

Father, Forgive Them

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[0 : 0 0] So this morning we're continuing a short study that we've been doing on Luke 23 that records! five sayings of Jesus and we're going through them one by one. Today we're at the third which is in verse! 33 and 34. When they came to the place that's called the skull there they crucified him and the criminals one on his right and one on his left and Jesus said father forgive them for they know not what they do. These words are remarkable and and they're even more remarkable when we think about the circumstances in which they're said. Going through the narrative Jesus has been arrested, he's been mocked, he's been beaten. You've got the crowd screaming for his execution, he's been dragged before Pilate, dragged before Herod, dragged before the council, dragged through the streets, out of the city, brought to the hill known as the skull, nailed to a cross with two thieves either side of him and there he's hung to die. And he says father forgive them because they don't know what they're doing.

And that's the thing we're going to look at today and as we unpack these words we're going to just look at three things. We're going to see that they knew exactly what they were doing, they had no idea what they were doing and Jesus chose exactly what he was going to do. So first of all we need to recognize that in one sense they knew exactly what they were doing. All the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are telling us the story of Jesus's life but all of them are actually very imbalanced as biographies because they just they ignore almost all of the first 30 years of his life. They whiz through the next three years and then they focus the vast majority of their attention on one week of Jesus's life leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection. Luke is no exception. All of the narratives, the parables, the miracles that he's recorded are leading the reader up to this moment to the cross.

And as Luke's been leading us towards the cross in his gospel, he's revealed again and again and again that the opposition to Jesus is mounting. That's something you see in all the gospels. So to whiz through a few examples, way back in Luke 5, Jesus forgives a paralytic his sins. The religious authorities are immediately suspicious saying, who's this who speaks blasphemy? No one can forgive sins but God.

Jesus healed people in Luke 6. The Pharisees were cynical. They wanted to see whether they might heal on the Sabbath so they could accuse him. Jesus challenged the authorities. They wanted to trap him.

They began to press him hard, to provoke him, to speak about many things lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say. And so the tension's mounting all the time.

[3 : 11] And eventually they are desperate to find the right moment to get rid of Jesus. They find him teaching in the temple. They want to destroy him but they couldn't really find anything that they could do and they were worried about what the people would say. They sought to lay hands on him, again Luke 20, but they feared the people. And so it's absolutely clear as you read through Luke that the opposition to Jesus is mounting and it's deliberate and it's determined. So the people who crucified Jesus knew what they were doing. And that becomes even clearer when you look at the specific events of Jesus's trial and crucifixion. And so there's this deliberate conspiracy with one of his disciples, with Judas, with Judas, in order to find a way to trap Jesus. Going on to Luke 22, there's this coordinated ambush. Jesus is in the garden. They come with a crowd in order to arrest him.

You go into Luke, later in Luke 22, there's this kind of sham trial gathering up to sort of say, you know, are you the Christ? And he's kind of in this catch-22 situation where it's, you know, if he says no, when they're like, well, oh, who do you think you are then? And if he says yes, it's like, oh, who do you think you are then? No matter what he says, he's doomed. And you see the accusations that have been made against Pilate and you see the same against, before Herod, vehement accusations made against Jesus. I'm conscious I've whizzed through those. It's just to crucify, it's just to emphasize the same thing. They want to crucify him. They want him dead. They know exactly what they're doing. And it culminates with Pilate who says, look, there's nothing wrong with this guy.

I can't find anything wrong with him. And yet they kept on shouting, crucify him, crucify him. They knew what they were doing. And eventually they get their wish. Along with two others who are criminals, they led Jesus away to the place of the skull and there they crucified him. In it all, they knew what they were doing. They wanted rid of Jesus. He was a threat and a problem. They conspired against him. They prepared their accusations and they didn't mind whether they had to make some stuff up if they had to. They influenced the crowd, stirring them up into a frenzy. They made sure that they got the authorization that they needed from Pilate and they executed him right where they wanted him. Outside the city, cursed, condemned, disgraced. It was all deliberate, premeditated, planned and accomplished. They knew exactly what they wanted to do and they did it. They did it.

And, you know, there's loads that we could say about that. It's all just in so many ways a reminder that sin can lead us very deliberately down a path that's a terrible idea. And so all the time we're kind of watching on and you're seeing the Pharisees and you're seeing the crowd and you're seeing Pilate and you're seeing Herod and they're all marching down this path to condemn Jesus and you're thinking, what are you doing? And yet they're blinkered. They're determined. That's the path they want to go down. And, you know, that is just an important thing for us to think about because there are times in life when we stuff up, when we do things that are foolish and we never intended to. So, you know, you look back and, I mean, it's a minor thing, but I did not intend to speed. I didn't intend to get caught, but I did. You know, and you think, oh, why did I do that? And that's a tiny version of things that happen loads of times. There's things we do, we think, why did I do that? And, you know, sometimes it can be, you know, you can make a joke that you thought was funny and then you realize it's really offensive. Sometimes you might lose your temper. Maybe sometimes you'll hear a bit of gossip, you'll pass it on and then you realize, actually, that was all false. I should never have said anything.

