

A Word of Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] But if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the gospel according to Luke and chapter 23.

Luke chapter 23, and if we read again at verse 33, Luke 23 and verse 33, where we're told there, and when they came to the place that is called the skull or Calvary, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. All of the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but especially Luke, they all encourage us to come to the place which is called Calvary. Come to the place which is called Calvary. And this evening, and God willing, over the next few months as we come together for our service in Borg, I'd like us to do that.

[1 : 29] I'd like us to come to the place which is called Calvary. Because it was at Calvary that they crucified the Prince of Glory. Calvary. And the reason I'd like us to come to the place which is called Calvary is because the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is what changed the history of this world forever.

And you know, my unconverted friend, my hope and prayer is that it will change you too. Because you know, what took place at Calvary is central to everything we are as a church.

It's central to our salvation. It's central to all our theology. It's central to our faith. It's central to our lives. It's central to our witness. What took place at Calvary is central even to the gospel we preach. What took place at Calvary is central because the cross is central. In fact, the cross of Jesus Christ is the theme which runs throughout the whole of the Bible.

The whole of redemptive history is pointing to this one moment. Because the one and only remedy of the curse of sin and death is the cross of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 40] My friend, the difference between eternal life and eternal death is the cross of Jesus Christ. The difference between being saved or being lost is the cross of Jesus Christ.

The difference between an eternity in heaven with the Lord or an eternity in hell and judgment is the cross of Jesus Christ. But you know, what we ought to notice about the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, what we ought to notice about each of them is that they set the cross of Jesus Christ as the climax and the culmination of their gospel.

But even though they set it as the climax and culmination of their gospel, they don't dwell on what Jesus suffered on the cross. They don't focus upon the physical agony and anguish of Jesus' crucifixion.

Because none of the gospel writers, none of them explain that the act of crucifixion was invented by the Romans as this form of capital punishment to prolong the agonies of death.

They don't tell us that those who were crucified were said to experience dying a thousand deaths. The gospel writers don't describe the six inch nails that were driven through the hands and feet of those who were hung on these Roman crosses.

[4 : 00] And they don't tell us that when someone was crucified, they didn't bleed to death. They didn't die of the pain. Instead, they suffocated. They suffocated to death.

Because the only way to live and prevent suffocation was to press down on the nails that were driven through your hands and feet. And this battle would go on for hours.

This desire to live and the reality of death. It would go on for hours. Until you eventually gave up and died. You know, it was a brutal form of torture.

But what's interesting is that the gospel writers, they don't dwell on the physical sufferings of Jesus on the cross. Instead, they dwell on what Jesus had to say on the cross.

They tell us what Jesus had to say on the cross. And God willing, over the next few months, I'd like us to listen in to what Jesus had to say on the cross.

[5 : 00] I want us to come to the place which is called Calvary. And hear these seven sayings which Jesus uttered from the cross. And the first saying that we're looking at this evening is a word of forgiveness.

A word of forgiveness. Where we're told, where Jesus says, Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do. It's a word of forgiveness.

And I'd like us to consider this word of forgiveness under three headings. Intimacy, intercession, and ignorance. Three headings.

Intimacy, intercession, and ignorance. First of all, intimacy. A word of forgiveness. We're looking at intimacy. Look at verse 33 again.

When they came to the place that is called Calvary, there they crucified him. And the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them.

[6 : 01] For they know not what they do. Do you know, when we consider the context to these words, it's hard to believe that Jesus spoke about forgiveness.

Because a crucifixion was anything but forgiving. In fact, the trial and crucifixion of Jesus was anything but forgiving. Because as we read, the trial of Jesus, it was a sham.

There were six trials of Jesus. There were three Jewish trials and three Roman trials. And after each trial, everyone said, he's innocent.

Or Pilate said, he's innocent. And you know, it made a mockery of the justice system. Because after six trials, Jesus was found guilty.

Even though he was innocent and he was sentenced to death. Of course, Pilate, he wanted to let Jesus go. But for fear of the Jews, he sentenced him. Herod just wanted to pass the buck.

[7 : 00] He didn't want to have anything to do with it. But the people, we heard the people, as we read earlier, they shouted, give us Barabbas. They called for Barabbas and asked for Jesus to be crucified.

And after all that Jesus experienced during these trials, with the hatred and the mocking and the beating and the spitting and the scourging, when Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross and left to die, after being led as a lamb to the slaughter in silence, we see here that Jesus finally speaks. Jesus finally says something. Jesus has something to say. But what is he going to say? Is he going to call for God's judgment to fall upon all his accusers?

