

"Father, Forgive Them"

Lu 23:32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided *him*, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

Introduction:

1. Last words are PRECIOUS. Family members listen very carefully to the final words spoken by their loved ones. Father or mother lay dying and children hover quietly close to the bedside straining their ears so as to not miss any of those final parting words.
2. Last words can be very REVEALING.
 - a. Like an x-ray they can expose the heart and mind of a dying person.
 - b. The last words of P.T. Barnam, the circus showman, who worked his entire life to make money said, “What were today’s receipts?”
3. Last words can be filled with a special depth of WISDOM
 - a. When a person is about to breathe his last, he does not engage in idle chit-chat.
 - b. Some people seem to have great insight as they die like that which was shown by Alexander the Great in his final words. He said “When I die, thrust my hands through my death shroud so that the world may see that my hands are empty.”

4. Of all the last words ever spoken, none are more revealing, none are more precious, none are more filled with meaning and wisdom than the crucial last words of our Savior on the cross.
5. Remember where these last words were spoken - from a cross
 - a. Today's executions are mostly PRIVATE events
 1. They are not viewed by the general public
 2. A few people are permitted to watch the execution
 - b. In contrast, crucifixion was designed to be a PUBLIC event
 1. The Romans wanted everyone to remember the crucifixion
 2. Remember, this is the penalty for disobeying the Roman gov't
 - c. Today's executions are SWIFT and MERCIFUL
 1. The flash of electricity through the body
 2. The quiet, swift death of a lethal injection
 - d. In contrast, crucifixion was designed to be an excruciatingly, painful, humiliating, LINGERING death
 1. There are records of persons surviving for 9 days on the cross
 2. This is the most cruel and terrible death that man could devise
6. It is an amazing thing that Jesus prayed while on the cross
 - a. Dying on the cross - suffering the worst death imaginable
 - b. This is neither the time nor the place for prayer
 - c. It was normal for victims of the cross, frenzied with pain to shriek, to beg, to curse, and spit at the spectators - but Jesus prayed.
 - d. Jesus began his ministry in prayer and here He ends his earthly ministry with prayer. The fourth and seventh sayings from the cross are also prayers. The beginning, middle and ending of his agony on the cross was bathed in holy conversation with His heavenly Father.

I. TO WHOM WAS THIS PRAYER ADDRESSED - "FATHER"

- 34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.
1. In reading the gospels have you ever noticed how frequently this word "Father" was on his lips

2. Remember what Jesus said to Mary and Joseph when he was a boy and they found out that he was not in the caravan. They found him in the temple. Jesus said, “Didn’t you know that I must be about my Father’s business.”
3. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of his Father 17x
4. Before he left his disciples Jesus comforted them by telling them “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”
5. And Jesus’ last words on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”
6. Even on the cross, going through what he was going through he still looked up and said, “Father....”
7. God was His loving heavenly Father
8. What a great lesson for us...
 - a) *When life seems hard and unfair, when disaster and heartache come into your life we are inclined to question the reality of God’s love and goodness God is still your Heavenly Father*
 - b) *It is easy to believe in a loving God when things are going well*
 - c) *It is easy to believe that “all things work together for our good” when life is rosy*
 - d) *It is easy to believe in a loving heavenly Father when life is good, but it is not so easy when life caves in on us.*
9. Jesus’ first word from the cross reminds us that we should always believe in God’s goodness and loving purpose

II. WHAT WAS THE SUBJECT OF THIS PRAYER? - “FORGIVENESS”

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

A. “Father, Forgive” - Were Unusual Words

1. Up to this point in his life, Jesus had never asked the Father to forgive anyone
2. Jesus, Himself, would forgive sins
 - a) *Mt 9:2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*
 - b) *Lu 7:48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.*

3. Whenever Jesus forgave somebody's sins, it infuriated the Pharisees
 - a) *They said, "No man can forgive sins"*
 - b) *They said, "Only God can forgive sins"*
 - c) *The Pharisees were right but Jesus was God in the flesh and he had the right and authority to forgive sins*
4. But on the cross, Jesus asked the Father to do what he usually did

B. "Father, Forgive" - Were Words That Fulfilled Prophecy

Isa 53:12 Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

1. Isa 53 tells us much about the crucifixion
2. 800 years before it happened, the prophet knew that Jesus would pray for the transgressors

C. "Forgive"

1. "Forgive" expressed the idea of letting of a debt by not demanding its payment
 - a) *God could not just ignore our sin-debt. Our sins had to be paid for by someone*
 - b) *So Jesus Was saying, "Father, forgive them by placing those sins on me."*
 - c) *He was saying "Father, forgive them by condemning me."*
 - d) *God's infinite holiness demanded an infinite penalty - our sins had to be atoned for.*
2. There was a price to be paid and only Jesus could pay it

D. "Said" is In the Imperfect

1. "Said" here is in the imperfect - Jesus kept on praying this prayer.
2. The soldiers led Him to Calvary and he prayed, "Father forgive them..." They threw Him to the ground and pounded the nails in his hands and feet and he prayed, "Father forgive them..." As the cross

was being raised and dropped into the hole, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them...” When the people cursed and mocked Him, Jesus prayed, “Father forgive them... Looking down at the soldiers gambling over his garments he prayed, “Father forgive them...”

