

## Seven Words: Word of Forgiveness

### Luke 23:32-34

#### Introduction

Throughout the ages, people of every generation have given special credence to the last words spoken by their loved ones in those final moments before they passed into eternity. We do so because, when everything else is stripped away, when the seconds matter the most, people don't waste time with unimportant conversations. What they have to say is filled with meaning and value.

I love to hear stories of moments like these:

- A grandfather who calls his grandchildren in, one by one, to relay a special message to each one.
- A mother who gathers her children around her to pray for them as they will soon face life without her.
- The saint who speaks to Jesus who she sees standing at the end of her bed, ready to guide her into heaven.

Such stories bring tears to my eyes and goosebumps to my arms! Maybe you have been a part of just such a moment. But whether you have or haven't, beginning tonight I am inviting you to join me in a moment just like these.

- I invite you to come with me to the foot of the cross where together we will hear the voice of Jesus speak. We will hear his final words.

Jesus spent six hours on the cross that Good Friday. Those six hours were hours of incredible pain and anguish for Him, But despite the pain He was feeling, Jesus made seven statements during that span of time that were recorded by the writers of the gospels.

- Seven statements. Three of these are prayers offered to His Father in Heaven. The other four are directed at the people gathered around the cross.
- Each Thursday evening from now through March 25 we will gather here to listen to His voice as He speaks one of those phrases.
- Seven statements, but if you are counting, you know there are only five of these Thursday evening services, so the series will conclude with messages on the final two on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Tonight we begin where Jesus began. With a prayer, seeking forgiveness for those who had wronged him.

It's fitting, isn't it, to begin with a word of forgiveness. If, as you entered the sanctuary this evening, I had asked each of you to tell me what the cross of Jesus signified to you, I suspect every one of you would answered something like this:

Jesus died on the cross so that all my sins would be forgiven.

And you would be right. On the cross of Calvary the perfect Lamb of God was sacrificed for the sins of all people, past, present and future. Our Passover Lamb, taking away our sins.

We come to the cross many times to confess those sins and to ask for God's forgiveness. Thus it is reassuring for us to hear Jesus say:

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. (Luke 23:34)

Let's reflect on His words more closely:

### **#1: FATHER**

I don't intend to spend much time on this point, only to observe that the relationship between Father and Son continues uninterrupted. Even though, as we will see later in this series, God the Father is unable to look at the sin on Jesus, the Son is never rejected.

I am grateful for that, for no matter what I do I know that my Heavenly Father still loves me as His own. I am still His child. He is still my Father.

We move on ...

### **#2: FORGIVE THEM**

Here is the meat of these words of Jesus. In the span of 24 hours, the players in this story have:

- Plotted to kill Him
- Arrested Him, and subjected Him to the cruelest of mistreatments: whips with pieces of metal in the tips, a crown of thorns, spitting on him and much more
- Tried to humiliate Him before religious and governmental authorities
- Nailed Him to a cross in the heat of the day

People had done the very worst things to Jesus. His response was to offer them the very best He knew: forgiveness.

#### **1. No one in the crowd that day was asking to be forgiven.**

But Jesus prayed for it anyway.

- Below His feet were the soldiers, gambling for His clothing
- In the distance were the religious leaders, watching to make sure He died
- Stationed nearby were more soldier, guarding against any sign of revolt.
- Nowhere to be found were the disciples. With the exception of John, they each had fled out of fear.
- No hint of remorse.
- No request for forgiveness.

Jesus died so that every sin could be forgiven, not just the sins of those who would confess them. He died for the repentant sinner as well as the unrepentant one.

## **2. This is a repeated prayer.**

One of the things that is often lost in our attempts to translate the Scriptures is the intended message of the writer. The Greek language is so much more complex than English.

The tense and form used suggests that this is a repeated prayer of Jesus – one offered through His six hours on the cross. It was not a one-time prayer. Twelve words, spoken and forgotten.

No these were words repeated many times. It was as if Jesus would think of someone who had wronged Him, and prayed once again. The soldiers. "Father forgive them." The priests. "Father forgive them." The disciples. "Father forgive them."

And lest we forget ...

## **3. We are a part of them.**

When Jesus was praying these words, He was praying for you and for me. "Father forgive them."

As I was preparing this message, I began to picture the mind of Jesus speed racing through history, seeing every sin, every sinner, as the sins of the world were piled onto His shoulders. With each sinner, He prayed again "Father forgive them."

It's a humbling thought. But we have to remember that our sins put Him there. We too are guilty of the sacrifice of this innocent man. That's why we encourage you to carry a nail during Lent.

Jesus continues ...

### **#3: THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING**

One author writes:

Were they really ignorant of their wrongdoing? Of course not! Judas knew he had betrayed a friend. Pilate knew he had condemned an innocent man. The religious leaders knew they had bribed false witnesses to make their trumped up charges stick. All of these people were not ignorant of the facts of their sin. (Lutzer, p.34)

But they should have known. Jesus had taught it. The Scriptures had prophesied about it. God had promised it.

Sin has a way of blinding us to the truth. Our minds fog over and we can't see clearly how our actions are sinful... until it is too late.

But ignorance is no excuse. It's not one God accepts. Even the ignorant are guilty and need the forgiveness offered by God.

## **APPLICATION**

Let me conclude by raising two questions for your consideration:

### **1. Do you grasp – even a little bit – the seriousness of the sin in your life?**

I remember when I first had to wrestle with that question. I was in a revival service, and the preacher that night made a statement similar to this:

If you were the only person who had ever sinned, Jesus still would have gone to the cross.

That caught me off guard, because I never did any of the “big” sins. You know, the kind that deserved punishment. My sins were all minor ones. I did steal a pair of pointy scissors from a first grade classmate once, but I had a good reason! My brother needed pointy scissors and I gave them to him. I had yet to learn this truth:

Where sin is taken lightly, forgiveness is received lightly too.

### **2. Are you able to forgive others in the same way Jesus prayed for it?**

Forgiveness is a great thing ... as long as you are on the receiving end of it. It becomes a problem when you are the one who has to do it.

I encourage you right now to pray as Jesus did. It is a great way to start Lent.

Amen.