Is Jesus going to command legions of angels to take him down from the cross? Is Jesus going to destroy all those who put him upon the cross with one word from his lips?

No. After all that sinful man had done to Jesus, after being despised and rejected by men, after being abused and assaulted and attacked, Jesus says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[8 : 17] Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And you know, when we consider the context of these words, it's hard to believe that Jesus spoke about forgiveness.

And yet that's why he's on the cross. He's seeking our forgiveness. And it's interesting that the first saying of Jesus on the cross and the last saying of Jesus on the cross are prayers.

Jesus says here in verse 34, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And then in verse 46, the last thing Jesus utters before his death is, Father, into thine hands I commit my spirit. Friends, let's never forget that the work of salvation with Jesus on the cross, it was surrounded in prayer. The work of salvation was surrounded by prayer.

And it was prayer from the gracious lips of God the Son directed to his Father in heaven. And you know, what it ought to remind us is that despite the awful context of the crucifixion, Jesus was able to enjoy the intimacy of his relationship with his Father.

[9 : 30] At one point, we'll see where he's cut off from that intimacy, where Jesus cries, why have you forsaken me? But at this point, he's able to enjoy the intimacy of his relationship with his Father.

And even though he was despised and rejected by men, even though his own people wouldn't receive him, Jesus was assured, even on the cross, he was assured that the Father would receive him, and the Father would hear him, and the Father would love him.

Despite the hatred that rose up from the world, Jesus knew the love of his heavenly Father.

Because the love of the Father was in him. And he was loved from before the foundation of the world.

And the love between the Father and the Son, it was so intimate and so personal that Jesus often said, I and the Father are one. But you know, my friend, the wonder of the cross is that we are able to enjoy this same intimate relationship with the Father.

It's through the cross of Jesus Christ that we're able to receive that spirit of adoption, by which we're able to become sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. It's through the cross of Jesus Christ that we're able to cry, as Paul says, Abba, Father.

[10:51] And you know, it was when the Apostle John, when he looked at the cross, he wrote in his first letter, Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God.

My friend, the cross of Jesus Christ was not only a place of hatred and cruelty, but you know, it was also a place of love and intimacy, between the Father and the Son.

For the love of the, which God the Father had with Jesus Christ, his Son. It was even being demonstrated there. Demonstrated to who? Lost sinners, like you and me.

And it was demonstrated also that we would come and experience this love and intimacy with the Father. You know, is that not what the greatest version of the Bible tells us?

John 3, 16. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. It was all out of love that the Son willingly came to die.

[11:57] And now, on the cross at Calvary, the intimate love of God the Son and God the Father is being demonstrated and shared with the world. And that's what Jesus said.

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John says, when he looks at the cross, here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

That's the love of God demonstrated to us in the death of Jesus Christ. And you know, even when Isaac Watts, when he surveyed the wondrous cross upon which the Prince of Glory died, he knew that that wondrous cross was displaying to him such an intimate love.

He said it was a love so amazing and a love so divine. But he also knew that it was a love so amazing and divine that it demanded what?

His soul, his life, and his all. You know, that's why the call of the gospel is come. We're to come and see the love which the Father has bestowed upon us that we are now able.

[13:16] We as sinners are able to be called the children of God. And how are we able? Because Jesus prays here, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. But you know, when we hear these words, we have to realize that Jesus, he practiced what he preached.

Jesus practiced what he preached because instead of pronouncing judgment upon his enemies, Jesus prays for his enemies. And was that not what he preached in the Sermon on the Mount? Jesus said, love your enemies, bless them which curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you. and here is Jesus, he's practicing what he preached.

He's praying for his enemies. He's praying for those who spat on him and those who mocked him and those who scourged him and those who beat him and those who crucified him. He's praying for his enemies.

[14:22] And you know, it ought to make us realize that if Jesus was prepared to pray for the forgiveness of those who nailed him to the cross, how much more? how much more should we be prepared to forgive those who have wronged us?

He prayed for his enemies. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And this is what I want us to see secondly, intercession, where he's praying for his enemies.

Intimacy and intercession. Intercession. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. You know, these words affirm to us that Jesus, as we said, he practiced what he preached.

He prayed for his enemies. He prayed to his Father for them. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

But it's not specific. We don't know who the them is. Therefore, we could ask, well, was Jesus praying for those around the cross?

