

The Word of Forgiveness

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Text: *Luke 23:1-34*

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.

Introduction

I have always been fascinated by "last words" that famous people say just before they passed away. Last words can tell a lot about the character of a person and how he lived his life. Last words can reveal about the personality of a person. It can also reflect the person's deep faith or lack of faith, as the case may be. Words from a dying man can be sad, fearful, resentful, funny, inspiring, encouraging.

Listen to some of the last words of famous people...

Karl Marx, founder of Communism. On his deathbed, his nurse asked him if he had any last words: *"Go on, get out! Last words are for fools who have not said enough."*

David Hume, an Atheist, cried: *"I am in flames!" "I am in flames!"*

Cesare Borgia, a politician, *"During the course of my life I have made provision for everything, but I forgot about death. Alas, I die unprepared."*

Jean Paul Sartre who questioned the existence of God, *"I failed!" "I failed!"*

John Newton *"I am still in the land of the dying; I shall be in the land of the living soon."*

Michael Faraday, *"I shall be with Christ and that is enough."*

John Wesley proclaimed on his deathbed, *"The best of all is, God is with us. Farewell! Farewell!"*

In the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the last words of our Lord were recorded. Listen to the last words of our Lord ...

Father forgive them, for they don't know what they do!

Today you shall be with me in Paradise;

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!

Woman, behold thy son! Behold thy mother!
I thirst.
It is finished!
Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Today, I want to speak with you about the first of the seven sayings of Christ on the Cross.

The first cry from the cross

When our Lord was being falsely accused by the religious leaders before Pilate ... When false witnesses came forward and testified against Him ... When Herod interrogated Him and mocked Him ... When His enemies spat upon His face and plucked off his beard.... When they scourged Him and beat Him up ... When they insulted Him ... When they crowned Him with a crown of thorns ... When they were driving those nails to His hands and feet, **Christ opened not His mouth.**

John 19:10 Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

Christ's silence doesn't mean He was guilty but it means submission to the Father's will and plan. Christ's silence reveals strength in character.

But then when He was in great pain and great shame and dying on the cross, He finally opened His mouth.

And what do we hear? What were the first words we hear from our Saviour?

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Even in His dying moments our Lord did not speak any foolish words. There was no cry for pity or mercy? Not a word of complaint. Not a cry for pity or mercy. Not a word of condemnation and judgment upon those who crucified Him? But a word of prayer. A prayer , not for Himself but for others.

A word of prayer. A short prayer yet full of meaning and instruction in it.

I - This prayer is a fulfillment of prophecy

The prophecy is found in the of Isaiah which was written **745 years before the event!**

Isaiah 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.**

Now, let's look at the prayer the Jesus uttered ...

II - This prayer shows Jesus closeness to the Father

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, **Father**, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

The first word from the cross is the word, “**Father**.” Our Lord speaks to the Father. Our Lord did not address the religious leaders nor the soldiers who crucified Him nor the crowd nor the women nor the thieves on the cross. Jesus began his prayer, “Father...”

Firstly, isn't that what He taught His disciple when they asked Him, Lord teach us to pray... When you pray address God as "Father."

Our prayer will much depend upon our confidence in our relationship to God.

Secondly, in the midst of extreme trial, call on the Father! Repeat that Name, just to remind ourselves that God is our Father, When we are in the midst of extreme trial, we are prone to think that God is not dealing with us as a father with a child, but rather as a severe judge with a condemned criminal. Oh, call Him Abba, Father!

Psalm 103:13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14: for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

III - This prayer reveals the heart of Christ

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, **forgive** them; for they know not what they do.

The second word from the cross is the word, “**forgive**.”

Jesus called out for God to forgive His tormenters rather than to punish and destroy them.

Jesus' heart was full of compassion for them, rather than anger. The normal thing was to swear, curse, use foul language at His tormenters but Jesus' heart was just the opposite.

Here we see the His nature and the nature of His love - divine and unconditional.

IV - This prayer shows man's greatest need

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, **forgive** them; for they know not what they do.

When Jesus finally opened His mouth with a word of prayer, what did Jesus pray for? He did not pray for their health nor their wealth. Jesus prayed for their forgiveness.

In praying for their forgiveness, Christ was addressing the greatest need of every boy, girl, man, and woman in this room today. Our greatest need is not health, not food, not finances, not physical comfort. Our greatest need is in regards to sin – forgiveness of sin.

Sin and guilt are our greatest problem. And the greatest need of mankind is to be forgiven. Man needs to be reconciled to God. There is only one way. It is not through religion, good works, and our goodness. It is through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. It is through His precious blood shed on the cross of Calvary.