And all the time our intention is not to do harm and sometimes we make those mistakes. That happens to us quite often, probably happens to us most weeks of our lives. But sometimes you see people and sometimes even in ourselves, sin can leave our judgment so skewed and it can leave our desires so misplaced that we deliberately go down a path that takes us to a terrible place. And so sometimes anxieties can lead us down the path of addiction. Sometimes our insecurities can lead us down the path where we hate other groups of people or other individuals. Sometimes our bruises can leave us so aggressive towards others because we never want to get hurt again. Sometimes we can deliberately go down a path that's a bad idea. And most seriously of all, sometimes we can deliberately go down the path that rejects Jesus. And so I don't think anybody here or anybody watching at home would align themselves with the crowd in Luke 23 that's shouting, crucify him. I don't think anybody would align themselves with the religious leaders who are like, how can we find a way to get rid of this guy? I don't think any of you are aligning yourself with him, with them. But I think there's a danger that some of us, there's a danger that some of us are looking at Jesus and saying, I don't really want him in my life.

[8 : 56] I don't really want him interfering with things. I don't really want to have to think about this. And, you know, maybe you're like, I've thought about it and I'm quite deliberate and I don't want this.

I want you to think about that again. I want you to think about that again. Because these religious leaders and these crowds, they thought that they knew exactly what they were doing.

And the truth is, they had no idea what they were doing. And that's what we see when we look in this passage a bit deeper.

All around Jesus, people are mocking him. They're condemning him. They're deliberately executing their plan to get rid of him. But all the time, it's deliberate, it's planned, it's intentional, and yet all the time, they do not realize just what they are doing.

And that becomes so clear when you look in a bit of detail at what Luke records. And it's actually really fascinating because all of this is just woven into the passage and you could easily miss it.

[10 : 22] Some of this is seen in what we call irony. When you look at the crucifixion narratives, this is something that you see again and again. You see it in all the Gospels. There's a very deliberate irony in the writers.

What do I mean by that? Well, I'll give you a couple of examples. You can see it in the verses there. So in verse 35, you see they're kind of scoffing at him and they're saying, you know, if he saved others, let him save himself if he's the Christ, the chosen one.

And so there's this kind of statement, it's like, oh, well, if he's really the Christ, you know, look at him now. And of course, the irony is, that's exactly who he is. And it's only by not saving himself that he saves others.

They're saying, oh, you know, if he saves himself, then he'll be able to save others. It's like, well, that's a deliberate irony because the truth is, the only way he can save others is by not saving himself and by dying for them.

The inscription above him says, the king of the Jews. And again, there's supposed to be a kind of irony. This is supposedly the king of the Jews, but look at him. He's been hung and put to death.

[11 : 23] That's exactly who he is. That's exactly who he is. And at the very same time, all of these words are fulfilling prophecy from the Old Testament.

And this is so important in terms of the credibility of the Christian faith, that the stuff that happened to Jesus isn't just random stuff. It's actually fulfilling stuff that's been prophesied centuries before it.

And everything connects together in an astonishingly powerful and persuasive way. You see it here. So verse 34, they cast lots for his garments. I need to change my color because I'm making my page very dirty.

They cast lots for his garments. That's fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 22, verse 18. And they gave him sour wine. That's fulfilling the prophecies of the words we just sang in Psalm 69.

And in all of these things, Jesus' identity's been confirmed. The Old Testament prophecies are being fulfilled and the people have no idea what they're doing.

[12 : 22] Now, I just want to dig into three things in a little bit more detail. Number one, they had no idea that they were crucifying the Son of God.

So they thought they were getting rid of this man who'd become more and more of a problem. He was traveling around. He was challenging the religious elite. He was upsetting the kind of social order of the day, gaining support from the crowd.

And he was becoming a threat to those who had control over the religious life of the people. In other words, he was a pain that needed to be dealt with. That pain, that nuisance, was actually God the Son.

And this realization finally comes from many of the people of Jerusalem in Acts chapter 2. Peter preaches to them after the resurrection.

And Peter shows them that Jesus is actually everything that the Old Testament was pointing towards. And he says to them, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.

[13 : 27] As you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

And finally, finally they realize what they've done. Peter goes on to say, let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God's made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

And when they heard it, they were cut to the heart and they said to Peter, what shall we do? They're just starting to realize what they've done.

Paul echoes the same thing when he writes to the Corinthians. He talks about Jesus and he said, they didn't understand what they were doing. If they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

And so it's all reminding us that the crucifixion is monumental in its controversy. The Son of God hung on a cross to die. It's the greatest injustice in all of history.

