

The Promise to Pardon Sinners

Luke 23:32-38

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Have you ever had someone say something so profound that it caused you to reconsider your own thinking and actions? Jesus said something profound and powerful from the cross that it changes our attitudes and our behavior.

In the weeks leading up to Resurrection/Easter Sunday we've been looking at some encounters with Jesus. In each encounter Jesus has revealed why and how we should believe in Him. In our conversations with family, neighbors, and co-workers we have the opportunities to share these moments from Jesus' life.

Jesus shared the bread as His broken body; the cup as His blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus stood before the religious leaders proclaiming His rightful place was at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Today we will look at Jesus while He hangs on the cross.

Luke 23:32–38 (NLT) Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

Even as Jesus is dying for our sins, He is praying for our salvation. Jesus is dying between two people who earned their death sentence. He is hanging on a cross falsely accused, beaten, publicly humiliated. He is dying a slow death. He is guilty of being God's Son. He is guilty of being the King of Jews. He is guilty of being the Son of Man. These reasons are not worthy of being executed. These are not crimes. But, Jesus is willing to die on that cross.

Each criminal nailed to the cross was guilty of breaking the law. We don't know what these two were guilty of doing. Some suspect they were thieves. Some scholars think they may have been rebels against Rome. They were condemned to die. They were beaten. They carried their cross to the site of their execution. They were nailed to their cross. They were receiving the punishment for their disobedience to the law.

But, Jesus is willing to die on that cross. An innocent man made the choice to die. He wasn't dying because He wanted to be a martyr. He wasn't dying to inspire a movement. He wasn't dying for a religion or to create a religion. Jesus made the choice to be found guilty of being who He was to die for all those who are guilty. His choice we remember. His sacrifice we remember.

The soldiers were ignorant of what they were doing. This was their job. Some soldiers go to war. Some soldiers carry out executions. Some of these soldiers had become very good at crucifying criminals. They knew the ways to make the agony more miserable. They knew how to make the

torture more horrific. Some of these soldiers enjoyed their work. They liked to inflict pain. They enjoyed watching others suffer. They took pleasure in reminding others of their power and authority. They were cruel. They didn't care. They were just going about their job. Jesus is willing to die on that cross.

They had no idea that Jesus was God's Son. It didn't matter to them. They had no clue who the Son of Man was. It didn't matter to them. They had no regrets about beating, mocking, and executing Him. But, Jesus is willing to die on that cross for their sin. Jesus prayed for them. He prayed for the Father to forgive them.

Luke 23:33 (NLT) When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

Jesus suffered in unimaginable ways to remove sin from our lives. The act of crucifixion is the cruelest way to die. In ancient history every nation had their own form of crucifixion. But the point was always the same. Terrorize the people with a devastating form of execution.

The Roman army seemed to perfect it. They caused pain for the prisoner. They made it clear that most crimes could be punished in this manner. Jesus chose to die on the cross. He had spent His ministry healing people and casting out demons. He even raised the dead. He could have avoided the cross because of His power and authority. But He willingly chose to follow the leading of God the Father.

The Romans after beating a person into submission, would make them carry their cross out a public road leading into the city. This was a place where they would be seen everyone. Nearly exhausted, defeated, and demoralized the prisoner would be nailed to the cross. This was no small nail, but rather a huge spike. It would be driven through the palm of the hand or just above the wrist. Either place would inflict devastating pain. Then a spike would be driven into the feet that were overlapping one another. The body was then taken from a horizontal position on the ground to a vertical position as the main post of the cross was dropped into the ground. The jolt of the cross landing in the ground would reverberate through the body.

Long hours awaited for the weight of the body by the pull of gravity to suffocate the prisoner. Some died sooner from cardiac failure, others died later from starvation and thirst. The people would come by shouting insults and berating the prisoner for being a criminal. Jesus willingly gave Himself to this punishment to take away our sins. Jesus prayed for those who did this to Him.

The weight of our sin on Jesus separated Him from the Father. Through the pain Jesus endured. Through the mocking and insults Jesus endured. Through the debasing of His body Jesus endured. The greatest weight on Jesus was my sin, your sin, and the sin of every person. The sin of pride, the sin of jealousy, the sin of selfishness were all weighing down Jesus. The sin of lying, stealing, greed, slander, disrespect were all upon Jesus. The sin of adultery, the sin of murder, the sin of idol worship were all placed upon Jesus. The sin of turning away from God, disobeying God, rejecting God were all on Jesus.

Jesus never committed any of these sins. He was faithful to God in every way. He turned away from temptations. He looked the devil in the eye and said no every time. Yet, all of our sins were put upon Jesus. From one sin to all the sins of the world Jesus was separated from God His Father. He felt the distance between the two of them. He experienced what no one in this life experiences: cut off from God.

