

217 – Father, Forgive Them – Luke 23:34-37 - 2021-04-11
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INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago tomorrow, I had the joyful privilege of hearing one of the young men here with us tell of coming to trust his soul to Jesus Christ. He spoke of how the Lord Jesus prayed for His tormentors to be forgiven. Last week, late in the afternoon, the young man again spoke of his new-found faith in Christ, this time to the several people who were still here at church at that time. He plans to address the whole congregation today, in this worship service. Because of how he has testified regarding Jesus' prayer that His persecutors be forgiven, I determined to preach on that subject today.

Hear how our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ prayed for ignorant sinners to be forgiven, and how that forgiveness now is preached in the name of Jesus Christ to ignorant sinners everywhere.

TEXT

Luke 23:32-34a There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. (33) And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. (34) Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

BODY

I. Jesus Christ Mercifully Identifies Sinners As Ignorant

A. Hear this in what Jesus said on the cross: they do not know what they do

B. Jesus could have said other things about sinners:

1. such as

a) they are cruel

b) they are rebellious and disobedient

c) they are unjust

2. and He would not have been wrong in saying such things of sinners

C. But He chose to have mercy on sinners and identify them as ignorant

1. we know that it is not good to be ignorant

2. we know that if someone does something wrong out of ignorance, it is still wrong

3. but we also know that to see someone making an error, and attributing it to ignorance, is merciful

D. Understand in what sense sinners are ignorant, in what sense they do not know what they do

1 Corinthians 2:7-14 But we speak the wisdom of God in a **mystery**, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, (8) which **none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** (9) But as it is written: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (10) But **God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.** For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (11) For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (13) These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (14) But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know** them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1. see that Paul is specifically addressing the ignorance by which sinners crucified the Lord Jesus

2. the ignorance is a disability to receive spiritual things, to discern the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ; it is not that the person does not or cannot know the facts with his brain; it is that he cannot truly know them in his spirit

E. To be ignorant in this sense is not necessarily permanent

1. as God has made the truth about Jesus Christ known by His Spirit to many sinners already

2. so He makes the truth about Jesus known to sinners today by that same Spirit, whenever and wherever He is pleased to show mercy

- II. Jesus Christ Prays to God the Father for Ignorant Sinners
 - A. Hear Jesus praying to the Father on the cross
 - 1. addressing God the Father
 - 2. petitioning Him for “them” the ignorant sinners
 - B. In making that prayer, Jesus was fulfilling His office of priest, of mediator Hebrews 5:1-2 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. (2) He can have **compassion on those who are ignorant** and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.
 - 1. He is taken from among men
 - a) a priest for men must be a man
 - b) so, the Son of God became a man, Jesus of Nazareth, to serve as high priest
 - 2. He is appointed for men in things pertaining to God; He acts on behalf of men in dealing with God
 - 3. He offers sacrifices for sins
 - a) in the case of the priests who went before him, they offered animal sacrifices
 - b) in the case of Jesus Christ the final high priest, he offered Himself a sacrifice for sins
 - 4. He has compassion on ignorant sinners
 - 5. He has that compassion because that ignorance is by weakness, and He Himself is subject to weakness
 - a) not that He has moral weakness; but He has natural weakness; He, being human, knows what it is like to be unable to do something
 - b) so he has compassion on ignorant sinners, who are unable to discern spiritual things

III. Jesus Christ Prays for Ignorant Sinners to Be Forgiven

A. Other times we could speak more directly about what it is for sins to be forgiven;

B. An ignorant sinner was forgiven just right after the Lord Jesus made that prayer.

So let's look to that, to consider what it is for an ignorant sinner to be forgiven
Luke 23:39-43 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." (40) But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? (41) And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." (42) Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (43) And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