[15:28] Those who were just below him? Was he referring to those who were standing at Calvary hurling insults at him? Those who were saying, are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. Was he referring to the two criminals crucified on either side of him? Was Jesus referring to those who mocked him? Or those who scourged him? Or those who spat on him? Or those who beat him? Who is the them? Was Jesus referring to the crowds who were in the marketplace? shouting, crucify him. Away with him. Crucify him. Is that who the them is? Was Jesus referring to the Roman soldiers who had nailed him to the cross? Who does the them refer to? Who is Jesus praying for when he says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?

And you know, it's good for us to be specific in prayer. It's good for us to bring specific requests to God. But this prayer of Jesus was general for a reason.

[16 : 32] Because we're included in this prayer. We are the them. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

We are included in this prayer. we said earlier that when we consider the context of these words, it's hard to believe that Jesus spoke about forgiveness because a crucifixion was anything but forgiving.

And yet, these words affirm to us that Jesus, he's practicing what he preached because he prayed for his enemies. He prayed for us. This is the amazing thing.

He prayed for people living in 2020. He prayed for our forgiveness. Because as the Bible reminds us, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son.

While we were enemies, Jesus was praying for us. He was praying for his enemies. Praying for those in 2020. Father, forgive them.

[17 : 38] For they know not what they do. Do you know, my friend, the wonder of wonders is that everyone who comes to Christ seeking his forgiveness is included in this prayer. This beautiful prayer.

Everyone in the past, all those who were in the Old Testament, all people like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all these men, David and Joshua, all these men in the Old Testament who were looking forward to the cross, they are the them.

And all those since the cross in the 1800s, the 1900s, 2020, we're all looking back to this crucial moment in time and we're included in the them.

We're included in this them. Father, forgive them. Them, for they know not what they do. Father, forgive them.

Are you included in the them? But you know, what's so powerful about what Jesus says here is that this prayer was not just a request. It's a demand.

[18 : 50] Because Jesus, he's not just asking his father to forgive them. Jesus is commanding his father in heaven to forgive them. And I say that because the word forgive, it's not a request, it's an imperative of command.

Where Jesus, he's commanding his father in heaven, Father, forgive them. Forgive them. But the only reason Jesus can make such a command is because he's acting as our mediator. he's standing between a holy God that demands justice and sinful mankind who needs forgiveness. He's the middle man. My friend, Jesus was commanding our forgiveness because he's the only mediator between God and mankind.

kind. And as Jesus prayed for his enemies, as Jesus prayed for us, he was interceding on our behalf. Because as guilty sinners, we can't plead our own innocence.

[20 : 00] We can't plead before a holy God our righteousness. We can't plead that we are sinless. No, no, no. Our righteousness, our sin, it's like filthy rags.

But as Jesus stands on our behalf between a God who demands justice and a people who need forgiveness, Jesus stands in the gap as our mediator and he intercedes on our behalf pleading not our righteousness but his own.

His own righteousness and he commands his father, father forgive them or forgive them for they know not what they do. Father forgive them.

But you know what I love about these words is that when it says in the verse and Jesus said and Jesus said these words express that Jesus was repeatedly saying it.

It's like a continuous verb where it's repeatedly said father forgive them father forgive them father forgive them Jesus standing as the middle man between a holy God and a sinful people and he's saying father forgive them for they know not what they do.

[21 : 20] Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And it gives to us the idea that as Jesus hung upon the cross as our mediator he was making continual intercession for us.

Continual intercession. intercession. And you know is that not what was promised in the Old Testament in Isaiah 53? Probably a chapter we learnt in our youth.

Maybe you learnt it in Sunday school even in school. Isaiah 53 who shall believe our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed.

And I'm sure you would know many of the verses if not all of them. They're probably hidden in your heart somewhere. And you know we're given in those verses the most vivid prophecy about the death of Jesus Christ and it was given over 700 years before crucifixion was even invented.

And yet when you read Isaiah's prophecy you would think that Isaiah saw it with his own eyes because Isaiah describes Jesus as this man who had no form nor comeliness.

[22 : 28] He had no beauty that we should desire him. He was a man of sorrows. He was acquainted with grief and yet we hid as it were our faces from him. And he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed. But you know Isaiah also said about Jesus that he will be numbered.

Numbered with the transgressors. And as he bears the sin of many he will make intercession for the transgressors. That was the promise of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53.

That Jesus would be our mediator. Our middleman. Who would make intercession for us as transgressors. Where this holy God is demanding justice and we as sinful people need forgiveness. And Jesus is there making intercession for us. But you know the wonder of the gospel. Is that Jesus us. We are told in Hebrews. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God through him.

