

Father, Forgive Them

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2019

Preacher: Mr Calum Campbell

[0 : 00] You will find the words for the text in the portion of scripture that we read together in Luke chapter 23 reading at verse 34.

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

I have found myself throughout the course of this year, almost from the very beginning of the year, being burdened and challenged with my personal need to understand the seven sayings on the cross.

For me to understand what Jesus was saying, what it meant then when he said it and what it means to us now, today, many years later.

And maybe it is very appropriate that after a communion season that we are going back to the cross, both this morning and also this evening, to focus on the first two sayings of our Savior on the cross.

[1 : 26] In doing so I am hoping that this is not a text that you might have heard over the other communion season, I don't know if it is or not, but we can never hear enough about Christ and Christ's offerings.

So with that in mind I want to look at our Savior's first saying on the cross under three headings. I want to look first of all at Christ's words to all at Calvary, you find that in verse 34.

And then we shall look at the ruler's words to Christ at Calvary, you find that in verse 35. And then we shall look at thirdly the soldier's words to Christ at Calvary, which we read in verse 37.

Crucifixion, I don't need to tell you, was the most horrific way that anybody could die.

It was a shameful death, it was a torturous death, it was a death in which the Roman soldiers took great pleasure in inflicting as much pain upon the worst of all criminals.

[2 : 47] We know that in the experience of our Lord He was crucified on a cross. He was crucified on a cross in the shape of what we would call today a small letter T, where the cross was like this and at the top of it, under, above his head, as we read in this portion of scripture, there was written the words and inscription over him in verse 37.

This is the king of the Jews. I didn't know until this year that the Roman soldiers also had four other different shapes of crosses.

They had the traditional cross in the shape of a capital T. They had a cross in the shape of a Y, where at the bottom both your legs were held together by the same nail.

They had a cross in the shape of the letter X and unbelievably they also had a cross in the shape of the letter I, whereby the nails went through both hands and both feet at the same time.

Our Saviour on the cross uttered seven sayings during these six horrific hours, whilst he is in this torment of crucifixion.

[4 : 22] We read in scripture in the Gospel of Mark and in chapter 15, we read that from the Sixth Tower until the ninth hour there was a great darkness that took place.

Christ our Saviour is crucified on the cross in timeline as we know it from 9am in the morning until he died at 3pm in the afternoon.

It's interesting for us to know that this place where he is crucified, this place which is called a place of a skull, in the Aramaic language this place of a skull that we read off here is known as Golgotha and in the Latin it is known as Calveria.

That is where we get the name Calvary today, where we remember our Saviour being crucified on the cross.

We remember too that in these times the Roman soldiers very often crucified people, the worst of the worst in groups of three.

[5 : 35] And always when there were three people being crucified, the one in the middle was always put in the middle because he was considered by the courts as the worst of the three of them.

And we are read in scripture here how Christ has one thief on his left hand side and one thief on his right hand side. And Christ is in the middle as if from the whole judicial court system he has been labelled as the worst of the worst, way worse than the other two.

And this is what the prophet Isaiah wrote about many many years ago in that wonderful prophetic portion of scripture that many of us learned when we were in school.

Isaiah 53 verse 12, he poured out his soul today and he was numbered with a transgressor, yet he bore the sin of many making intercession for the transgressor.

Christ's crucifixion between two thieves is something that has been prophesied hundreds of years ago and it is now taking place.

[6 : 55] This is actually also something that in the previous chapter our Saviour himself has said was going to take place where in verse 37 in chapter 22 he says, for I tell you that the scriptures must be fulfilled in me, that he was numbered with a transgressor and that what is written about me has its fulfilment.

You will find that if you study the seven sayings of the cross that each one of the seven things that Christ says on the cross has been prophesied in the Old Testament and this is the first of them.

So let's look at verse 34 in first heading and let's look at Christ's words to all at Calvary. Jesus says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Savior is an incredible statement from our Saviour. As he kneels to death, as he knows that he has bid ours to live and yet our Saviour is praying for all those that are there found gathered.

Forgive them for they know not what they do. And that includes his tormentors, that includes his abusers, that includes those who are mocking him, those who are swearing at him, those who are spitting at him, those who have driven the nails through his hand and feet.

[8 : 34] And what he has here for us is a model prayer in these few short words for us to learn and how to pray. He shows us how we must and how we should address the Father in prayer.