1. the ignorant sinner acknowledges himself a sinner before God, deserving of punishment (41a)
2. the ignorant sinner comes to understand that Jesus Christ crucified is the true Lord of the Kingdom of God (42b)
 - a) this is what the Jews stumbled over
 - b) this is what the Greeks thought foolish
3. the ignorant sinner cries out to Jesus Christ to remember him (42a)
 - a) this reminds me of Joseph in prison
 - (1) he asked the butler to remember him when he was released from prison
 - (2) but the butler did not remember him
 - (3) later, when the butler did remember him, he mentioned him to Pharaoh, who then released him from prison
 - b) the sinner cries out to Jesus to remember him, which is as much as to ask Jesus to save him
4. Jesus Christ promises that the man will be with Him in paradise (43)
 - a) the Bible already had taught that our sins separate us from God
 - b) for Jesus to promise the man that he would be with Him in paradise that very day is to pronounce that the man was no longer separated from God by his sins; his sin were forgiven!
 - c) notice that our Savior's promise was not only that the man would be in paradise with Him, but that he would be there with Him *that day!*
 - (1) the man was saved from going to *inferno*, but there also is no mention at all of *purgatorio*; even such a sinner as a thief justly being punished for his crimes does not have to have his sins burned away; in fact, there is no such place as "purgatory;" that is a false doctrine of Antichrist
 - (2) a sinner forgiven his sins by God through Jesus Christ, when he dies, goes directly to *paradiso*, to paradise, to heaven, to be with Jesus Christ his Savior

C. So, for an ignorant sinner to be forgiven is for his sins, which previously had separated him from God, to be removed from him, so that nothing separates him from God anymore.

IV. That Forgiveness of Sins for Which Jesus Prayed Was Soon Preached Abroad
Acts 3:13-19 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. (14) But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, (15) and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. (16) And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. (17) "Yet now, brethren, I know that **you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.** (18) But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (19) Repent therefore and be converted, that your **sins may be blotted out**, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

- A. Note how Peter echoes the words of the Lord Jesus, that the sinners did what they did in ignorance
- B. See how forgiveness is stated, that your sins may be "blotted out"
- C. The same Savior who prayed that ignorant sinners be forgiven now sends His preachers all over the world to proclaim that same forgiveness

V. APPLICATION

- A. When you are the one who needs to be forgiven
 - 1. you can know for certain that there is forgiveness from God the Father for sinners through Jesus Christ, since Jesus prayed for forgiveness even for those who crucified Him
 - 2. you know how to cry for that forgiveness
 - a) Father
 - b) in Jesus Christ
- B. When you are the one who needs to forgive
 - 1. here is the great Example for us forever
 - a) He had taught us, "Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you."
 - b) then He did that very thing, in the most moving way
 - 2. Stephen, the first to be killed for the name of Jesus Christ Acts 7:60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."
 - 3. and history tells us that this has been the practice of persecuted, even martyred Christians ever since

Allison - Prelude

Allison - Trinity 699 "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus"

Rita - Trinity 415 "God, Be Merciful to Me"

Rita - Trinity 176 "Not All the Blood of Beasts"

Roel - Call to Worship: Psalm 147:5-7

Andrew - Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:18-25

Dillon - Congregational Prayer

Lord's Supper:

Benediction: Colossians 1:13-14

- C. 1 Timothy 1:13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because **I did it ignorantly** in unbelief.

Matthew 27:12-14 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. 13 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" 14 But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.

I. "Father, Forgive Them" Was a Prayer

A. Jesus our Savior was suffering terribly---He had just been nailed to the cross

B. Jesus our Savior was being insulted cruelly

1. By the Jewish rulers

2. By the Roman soldiers

C. APPLICATION: What would your reaction be?

1. When someone has caused you pain

2. When someone has insulted you

3. Aren't you tempted to think, say, and do spiteful things back?

D. The Lord was tempted to this, also, and He had the power to take revenge

E. But instead of succumbing to this temptation, what did He do? He prayed!

1. This was a long-established pattern and discipline

2. This was the action of a righteous, sinless man

F. APPLICATION: Let us live this way!

1. Let us establish, through constant effort every day, the pattern, the habit, of prayer

2. Then, when we suffer at the hands of other people, let us go immediately into prayer

II. "Father, Forgive Them" Was a Prayer to God the Father

A. Jesus the crucified is the Son of God

1. Not that He is a demigod, like the fictional characters in Greek mythology

a. In those myths, Hercules, Prometheus, and others had a god for one parent, and a human for the other