[23 : 41] Why? Because he ever lives to make intercession for us. He ever lives to make intercession for us.

He ever lives to be our middleman. And because he is our mediator. He is able to save to the uttermost.

The uttermost. Which means that there is no one who is here this evening. And there is no one who is not here this evening.

Who is beyond the pale. There is no one outside of his grasp. There is no one whom Jesus cannot save. He is able to save to the uttermost.

He is able to forgive those who think they are unforgivable. You know my unconverted friend here this evening. This Jesus is able to save you. This is the wonder of the gospel.

[24 : 41] He is able to save you if you come to him seeking forgiveness. Because he ever lives. Tonight he still lives. He ever lives to make intercession for you.

Saying Father forgive them. forgive them. For they know not what they do. Father forgive them. That is what Jesus is doing. He is able to save to the uttermost.

Because he ever lives to make intercession for us. But do you know why Jesus is able to intercede on your behalf? Do you know why Jesus is able to be your mediator?

Do you know why Jesus can be your middleman tonight? Between a holy God that demands justice from you and you seeking forgiveness? It is all because of his blood.

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Without blood there can be no forgiveness. Without his blood you will never experience forgiveness.

[25 : 52] And the message of the Bible is that if we confess our sin Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness all because of the blood of Jesus Christ.

It cleanses us from all sin. My friend even though the means of crucifixion was unforgiving the message of the cross is all about forgiveness.

forgiveness. It's all about forgiveness. It's a word of forgiveness. Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

But you know this word of forgiveness it not only displays intimacy between the father and the son and intercession between sinful man and holy God.

It also displays ignorance which is what we see lastly. Intimacy intercession and ignorance. We'll read in verse 33 again.

[27 : 02] When they came to the place that is called Calvary there they crucified him and the criminals one on his right and one on his left and Jesus said father forgive them for they know not

what they do and they cast lots to divide his garments and the people stood by watching but the ruler scoffed at him saying he saved others let him save himself if he is the Christ of God his chosen one.

The soldiers also mocked him coming up and offering him sour wine and saying if you are the king of the Jews save yourself. You know the second half of this saying it explains why Jesus had to pray.

Father forgive them for they know not what they do. Jesus knew that it was in ignorance that they crucified him. If they'd known that Jesus was the king of kings.

If they'd known that Jesus was the lord of lords. If they'd known that Jesus had all authority in heaven and on earth. If they'd known that Jesus was the creator and the sustainer of all life.

If they'd known that Jesus was the promised Messiah. If they'd known all that they would never have beaten him or spat on him or mocked him or scourged him or crucified him.

[28 : 22] But it was in ignorance that they crucified the prince of glory. And you know the apostle Peter he reminds the Jews of this very fact in Acts chapter 3.

When all this scene is over Jesus has been crucified dead and buried and risen on the third day. But then in Acts chapter 3 Peter stands up before all the Jews and he says to them this Jesus whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate when Pilate was determined to let him go and you he says you asked for a murderer to be granted to you instead and you killed the prince of life whom God raised from the dead of whom we are all witnesses.

But says Peter I know you did it in ignorance as did all your rulers. But you know for Peter their ignorance wasn't inexcusable.

Their ignorance was inexcusable which is why he calls them in Acts chapter 3 to repent and be converted that their sins may be blotted out. Their ignorance was inexcusable.

They were without excuse. They were without excuse. And you know the same is true with you my friend. If you knew who Jesus really is.

[29 : 55] If you knew what he really suffered on the cross in place of sinner. If you knew how loving and how gracious and how merciful Jesus really is.

If you knew how often Jesus is speaking to you through his word and through providence you would never reject him the way that you do.

And you would never act in ignorance towards him the way that you do. But you know the problem many people have and you probably have it my unconverted friend.

The problem people have is that you're ignorant of the fact that you're a sinner. Yes you know that you're a sinner. You know all these things. You've heard it before.

You've been told that you're a sinner. You know that the Bible says that you're a sinner. But you don't really see yourself as a sinner. You're not really convinced of your sin and misery.

[30 : 58] Are you? Instead you see yourself as well I'm a good person. in comparison to others I'm not that bad. In comparison to some Christians I'm even better.

You're not a murderer. You don't steal. You work hard. You pay your taxes. You give to charity. You help your neighbor. You help others. You come to church. And for all that you're a good person because you're not all that bad.