[14 : 30] It's the most shocking crime in all of history. It's the most despicable act in all of history. And they didn't know they were doing it. Number two, so first of all, they had no idea they were crucifying the Son of God.

Second thing, they had no idea they were rejecting the Savior that they desperately needed. And this is again, like so, it's like so tragic in terms of what you see going on.

In verse 39, one of the criminals hanging beside him railed at him saying, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. And it's again, it's just to mock him as if to say, well, if you really are supposed to be a Savior, come on, show it.

as if to say, look, you're just a fraud. You're not really who you claim to be. And yet, the criminal's got no idea what he's saying.

Because he's hanging there as a guilty criminal about to die. And the only possibility for salvation for that criminal is the guy hanging next to him. And as we'll see next week, the other criminal realizes this just in time.

[15 : 36] But he's the exception for everybody else at the cross. They've got no idea that they're rejecting the Savior that they desperately need. Jesus has come to save them. He's come to save sinners.

And that salvation is accomplished on the cross. It's by dying on the cross. You know this. It's by dying on the cross that salvation is possible. And that's saying that not only is the crucifixion monumental in its controversy, it's also monumental in its power.

Jesus, is dying on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. Dying as the Lamb of God to take away our sins. Dying to take death so that we would be freed from the power of death.

The crowds who were crucifying Jesus, they thought that his death would get rid of a problem. They had no idea how right they were. But the problem that's been dealt with is not the problem of an itinerant preacher and supposed miracle worker.

the problem being dealt with is the sin and guilt and brokenness in us all. Jesus is the saviour that those people desperately needed but in rejecting him they had no idea what they were doing.

[16 : 52] So they had no idea that they were crucifying the Son of God. No idea that they were rejecting the saviour they desperately needed. But thirdly, and this is the one I really want you to think about, this is the most important thing. They had no idea that they were actually missing everything that they were longing for.

They had no idea that they were missing everything that they were longing for. And this is so important to recognise. The Jewish authorities and the crowds who condemned Jesus, they were not secular atheists.

They were not reckless pagans. They actually wanted to please God. They were in Jerusalem for the Passover. They wanted the Messiah to come.

They wanted God's promises to be fulfilled. They wanted peace and security and forgiveness and hope. They wanted things to be better. And when they crucified Jesus they had no idea that they were actually missing everything that they were longing for.

Jesus had come to give them that, to give them healing and hope, to give them forgiveness and freedom, to give them security and salvation, to give them justice and joy.

[18 : 12] He came to give them everything that deep down they longed for and they had no idea and they pushed him away. And this raises a crucial point that I want to, I'm just going to say it, I want you to think about it.

I'm not sure everyone's going to agree with us, but I'm going to say it and I hope that I can persuade you that it's true. And here's what I want to say. Everybody who pushes Jesus away is pushing away the thing that deep down they really want.

Everybody who pushes Jesus away is pushing away the thing that deep down they really want. Now, you might not agree with that, but that's okay. Here's why I think that's true.

I'll give you lots of examples. So, people go chasing after things in lots of different ways in life in order to meet our needs.

We're all going after stuff in order to meet our needs. And so, people want confidence. And so, to get that they might go to alcohol.

[19 : 21] Now, I don't mean in terms of addiction. I might just mean in terms of just thinking, you know, it's by going out and having a drink. That's where I'm going to feel confident. That's where I'm going to have fun. That's where I'm going to feel better.

They want confidence. They go to alcohol. People want to feel loved. So, they just go looking for any relationship they can get. And often, that will be with multiple people. People want security.

But instead of Jesus, they go to money thinking, if I've got more money, if I've got a good pension, if I pay my house off, if my salary is secure, then I'll feel secure. People want purpose, but instead of Jesus, they pour everything into their career thinking, that's where I'll find purpose.

People want beauty and pleasure, but instead of Jesus, they go for their next holiday thinking, that's what's going to make me feel better. And people want peace, but instead of Jesus, you know, they just go to a screen for a distraction to think, I just want to take my mind off the stuff that's bothering me.

I just want some kind of sense of peace. People want victory, but instead of Jesus, they'll go to sport. People want hope, but instead of Jesus, they'll go to politics. And at one level, at one level, you know, in many of those things, none of these things are necessarily bad in and of themselves.

[20 : 29] None of them are. All of them have an appropriate place in life. But all of these can become the main thing that we chase in our lives. And sometimes, sometimes these can be a path that actually will do us a lot of harm, whether that's pouring ourselves into our career to the point that it breaks us, or whether it's putting all our hopes into politics to the point where it leads us disillusioned or whatever it might be.

In other words, what am I saying? I'm saying, when people go down a bad path in life or when people go down the wrong path in life, almost always, it's because they're longing for a good thing.