b. This made them half god and half human---demigods

c. Jesus is not half divine, but fully divine

d. He is not half human, but fully human

- e. This is because not giving up His essential divine nature, He took on also human nature
 - i. Is He fully possessed of the divine nature, as is God the Father and as is God the Holy Spirit? Yes!
 - ii. Is He fully possessed of human nature, as was Adam, and as are we? Yes!
- 2. Not that He became the Son of God
 - a. He did not become the Son of God when He was conceived in the womb of Mary
 - b. He always had been the Son of God
- B. As the Son of God, Jesus Christ prayed to God the Father
 - 1. It is a bit hard for our minds to grasp that God the Son prays to God the Father
 - a. God is one God, not three gods
 - b. So why does God need to ask something of Himself?
 - 2. To gain some understanding here, please consider that although God is one God, He exists in three persons---the Father, the Son (also called the Word), and the Holy Spirit or in the old way of saying it, the Holy Ghost
 - a. God created us to have the father-son relationship in our human families
 - b. This relationship is not like that of God the Father and God the Son in every way, but the ways in which it is similar help us understand how God the Son prays to God the Father
 - i. a human son loves his father
 - ii. a human son sees his father as wise and strong, and so the most likely person to ask something of
 - iii. a human son senses that he has a special standing with his father; that he has access; that he is in favor
 - iv. and truly he is in favor; the human father loves his son and delights in doing good things that the son wants and needs, that are good for his son
 - v. and so the human son comes to the human father and prays to him, telling him things and asking him for things
 - 1. May I please have more potatoes?
 - 2. May I please use your screwdriver?
 - 3. Will you please help me with this?
 - 4. I fell down and hurt my arm
 - 5. That big bully pushed me down
 - 3. So, understand that Jesus the Messiah was and is God the Son, and as the Son of God, He prayed and prays to God the Father
- C. APPLICATION: All of the adopted sons of God may also pray to God as Father
 - 1. God loves His Son, Jesus Christ so much that He considers anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ to be in Christ, and so to be an adopted son
 - 2. All you who believe in Jesus Christ, then, pray to God as Father!
 - 3. This is, in fact, one of the distinguishing marks of a true Christian
 - a. When you are in Christ through faith in Him
 - b. The Holy Spirit of God is also in you
 - c. The Holy Spirit causes you to cry out to God as Father

4. So, as you who love the Lord pray to God, pray to Him as a beloved, favored son praying to your Father

III. "Father, Forgive Them" Was a Prayer to the Holy Father for an Unlikely Forgiveness

- A. Jesus prayed "forgive." For what was He asking?
 1. People had wronged God the Father
 2. The Father had every right to respond in justice
 - a. to be angry at these sinners
 - b. to punish for lawbreaking
 - c. to render vengeance for being wronged
 3. But the Son was asking the Father to forgive
 - a. not to remain angry
 - b. not to punish for lawbreaking
 - c. not to render vengeance for being wronged
- B. That forgiveness would be granted seemed highly unlikely
 1. God is wrathful---He is angry at the wicked every day
 2. God is just---He never fails to punish lawbreakers for their sin
 3. God is vengeful---He never fails to render vengeance on those who wrong Him
- C. But God is forgiving! That is part of His perfect character
 1. The Bible says that with God there is forgiveness!
 2. He forgives iniquity
- D. But wait, even if with God there is forgiveness, how could that forgiveness be brought to bear on sinners, because with God there is not only forgiveness, but also wrath, justice, vengeance!
 1. God could not merely forgive, thus forsaking His other perfect attributes; He could not fail to act according to His perfect character
 - a. What would we think of a human judge who simply forgave the sins of all the criminals who came before him
 - i. You committed murder? Well, I forgive you
 - ii. You committed robbery? That's okay, I forgive you
 - b. We would despise such an unjust judge
 - c. Could God act the part of the unjust judge? By no means! Perish the thought!
 2. Therefore, in order for God to grant forgiveness, yet maintain all of His other attributes in perfection, He would have to impute the sins of the guilty to someone who was innocent, and punish that one for those sins
 3. And this is what Jesus, the Son of God prayed for!
 - a. These at whom you are angry every day---impute their sins to Me, and pour out all Your wrath on me
 - b. These who have broken Your law---impute their sins to Me, and punish me for them
 - c. These upon whom You would render vengeance for the wrongs they have done You---impute those wrongs to me; count those sinners as being in Me, and take Your vengeance on Me!
- E. Oh, what love! God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still

sinners, Christ died for us!