Jesus did this willingly. He chose to become our sin, your sin, my sin. He did this to set us free, you free, and me free from our sins. He made this choice because He didn't want anyone to be separated from God the Father. He died this death because He loves each one of us. He loves me. He loves you.

Luke 23:34 (NLT) Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

This prayer of Jesus is not merely for the moment but for all sinners for all time. If Jesus can pray for the soldiers who killed His body what is He doing for you? This prayer is between the Father and the Son. Long before anyone sinned, before we were even created, the Father said to the Son "someone will need to die for their sins. Someone who is one of them will need to become all their sin and pay the penalty for their sin. Someone who is has lived without sin, who has always been faithful, who has followed all my commands, who trusts me all the time will need to carry all of their sins."

"This person will need to face temptation, look at the devil and say no. This person will need to suffer as they suffer, and even greater suffering. The person who dies for their sins will need to be separated from me because of their sins. When this person dies all the sins of the past, present, and future will be forgiven."

"Through this one person all sin will be removed for all people regardless of where they were born, where they live, how they live, the color of their skin, or the language they speak. By the death of this one person everyone who believes in Him will no longer be burdened with their sin. The death of this one person will set everyone who believes in Him free from the power of sin."

"This one person will not remain dead but on the third day will come back to life, to eternal life, to sit at my right hand."

The Father asked the Son, "will you be this person, will you do this? Will die to save the world? Will you take their sin and pay it's penalty?"

Jesus replied, "Father forgive them for the don't know what they are doing."

If Jesus can pray for the Jews who rejected Him, what is He doing for you? Jesus was a Jew by birth, a descendent of the great King David. He is the one David proclaimed would carry out God's mission. He is the one that all the prophets said would come. He is the one who fulfills the Law, keeping and doing and living all God's commands. He is the one who fulfilled all God commanded because He loves God.

Jesus came to bring the Jews, God's favored people back to God. He was there to make a new covenant, a new promise between God and His people. He came to them because God loved them. God always loved them and wanted to be with them.

Now the Jews had turned their backs on Jesus. Once their favorite leader, now they cried out for His death. At one time they flocked to Him to be healed, to be feed, to hear the truth. Now they mock Him. These people who were called to lead others to God, to faith, to repentance, to salvation now rejected Him. They didn't want to change. They didn't want to follow Him. They wanted Him dead. They wanted to forget about Him. They wanted to keep living the way they wanted.

Jesus cried out, "Father forgive them for the don't now what they are doing." Our sins put Jesus on the cross to die for us. We have rejected God.

Luke 23:34 (NLT) Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Choose today to allow Jesus to forgive your sins and enter your life. It's obvious Jesus died. No one who is crucified lives to tell about it. Jesus stopped breathing, His heart stopped beating, He was dead. They took His body and buried it in a tomb. They rolled a stone across the tomb. They put soldiers outside the tomb to keep someone from stealing His body.

On the third day Jesus walked out of that tomb. Jesus was alive. He rose from the dead. Death has no power over Him. He is still alive today. He will be alive forever and ever.

Jesus talked to His disciples and to others. He was alive again. Then after forty days He returned to Heaven. Today and everyday He is at the right hand of God the Father.

Everyday people die. Everyday people see Jesus at God's right hand. In the snap of a finger, as quick as lightening flashes across the sky, Jesus says to all who believe His body as broken to take away their; to all who believe His shed blood covers their sin; to all who believe Jesus is alive, "I know you, come on in. I have a place made just for you."

Every person in this life who asks Jesus for a second chance, a new life, who believes Jesus loves them, who believes Jesus wants to be with them for eternity receives His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Jesus takes every person who believes in Him and makes them a branch on His vine and they begin to produce that fruit in this life. Jesus does this willingly because He loves every person. Jesus willingly forgives every person because He loves them.

But, each person in this life who rejects Jesus is going to face something different when they see Jesus at their death. For each person who doesn't believe Jesus is alive; for each person who doesn't believe Jesus' death saved them from their sins; for each person who doesn't trust Jesus to take away their sin will hear Jesus say, "I don't know you."

For that person as quick as you can snap your fingers, as fast as lightening flashes across the sky punishment greater than Jesus endured will begin. That punishment will last forever, for eternity. What Jesus endured on the cross for a few hours, the separation from God the Father because of sin, will be endured without end for the person who doesn't believe.

You have the opportunity to say to Jesus, "I want a new life. I want a second chance. I want to be forgiven. I want to receive every blessing. I want to be filled with your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Jesus, I know you love me. Jesus, I love you."

You can choose today. I'll give you a few moments to talk to Jesus. Silently, in your heart, with your spirit, from your soul talk to Jesus. Then I'll pray.