But as Jesus says there is none good but God alone. all have sinned. We're all in the same situation.

All have sinned. And come short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is what? And we need not be reminded. The wages of sin is death.

But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And you know my friend your ignorance towards your sinful condition and your need of a savior.

[31 : 59] It doesn't mean that you're innocent. Ignorance doesn't equate to innocence. Ignorance doesn't equate to innocence because there's no excuse for ignorance.

Even the Bible says that. God has revealed himself through the whole of creation so that man is left without excuse. Ignorance doesn't equate to innocence.

But the truth is tonight you're not ignorant of the gospel are you? none of you are ignorant of this gospel. None of you are ignorant of the fact that Jesus has been speaking into your life all your life. You've been hearing this again and again and again. You've been hearing this word of forgiveness for years. You're not ignorant of the gospel but you live your life ignorant of eternity.

You live in ignorance thinking that you have plenty of time. You live in ignorance convinced that you'll see tomorrow. You live in ignorance confident that the rest of your life is ahead of you.

[33 : 14] I don't know how much of that life you think you're going to have. you live in ignorance assured that you'll have another gospel opportunity later in life. You even maybe living in ignorance thinking well I'll have a deathbed conversion because that's a good way to go.

You know my friend if these first few days of 2020 should teach us anything it's that life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause Christ is the cure and you know he's the cure because when we come to Calvary when we come and behold the wondrous cross upon which the prince of glory died when we look at Jesus our mediator what do we find him doing?

We find him praying father forgive them for they know not what they do and the thing is my friend you will not be forgiven unless you repent unless you seek the Lord's forgiveness unless you commit your life to Jesus Christ but you know what this word of forgiveness ought to assure you is that Jesus is more ready and willing to forgive you than you are to ask him he's more ready and willing to forgive you than you are to repent so my friend you come you come to the place which is called Calvary you come with a broken and a contrite heart you come on bended knee you come asking for cleansing you come to the place called Calvary seeking salvation you come knocking as it were on heaven's door you come to the place called

Calvary because the promise is that when you ask you will receive when you seek you will find when you knock it will all be opened to you so you come you come to the place which is called Calvary because when you come you'll hear this wonderful word of forgiveness forgiveness that will change your heart and transform your life and give to you a promise of glory that is beyond your asking and beyond your thinking you come because tonight Jesus is praying father forgive them for they know not what they do you come my friend you come may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord our gracious god we thank thee that thou art one who is a gracious god and we marvel at thy willingness to forgive us that thou art a god who is more ready and willing to forgive than we are even to ask but lord teach us to ask teach us lord even to come confessing our sin knowing that this wonderful promise that's held out to us in the gospel is that if we confess our sin the lord one who is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness all because the blood of jesus christ thy son cleanses us from all sin oh lord bless thy truth to us we pray that we would know and be assured that oh our great mediator he is interceding on our behalf praying father forgive them for they know not what they do lord bless us then we pray bless us in the week that lies ahead a week lord that is unknown to us we do not know what a day nor an hour may bring in our lives but we give thanks lord that we were able to spend this hour in thy presence worshipping thee and may it be of benefit to us not only for time but also for eternity lord lead us then we pray guide us by thy spirit and go before us for we ask it in jesus name and for his sake amen we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of psalm 130 psalm 130 in the scottish psalter page 421 psalm 130 will sing the whole psalm this is a prayer for forgiveness a prayer that begins in the depths where the psalmist is seeking forgiveness and a prayer that ends in the heights where the psalmist has received forgiveness forgiveness and you know my unconverted friend if you don't have a prayer make this your prayer because you know there are no better words to come before the lord than with the word of god itself lord from the depths to thee i cried my voice lord do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear lord who shall stand if thou lord should mark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be i wait for god my soul doth wait my hope is in his word more than they that for morning watch my soul waits for the lord i must sing on down to the end of the psalm of psalm

130 to god's praise lord from the death to thee i cried my voice lord do thou hear unto my soul oke to jesus a voice gibbar nye AND po O Lord, just mark iniquities, but yet with Thee forgiveness is.

[40 : 23] That fear Thou mayest be. I wait for God, my soul doth wait.

My hope is in His Word. More than lay that for morning watch, my soul waits for the Lord.

I say, Lord, I lay Thine to watch, the morning light to see.

Let Israel open the Lord, for with Him mercies be.

A plentiful redemption is ever found with Him.

[42 : 12] And from all His iniquities, Israel shall redeem.

Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.