F. APPLICATION

1. You, who have received this forgiveness from the Father because your sins have been punished in the Son, and You have trusted in Him, oh, rejoice in that great forgiveness, purchased at such great cost, and given to you free of charge!
2. You who have been loved with so great a love, oh, love this great lover of your soul!
3. You who have been forgiven all your sins, do not walk in them any longer! Do not obey the urges of your flesh, but obey the commands of this great God and Savior

IV. "Father, Forgive Them" Was a Prayer to the Holy Father for an Unlikely Forgiveness for Those Who Killed His Son

- A. Because He is altogether righteous, the first sin we committed in Adam was a great insult to God
- B. Because He is holy, holy, holy, every sin is detestable to God
- C. But on that day, men had just crucified the Beloved Son of God
 1. The ultimate injury to the Son, the very One who had come to save them
 2. And the ultimate offense to God, the murder of His Beloved Son
 3. And having crucified Him, they even mocked Him!
- D. But in the moments when Jesus the Son of God prayed this prayer, He asked forgiveness from the Father for those who had just crucified Him
- E. God had revealed Himself to man at various times in various ways
 1. In ourselves
 2. In the rest of creation
 3. By His prophets through the centuries
 4. By signs and wonders
- F. But here God revealed Himself through His Son
 1. In order to vindicate God's justice
 2. In order to demonstrate God's grace
 3. In order to show forth God's mercy
 4. In order to demonstrate God love
 5. The Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the same moment
 - a. prayed for forgiveness for those who were murdering Him
 - b. and took their penalty upon Himself, so the forgiveness could be granted
- G. Oh, bow down and worship! Give all praise and glory to God---Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! He is God, and there is no other! Worship Him only.
- H. Oh, love this God! Love Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength!
- I. Oh, trust in this blessed Son of God! He prays for the forgiveness of sinners, even the worst sinners, and takes their penalty. So believe in Him, and be counted as adopted sons in Him. Turn away from your sins, and receive from God the forgiveness for which the Son prayed!
- J. Christian, forgive your brother from your heart! Forgiven so much, how can you be unforgiving toward your brother or sister? Forgive as the Lord forgave you! Let forbearance and forgiveness reign in Christ church now and always!

JRY: It is a principle of justice that if a person accuses someone falsely, and is found out, the punishment he sought to inflict on the innocent one should be inflicted on him. Here it was! Those who crucified Him wrongly deserved themselves to be crucified. And indeed they were---those who believed in Him were crucified in Him.

Footnote: Let sinners never despair of mercy, but come and find it in Christ, who was willing that God would forgive even His murderers.

Footnote: Let us all forgive one another, whose offenses are so small in comparison.

Father

It is God against whom all offenses are committed; it is He who must forgive.

forgive

ISBE: To forgive is to give up all claim to retribution or restitution.

ISBE: Repentance is a necessary prerequisite for forgiveness.

them

JRY:

The Bible says that not only the soldiers who actually crucified Jesus, nor only Pilate, who ordered it, but also all those who called for His crucifixion, were those who crucified Him. Even among these who crucify Me, please forgive all who will believe in me, repenting of this sin.

Henry:

not only these, but all that shall repent, and believe the gospel; and he did not intend that these should be forgiven upon any other terms.