Ephesians 1:7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

V - This prayer is for His enemies

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive **them**; for they know not what they do.

The third word from the cross is the word, “them.”

The prayer was offered for those who were guilty of putting him to death. Them refers to all the soldiers who have whipped Him and nailed Him to a cross. Them refers to all the religious leaders who have falsely accused Him.

The prayer was not simply for others, but it was for His most cruel enemies who wanted Him dead.

Matthew 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 despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Luke 6:27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

I know this is easier said than done. But that is what Jesus did from the cross. Jesus loved those who were mocking Him, insulting Him, hurting him and killing him. That is what is amazing. To love your enemies is a supernatural and it is a miracle from God.

Them also refers to all of humanity which includes you and me.

We too are in need of God’s forgiveness.

VI - The prayer shows the ignorance of the human heart

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; **for they know not what they do.**

What they did to Christ was due to their ignorance of who He was. No one really knew who Christ was. The soldiers on duty that day around the cross did not really know that they were tormenting the very Son of God. The religious leaders did not really comprehend that they were plotting against the very Prince of life. The crowd had no idea that they were watching the crucifixion of the Lord of glory.

Acts 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? 13: The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. 14: But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15: And **killed the Prince of life**, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. 16: And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this per-

fect soundness in the presence of you all. 17: And now, brethren, **I wot (know) that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers** (as your leaders did).

The enemies of Chrst did not know whom they were dealing with. They did not know that He was really the Prince of Life. They did not know that He is the Lord of glory.

1 Corinthians 2:7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: 8: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified **the Lord of glory**.

Through their ignorance they delivered Jesus up into the hands of Pilate; denied Him to be the Messiah before him; preferred Barabbas, a murderer to Him, and put Him to death.

Their ignorance does not excuse them from their sin. Ignorance of the law excuses no one. They still need to be forgiven. But our Lord here shows the compassion of His heart, He pleads with His Father to forgive them.

The first word of the cross is pure grace for you and me and the world

Jesus' forgiveness and love from the cross was pure grace, was freely given, as a gift to people who did not deserve the gift.

People badly need forgiveness from God, but few people know this.

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; **for they know not what they do**.

Conclusion

This event took place and this prayer was uttered by Jesus more than 2000 years ago but it is as relevant and as powerful as today as it was then.

1. Jesus Christ is still praying for his enemies

He continues still before the eternal throne to intercede on the behalf of guilty men, crying, "Father, O forgive them."

These final words of Jesus offer eternal confidence and eternal relationship. **There is the promise of forgiveness.**

2. The first sentence from the cross teaches us to pray

In the midst of His excruciating pain and suffering, the heart of Jesus was focused on others rather than Himself.

3. The first sentence from the cross calls us to forgive

Oh, that we may be like our Lord. May we all learn to forgive.

A translation of the word, forgiveness, is to "let go." Jesus forgives our sins; Jesus lets go of our sins.

A story is told about how to trap monkeys. A trapper of monkeys sets coconuts at the bottom of the coconut tree, but those coconuts have holes drilled in them, holes about the size of a monkey's fist. In order to get the white meat in the coconut, the monkey would squeeze his hands into the hole in the coconut and when his fist is inside the coconut, the monkey's hand expands and grabs the white coconut inside. The hand is now full of coconut meat. The only way a monkey becomes free is to let go of the coconut. But the monkeys would get caught because they would not let go of the coconut.

The only way we as human beings ever become free in life is to let go. Forgiving others is letting go. The only way to be free is to forgive, to let go of all the hatred and anger inside about wrongs I have done in the past or wrongs others have done to me.

From the cross demonstrated this truth, God lets go of our sins.

4. This first sentence teaches us that anyone could be forgiven

The greatest sinners, through the intercession of Jesus, may obtain pardon.

God heard his prayer, and still hears Him "always," and there is no reason to doubt that many of His enemies and murderers obtained forgiveness and life.

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38: Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39: For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. 40: And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41: Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and **the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.**

Those who crucified Him became believers and were forgiven.

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and **a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

Many of the religious leaders became obedient to the faith and received forgiveness.

Jesus Christ came to forgive. He came to save. He came to pay sin's penalty. He came to suffer and die for sinners like you and me to forgive and to save.

The question of the forgiveness of my sins is very important. You may have lived a good moral life; have great education; have been a successful business person; have a respectable family, but what will matter most in the hour of death is, "Have my sins been forgiven, have my sin been put away by the blood of Christ?" Can I, by the grace of God, confidently say that I have been forgiven?

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Oh, repent and believe the Gospel and experience the forgiveness that God alone could give!