He speaks about forgive them for they know not what they do. He speaks about our need of forgiveness for our sins. And he also speaks in this small little portion, what he says here, he is full of inspiration of our need to pay even for the forgiveness of our enemies, of those who have wronged us and those who have hurt us.

In verse 34 in the ESV version that we are looking at here, it begins, and Jesus said, but this very often when we are reading and studying scripture it is good to have different versions of the Bible with us.

There is a word which is in the authorised version, which is not in the ESV. It is the same sentence, it is the same statement, but there is one word which makes such a difference.

In the ESV it says, then said, in the King James it says, then said Jesus, Father forgive them.

[10 : 02] And we read the lead up to it in verse 33, and when they came to a place which is called a skull and they crucified him, and the criminals one on the right hand and one on the left, then.

The emphasis is on the word then. And it is a scripture that is telling us here, now, then, at that point where man has done his very worst to our Saviour, then, at that moment, then, at that moment in time, Christ utters this remarkable prayer.

Forgive them for they know not what they do. Christ's public ministry began with his baptism in prayer, and now we see that Christ's public ministry is coming to an end, as he prays to the Father, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

And we find that throughout his whole public ministry in these three years of ministry, that forgiveness was a central theme in all that our Saviour said and in all that our first Saviour did, and right up until the point of his death, Christ is still praying and teaching and preaching and pleading forgiveness for sinners.

It's remarkable of all the things he could have said on the cross that this is what he says. And to whom is Christ's prayer at rest, to whom is he saying, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

[11 : 47] The answer to that question is found in verse 35, and the people stood by watching. It's to everybody who's there at Calvary. It's to all the people.

It's to all the people who were there out of just noisiness and curiosity, and those people who went to all the crucifixions because they loved watching people die.

It's to all the people there, including his enemies, including his executioners. It's to all the people there, including the Jewish people that were there, including all the chiefs, the Jewish chiefs, all the people that are there who are part of the Sanhedrin, all the people of his own, people who ought to have known who Christ was.

He is speaking to them. He's speaking to the Roman soldiers. He's speaking to those who have spread the lies about him. He's speaking to those who are responsible for him being crucified at this moment in time.

He's speaking to them all. And he's pleading for them all in mercy. Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

[13 : 00] Christ is here teaching us that in this moment of time, that even the worst of the worst people is not beyond redemption.

And is that not how we feel you and I who are Christians today and here? What did he ever see in me to save a soul like me?

Where we see Christ's divine intercession at work and it's remarkable the seven sayings of the cross and what he is saying at this moment in time.

And notice also what he is saying. Notice the incredible beat. We cannot even begin to understand the agony that our Savior is in.

We cannot begin to understand how difficult it must have been for him to speak. We cannot begin to understand how difficult it was for him even to breathe.

[14 : 01] And yet what do we see when we look at Christ on the cross? Calmness. There's no shred of anger in the voice of Christ.

There's no shred of retaliation. But it's nothing but pleading intercession. Listen to what our Savior is saying here.

He doesn't resent these people. He doesn't hate these people. He's not angry with these people. He has no desire to punish these people.

He's so calm on the cross to the very people who are mistreating him. Let me tell you that earlier on this year, I am sure I'm just like everybody else here, other than my Savior, that there's nothing more precious to me than my family.

And there was one person who earlier on this year said lies about somebody within my family.

[15 : 13] And it was very hurtful. And it didn't take long for people to know straight away that the accusation was lies from somebody who likes to gossip.

But see when I heard it, I was so angry. And all I wanted to do was say to myself, man, I hope I meet you just to give you a blast.

How dare you say such and such a thing. How dare you insinuate lies. How dare you make up these things. Who do you think you are? Why would you do that?

It got me so angry. It got me so wild. How unlike Christ I am. And yet here's our Savior being crucified.

And there's no anger to be found in Him. It truly is remarkable. Here's our Savior who could have cried at that moment Father consume them.

[16 : 11] He could have cried Father open the ground and let the ground swallow them all up and close the ground like has already happened in another portion of our Holy Word. But He doesn't.

He couldn't. Otherwise His work as our Savior as our Messiah would have been a failure. He endures all that an innocent man hanging on the tree being crucified all because of a series of lies, lie after lie after lie.

Evidence falsified. And now He has been crucified with this inexcusable crime against Him. My friends, if ever you need encouragement to repent of your sins, here it is.

When we go to Christ He doesn't throw things back in our face and say, I remember what you did ten years ago. I remember what you did when you were a teenager. I remember what you did when you were thirty years ago.