3. Some have suffered with problems and troubles and they stated that they could not pray any more. “I don’t believe that God cares for me anymore.” Look at how Jesus was treated and yet He continued to pray.
 - a) *His own disciples had forsaken Him*
 - b) *Religious leaders had handed him over to the Romans to be killed*
 - c) *Pilate sentenced Him to death and He was innocent*
 - d) *And still Jesus prayed*
4. Jesus did not fight God’s will or question God’s love. When we are troubled we may ask, “Does God still care for me?” Just look at the cross. We know the answer
5. As our intercessor, our High Priest, in heaven, Jesus still prays for us

E. Jesus Practiced What He Preached

1. During his ministry, Jesus preached forgiveness
2. He told us to turn the other cheek
3. He told us to pray for those who spitefully use us
Mt 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you;
Mt 6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

F. Some Think that Only Jesus Could Pray This Prayer

1. In the midst of suffering and pain Jesus prayed for others
2. There have been humans who have prayed like this
 - a) *Stephen is a good example. His enemies were stoning him to death*

Ac 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

- b) *Many martyrs down through the centuries prayed for their persecutors as the flames blazed around them burning them alive.*
- c) *No normal person could pray like this - but a transformed child of God, filled with the love of God could pray like this*

III. THE OBJECT OF THIS PRAYER - "THEM"

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

- 1. On the cross, Jesus prayed for those Jews who had planned his death, initiated the trials,
- 2. He prayed for those Romans who drove the nails, parted his garments among themselves and guarded the cross
- 3. He prayed for those who mocked and ridiculed him
- 4. He who was the victim of history's greatest crime prayed for the criminals who committed the crime.

IV. THE REASON FOR THIS PRAYER - "THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"

- 1. There was a lot that the people knew
 - a) *Judas knew that he had betrayed an innocent man*
 - b) *Caiaphas knew that he had resorted to bribery and illegal tricks to bring Jesus into his trap*
 - c) *The chief priests knew that they had brought false charges against Jesus*
 - d) *Pilate knew that he was condemning an innocent person to death*
 - e) *The Roman soldiers knew that Jesus did not deserve such a terrible fate*
 - f) *No one who participated in the crucifixion of Jesus could plead, "Not guilty" They knew that they had committed a great evil*
- 2. At the same time, they did not realize the significance of their act - they didn't have a clue

Conclusion:

1. Jesus calls us to look at people who make our lives difficult, people who hurt us with hateful words or actions in the same way that He did.
2. Jesus forgave His enemies and we should forgive our enemies
3. I can think of no better way to conclude this morning-than by sharing a story with you from Charles Swindoll's book, *Improving Your Serve*. It's about a young seminarian named Aaron-a student at Chicago's Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. At the end of his second year Aaron began looking for something to do in the coming summer. And he didn't just want a job-he also wanted a meaningful ministry. So he prayed and asked God for a position on some church staff or some Christian organization. But in spite of his prayers, nothing happened. Weeks of interviews yielded no openings and finally Aaron faced reality and realized he needed ANY job he could find. He checked the want ads and the only thing that seemed a possibility was driving a bus in the south side of Chicago-nothing to brag about but it would help with tuition in the fall.

Well, after learning the route, he was on his own-a rookie driver in a dangerous section of the city and it wasn't long before Aaron realized just HOW dangerous his job really was. A small gang of tough kids soon realized he was green and inexperienced so they began to take advantage of him. For several mornings in a row they got on, walked right past him without paying, ignored his warnings, and rode until they decided to get off-all the while making smart remarks to him and others on the bus. Finally, Aaron decided that this had gone on long enough. The next morning, after the gang got on, Aaron pulled over and reported the offense to a police officer. The officer told the gang members to pay or get off the bus. They paid-but unfortunately, the policeman got off and they stayed on. Then, when the bus turned another corner or two, the gang beat Aaron to a pulp. When he came to, blood was all over his shirt, two teeth were missing, both eyes were swollen nearly shut, his money was gone, and the bus was empty. After returning to the terminal and

being given the weekend off, Aaron went home, sank onto his bed and stared at the ceiling in disbelief. Resentful thoughts swarmed his mind. Confusion, anger, and disillusionment added fuel to the fire of his physical pain. He spent a fitful night in prayer wrestling with his Lord. "How can this be?" he thought. "Where is God in all of this? I genuinely want to serve Him. I prayed for a ministry. I was willing to serve Him anywhere, doing anything...and THIS is the thanks I get!"

On Monday morning Aaron decided to press charges. With the help of the officer who had encountered the gang and several who were willing to testify as witnesses, most of the thugs were rounded up and taken to the local county jail. Within a few days there was a hearing before a judge. But as Aaron looked at the gang that day-who by the way were glaring at him from across the courtroom-as he looked at them he was seized with a whole new series of thoughts.

Not bitter ones, but compassionate ones. His heart went out to the guys who had attacked him.

Under the Spirit's control he no longer hated them. In fact he pitied them. He saw that they needed help, not more hate. He wondered and prayed what he should do. Then after there had been a plea of guilty, Aaron suddenly felt led to stand up and ask permission to speak. He said, "Your honor, I would like you to total up all the days of punishment against these men-and I request that you allow me to go to jail in their place." The judge didn't know whether to spit or wind his watch. Both attorneys were stunned. And as Aaron looked over at the gang members-whose mouths and eyes-were like saucers he smiled and said quietly, "It's because I forgive you." The dumbfounded judge then reached a level of composure and said rather firmly, "Young man, you are out of order. This sort of thing has never been done before." To which Aaron replied with genius of insight, "Oh yes it has your honor. Yes it has. It happened over 19 centuries ago when a Man from Galilee paid the penalty that all mankind deserved." And then, for the next three or four minutes, without interruption, Aaron explained how Jesus Christ died on our behalf, thereby proving God's love and forgiveness. Now, the judge did not grant his request but Aaron visited the gang members in jail, led

most of them to faith in Christ, and began a significant ministry to many others in the south side of Chicago.