RWP: "for the Roman soldiers, who were only obeying, but not for the Sanhedrin"

Godet:

The persons for whom this prayer is offered cannot be the Roman soldiers, who are blindly executing the orders which they have received; it is certainly the Jews, who, by rejecting and slaying their Messiah, are smiting themselves with a mortal blow . . . The prayer of Jesus was granted in the forty years' respite during which they were permitted . . . to hear the apostolic preaching.

for they do not know what they do

Henry:

There was a veil upon his glory and upon their understandings; and how could they see through two veils? They wished his blood on them and their children: but, had they

known what they did, they would have unwished it again. Note, [1.] The crucifiers of Christ *know not what they do*. They that speak ill of religion speak ill of that which they know not, and it is because they will not know it. [2.] There is a kind of ignorance that does in part excuse sin: ignorance through want of the means of knowledge or of a capacity to receive instruction, through the infelicities of education, or inadvertency. The crucifiers of Christ were kept in ignorance by their rulers, and had prejudices against him instilled into them, so that in what they did against Christ and his doctrine they thought they did God service, [Joh 16:2](#). Such as to be pitied and prayed for. This prayer of Christ was answered not long after, when many of those that had a hand in his death were converted by Peter's preaching.

Calvin:

It is probable, however, that Christ did not pray for all indiscriminately, but only for the wretched multitude, who were carried away by inconsiderate zeal, and not by premeditated *wickedness*. For since the scribes and priests were persons in regard to whom no ground was left for hope, it would have been in vain for him to pray for them. Nor can it be doubted that this prayer was heard by the heavenly Father, and that this was the cause why many of the people afterwards drank by faith the blood which they had shed.

(on 1 Cor 2:8)

I answer that there are two kinds of ignorance. The *one* arises from inconsiderate zeal, not expressly rejecting what is good, but from having an impression that it is evil. No one, it is true, sins in ignorance in such a way as not to be chargeable meanwhile in the sight of God with an evil conscience, there being always a mixture of hypocrisy, or pride, or contempt; but at the same time judgment, and all intelligence in the mind of man, are sometimes so effectually choked, that nothing but bare ignorance is to be seen by others, or even by the individual himself. Such was Paul before he was enlightened; for the reason why he hated Christ and was hostile to his doctrine was, that he was through ignorance hurried away with a preposterous zeal for the law. ⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Yet he was not devoid of hypocrisy, nor exempt from pride, so as to be free from blame in the sight of God, but those vices were so completely covered over with ignorance and blindness as not to be perceived or felt even by himself.

The *other* kind of ignorance has more of the appearance of insanity and derangement, than of mere ignorance; for those that of their own accord rise up against God, are like persons in a frenzy, who, seeing, see not. ([Mat 13:13](#).) It must be looked upon, indeed, as a settled point, that infidelity is always blind; but the difference lies here, that in some cases malice is covered over with blindness to such a degree that the individual, through a kind of stupidity, is without any perception of his own wickedness. This is the case with those who, with a good intention, as they speak, or in other words, a foolish imagination, impose upon themselves. In some cases malice has the ascendancy in such a manner, that in spite of the checks of conscience, the individual rushes forward into wickedness of this

sort with a kind of madness. ⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Hence it is not to be wondered, if Paul declares that *the princes of this world would not have crucified Christ, had they known* the wisdom of God. For the Pharisees and Scribes did not know Christ's doctrine to be true, so as not to be bewildered in their mind, and wander on in their own darkness.

Clarke:

If ignorance do not excuse a crime, it at least diminishes the atrocity of it. However, these persons well knew that they were crucifying an innocent man; but they did not know that, by this act of theirs, they were bringing down on themselves and on their country the heaviest judgments of God.

Gill:

for his enemies, his crucifiers: not for those who sinned the sin unto death, the sin against the Holy Ghost, who knowing him to be the Messiah, maliciously crucified him, for whom prayer is not to be made; but for those who were ignorantly concerned in it, as the next clause shows, even for his own elect, whom the Father had given him out of the world, which were among his crucifiers; for those, and not the world, he prays: and the fruit of this his prayer quickly appeared, in the conversion of three thousand of them under Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, next following, in six weeks time.

(on Acts 3:17)

the members of the sanhedrim, some of them; see [1Co_2:8](#) for others of them knew him to be the Messiah, to be sent of God, by the miracles he did, and yet blasphemously ascribed them to Satan; and so sinning against light and knowledge, in such a malicious manner, sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost, to which ignorance is here opposed; and which did not excuse from sin: nor was it itself without sin; nor is it opposed to any sin, but to this now mentioned.