It's enough for ourselves to carry these burdens of these things that we will carry to the grave. But not so with Christ. He forgives us of every single sin.

[17 : 38] And like Christ we are a people who ought to pray for those who persecute us as they persecuted Him. And we have seen in our screens already today about what goes on with persecution.

If the worst that people can do is laugh at us for coming to church, let them laugh. If the worst they can do is call us fools for coming here for an hour or an hour and a half, let them call us fools.

As long as we are in Christ that's all that matters and that's all that's important. Christ our Savior is somebody who time after time after time speaks about our need to forgive our enemies.

In Matthew chapter 5 verses 43 and 44 He says, what you have heard, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy, but I say unto you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

It's not easy to do. But that's what He did and here is our proof of it.

[18 : 56] Remarkable how calm our Savior was. How calm even today brothers and sisters around the world are as they face death.

And yet they will not be calmed and yet it will cost them their lives today. I wonder how many have gone home to glory even while we're found gathered here today because they would not bow the knee to a false God.

Remember Stephen, remember what Stephen, we read of Stephen in the book of Acts. When Stephen was being stoned, how like Christ he was and falling on his knees he cried with a loud voice, Lord do not hold a sin against him.

And when he said this he fell asleep. That is how we need to be. That is how we are Christ like.

The man who prays for his enemies and the man who does that shows the mind of Christ and great will be his reward.

[20 : 09] Oh what a Savior we have. But why does he say they don't know what they do?

We can almost understand him saying Father forgive them because this is Christ who speak him. And even in the midst of his torture and agony it doesn't surprise us that he would say forgive them Lord.

But he goes on to say for they know not what they do. It's almost as if in this moment in time Christ is making up an excuse for them. It's almost as if Christ is almost taking pity upon them.

Why does he say that? Why does he say what he says there? Because they weren't ignorant of what they were doing. They weren't ignorant of what they were wanting.

They weren't ignorant of what it was going to cost them because they cried crucify him, crucify him. So why is Christ saying they know not what they do?

[21 : 19] When they do know what they are doing and shouting crucify him, crucify him. Well the answer is simply this. It's that they were just spiritually ignorant of what they were saying and what they were doing and the enormity of what they were saying and what they were doing.

In a nutshell they did not believe and they did not understand that this was truly the Son of God.

They looked upon Christ, this person that they were crucifying as nothing other than impostor. Even the Jewish ruler, even those people who knew the Old Testament Scriptures like the back of their hands, even those people who knew about the prophecies, who knew of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, who only needed to go to the Word to look into it, yet they didn't bother and they didn't believe.

And they looked at our Savior as if he was an impostor. John Gil the Puritan says this, Our Lord does not mention the ignorance of those he prays for as a plea for pardon, but as a description of their state.

They did not believe that it was the Son of God who was being crucified. And not only that but Arthur Pink says in his book, The Seven Sayings of the Cross, the emphasis is not on they know not, but they know not what they do.

[23 : 10] And yet they ought to have known their blindness was inexcusable. No there was no excuse for their ignorance, it only demonstrated the blindness of their hearts, the rejection of the Son of God bore full witness once and for all that the carnal mind is enmity against God.

I wonder how that makes us feel today when we come to worship the Lord. Is he just the Lord of Scripture or is he your Lord and your Savior of Scripture?

Do you have that personal relationship with him? I hope and pray that you do. Ignorance is not innocence.

In the sight of God. So then we ask a question, well why does Christ say this, Father forgive them for they know not what they do?

Why is it that he goes to the Father? Why doesn't he just pronounce forgiveness upon the cross for these people himself? After all this is what the Lord did in these three years of ministry.

[24 : 27] But it's different on the cross because on the cross he becomes our sin-bearer, on the cross he becomes our substitute and on the cross he lays the sins of these people into the loving care of the Father because he is our substitute.

And as our substitute the authority is different from what he had. But his desire to see his sinner saved is no different to what he had throughout his whole ministry.

He still finds a way for the worst of the worst to be saved. He intercedes for them and he pleads to the Father for mercy for them.

And this is a triumph of Christ's redeeming love. Just like when you and I, you love the Lord die and leave this world and at the judgment we will stand before God and Christ will intercede for us and he will say, I died for him, I died for her because they believed in me through faith.

At what point did Jesus say this on the cross? Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

[26 : 15] We don't know for sure that part hasn't been revealed to us. It's only revealed that he said it once. But you know, we can't understand how difficult it was for Christ to speak.

But I can't help but wonder when people went up to spit at him, he would say, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

As the soldiers throw their nails through his hands and feet, I can't but wonder did he say it again, Father forgive them. As the crowds cheered and mocked and humiliated, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

It's just a thought. But I believe in his own way, for every sinful act that was thrown at him, the reply was Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

And then we read that they parted his garment, they cast lots to divide his garment. And this is even more incredible, more shame for our saviour to endure.

[27 : 39] Each condemned prisoner on their way to the cross was allocated four soldiers, two in front and two behind, as the criminal carried his cross, as if there was any way of escape for this poor criminal, four soldiers accompanied.

And when that person was being crucified, the soldiers had the right and they did very often remove the clothing from those who were being crucified.

Now the Jewish people wore five items of clothing, at least. They wore the turban, they wore the garter, they wore the inner tunic, they wore the outer cloak and they wore the sandals on their feet.

And these five items of clothing were stripped and taken from our saviour. But five into four does not go.

And the best part of the clothing, when this became the property of these soldiers, was the outer robe. And the outer robe was the most expensive and the best quality item of clothing that the Jewish person wore.

[29 : 11] It was in one piece and to have ripped it into four pieces, it would have meant it, it would have made it worthless.

It would have been ruined. And that is why they cast lots to see who would get the best of our saviour's clothing.

And we read these words in Psalm 22 in verse 18, they divide my garments among them for my clothing, they cast loads.

You see even that itself was prophesied in Scripture. And it would appear that to our saviour's shame, that there as he hung crucified, he would have been naked or near naked with regard to the clothing that he wore.

Again just to add further insult. Do we have any understanding of what our saviour went through?

[30 : 27] Or even the very clothing that he wore, the soldiers scabbled upon. And then no doubt they would go and sell on that clothing for profit for themselves.

And then we read in this portion of Scripture that it just continues to get worse as we move very briefly into our second heading, the ruler's words to Christ in verse 35.

As if he hasn't endured himself, the ruler scoffed at him saying he saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one.

You see how it's just continuous. You see how it's just, we can only describe as torment as an onslaught of satanic attacks.

And this is in the daylight. The darkness, out of darkness hasn't even come yet. And this is all taking place in the daylight. And this is taking place by its own Jewish people.

[31 : 43] We wouldn't expect in some ways anything better from the Roman soldiers, but its own people were so blind.

So much so that the Jewish people and the priests and all the people there that are part of the Sanhedrin, they join in and they become just exactly like the other people.

They become mockers of Christ. So much so that the psalmist says that we stand together. I am a worm and not a man scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

All who see me mock me, they make mouths at me and they wag their heads. He trusts in them, let them deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him.

See prophecy being fulfilled yet again. See how they mock Christ in three different ways.

[32 : 47] See what the rulers say. First of all they mock him by saying, he saved others, let him save himself.

Of course Christ could have saved himself. Of course he could have come from the cross, but in doing so he wouldn't have saved us.

So he endured and he interceded. And not only that, but they go on to say, if he be the Christ.

And then thirdly they go on to say, the chosen of God. See how the mockery, the three stages of it, it intensifies.

It gets greater and greater and greatest are scorn of their saviour. As the challenge Christ's divinity and even Christ's very mercy is used in mockery.

[33 : 46] This is what is taking place. This is what our saviour is enduring on the cross. It did not enter the minds of the rulers for one minute that the true meaning of being the Messiah was not the saving of himself, but the saving of his people.

It did not enter their minds and yet they knew the Old Testament Scriptures. They look away and they simply shake their heads and they say, whoever he is, he's not the Messiah.

Well one thing they said in their mockery that was very true. They said this, he saved others and yet he couldn't save himself.

How true that is, how thankful we are today that he stayed on the cross to provide a way of salvation for you and I.

What endurance our saviour had and on the cross he was not going to fail in his work as a mediator through the mockery of the priests and through the mockery of the rulers and through the mockery of everybody else.

[35 : 17] And then we find that as if that wasn't enough we see in our final heady the soldiers words to Christ on the cross and we see that in verse 37.

And the soldiers also mocked him coming up and offering him sour wine and say, if you are the king of the Jews save yourself. You see how they join in?

The first of all join in with this drink that they offer him. This wine, this cheap wine that the soldiers drank while on duty.

While the soldiers used to enjoy to make them happy as they inflicted pain and torment upon the criminal being crucified. And you would think that in some way that this is showing a little bit of compassion.

The soldiers here offering him sour wine. He is yet to say I thirst. But great was his thirst even at this stage on the hot day.

[36 : 28] As he has been crucified. But you see what they did? They would encourage people with a sponge to drink. Not out of love or compassion.

They did it in the hope that the little bit that they would drink would make them last an hour or two longer. Or a few hours longer on the cross so that their sufferings would be increased.

That drink would in some way strengthen their body to make them last a little bit longer. No, there was no love.

There was no compassion. It's not like you and I have been and have seen in love when somebody is near death.

And is lying on a bed and they cannot eat or drink for themselves. And a little bit of sponge with a wistig at the end of it that you put round somebody's lips.

[37 : 29] That we do in our homes and in hospitals and in care places to wet their lips. Just to give a little bit of ease and comfort. That's not what the soldiers are doing.

They offer it to prolong the agony of the sufferings of Christ. And the sufferings of all those who are being crucified.

They did not mock him as a Messiah. They mocked him as a king. And that is why they say to themselves, why they say, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

They're looking at Christ and they're saying, here's a king without a crown, without a kingdom, without an army. And they carry on with their taunts and with their mockery.

The Jews mock him as Christ, as a claim for the Messiah. And the Roman soldiers mock him with regard to his kingship.

[38 : 31] The Romans didn't see, of course, that the true function of a king is to care for his kingdom. And all those that dwell within it. To the Romans, a king was somebody who was an emperor, who had power, who had an army, who had everything and who was in complete control.

But Christ crosses the very opposite and they discount him as a king. But yet here's the thing, Christ is God's king.

God's anointed and God's appointed king overall.

And there's one final question that I want to ask and leave with regard to this subject.

Did the Lord answer his prayer when he cried, when he pleaded, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do?

[39 : 38] Well, you know, we don't have to read very far in scripture to find answers to that. Because we find in Matthew chapter 27 and in verse 34, this is what is written of in scripture.

When the centurion and all those who were with them, keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, truly this was the Son of God.

Not only that, but we read on the day of Pentecost a short while later, that 3,000 people are saved. And we can be sure that many of them were there mocking and cheering Christ as he was being crucified.

Not only that, but we read in Acts chapter 6 and in verse 7, the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem and many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

The very priests and many of them, I'm sure, were there at the crucifixion mocking. These people didn't come to faith through the eloquence of Peter's preaching.

[41 : 09] Although Peter was greatly used, but these people came to faith because the Lord is here answering the words and the prayer of Christ on the cross, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

And he's prayed that for us long before we became Christians. Don't think for a moment that our Saviour didn't pray for us before even we were born, before we came to Christ.

He most certainly did. Oh, think of your Saviour on the cross this morning. What do you see?

It is not a picture that you see portrayed in so many books of a beautiful man with a beard with a trickle of blood here and here and here from the crown of thorns.

We think of our Saviour as one who barely resembled a human being on the cross. His body broken from the beatings, from the whips, his joints in agony, his flesh torn from, his hair pulled out, barely wearing any clothes.

[42 : 36] When you think of Christ, you think of your Saviour as one who had blood pouring throughout the whole of his body. And that's your Saviour interceding, providing a way for you and me to be saved.

And now as our time comes to an end, our Lord is asking us once again the greatest question of all, what shall I do with this man called Christ?

Well, what is going to be our answer as we sing our last Psalm and walk out that door? Are you going to reject him?

Are you going to despise him? Are you going to mock him? No you say, I'm not in the camp of the Spitter.

I'm not in the camp of the Hater. I'm not in the camp of the Mockers. But my friend, are you in the camp of the unbeliever?

[43 : 51] Today you're not saying that you want to spend eternity in hell with people like that, when Christ has provided a way of salvation.

Or will you receive Christ as the Saviour of your soul and the Lord of your life? What will be your decision as you walk out that door?

Many of us here already have made that decision, but is there anybody who hasn't? How can you possibly refuse this Christ who died in such a way to provide hope and refuge in this world, to provide friendship and companionship?

Believing in Jesus is not just about getting to heaven when we die, and the wonder of that. Believing in Jesus is walking and is knowing that Christ is with us with each step that we take in this world, and his guiding and his provision.

And he's offering us all that, and the best is yet to come in glory. Tell us we part, may we all put our hands on our chest, and may we all be like the Centurion who said, surely this was the Son of God, and may we all walk out of here today, say, for me to love as Christ and to die as Gain.

[45 : 31] Amen, may the Lord bless you, these thoughts.