People don't go down bad paths looking for bad things. People go down bad paths looking for good things. And that's the kind of tragedy of the misjudgment that sin has placed in our lives.

And so often, people will reject Jesus in order to keep the counterfeit, the rubbish version, and the thing that might be good for a while, but which is never going to last forever.

And that leads people to say, well, I don't want to be a Christian because it's maybe going to spoil my social life and I won't have such good friendships. I don't want to be a Christian because it's going to interfere with my career. I don't want to be a Christian because it's going to disturb my routine. I don't want to be a Christian because it's going to make me weird.

[22 : 03] And yet, the truth is, Jesus gives you the way better version of what every alternative is offering you.

Now, this again is really important. To see this point and for this point to be valid, you have to make sure you distinguish between Jesus and church because sometimes church is weird and sometimes church does mess up your routine and sometimes church is dull in lots and lots of different ways.

I'm not saying church, I'm saying Jesus because everything about our church, if it's going to be healthy, it has to be focused on Jesus. And the point I just want you to see is this, is that Jesus actually gives you everything you long for.

He quenches your deepest thirst for you, for your family. He makes your friendships brilliant. He makes your job more fulfilling.

He makes your home happier. He makes your appreciation for life and hobbies better. And he puts everything into perspective and it's amazing. And if you push him away, you're pushing away the thing that deep down you really want.

[23 : 16] And all of that's because like this crowd, so often we think we know what we're doing and actually we've no idea what we're doing. Last of all, right, one minute, 30 seconds, let's do it.

Speed, speed, speed. Jesus chose exactly what he was going to do. And while you see it there, it's just one of the most simple, magnificent, beautiful statements that you have.

All of this stuff's going on. How does Jesus respond? He says, Father, forgive them. And that reveals two things. It reveals astonishing theology and it gives us an astounding example.

The astonishing theology is the theology that lies at the very heart of the gospel. These people are deliberately condemning Jesus. They've ignorantly overlooked what was utterly, you know, what was right in front of them and in condemning Jesus they were condemning themselves.

In so many ways they dug themselves into a massive hole but Jesus does not respond with condemnation. Jesus responds with forgiveness.

[24 : 21] And that's the theology that lies at the very heart of the gospel. When Jesus says forgive them, he's not just doing a nice thing on his deathbed. Forgiveness is the whole reason he's dying.

It's the whole reason we have the gospel so that our sins can be forgiven. And there's a sense in which for all of us in our lives, you know, for everyone, we know, we actually know not what we do.

Sometimes we make mistakes and we kind of have a realization of it. but so often in life we're going through it and we're doing stuff that we don't really realize that we're doing and it's especially true in terms of our relationship with God. We actually have no idea, no idea, just how serious our sinfulness before God really is.

The truth is only Jesus really knows and he's got a list that's a thousand pages long of reasons to condemn me and he doesn't do it. Instead, he responds with forgiveness for me and for you.

Now, I don't know the level to which guilt eats away at you at the moment. Maybe just a tiny bit, that's okay. For many people, you know, that can't be your experience. Maybe it's paralyzing you.

[25 : 39] But whatever level of guilt you're feeling, Jesus' promise is to forgive you. To wipe it clean. To take it away.

And there's an amazing verse in Acts 6 that highlights this. That's actually very, very easy to miss. Acts chapter 6, there's just this wee verse chucked in where it says, And the word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

It's that we've got at the end. A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. In Luke 23, what were the priests saying?

They were saying, crucify him. And look what happened. And I want you to imagine being them.

Imagine you're standing at that tile of Jesus and at the cross and you're like, get rid of that guy, crucify him. And then, a few weeks later you're standing in Jerusalem and Peter's preaching and Peter is saying, this Jesus is the son of God and you crucified him and they're like, oh my goodness, we did.

[26 : 59] And then you come to Acts 6 and they're like, I did that and he forgave me and I'm safe forever.

That's the power of the cross. Now, very few of us start from as low as that in one level. We're not in the crowd shouting crucify Jesus but we're all starting from the same place of being under the problem of sin and Jesus is calling us to forgive us, to heal us and that's so liberating and so amazing.

But alongside that astonishing theology, there's always an outstanding example and it's really important that we do recognise this that here Jesus is setting us an example that shapes our lives as Christians and, you know, it's just reminding us that, you know, our theology stands on God's willingness to forgive and then our discipleship must be shaped by our readiness to forgive one another because as we go on together as Christians, as we go on in a church family together, we're all always stuffing up side by side and to love one another and to be together and to go on together always is going to involve forgiveness but forgiveness is not easy.

Forgiveness is a bit like becoming a parent. It sounds amazing and it is amazing but it's way harder than you expect it to be and that's what forgiveness is like. It takes a huge amount of courage and strength and commitment and that applies to forgiving other people and it applies to forgiving yourself.

It's not easy. But Jesus always promises to give us the strength that we need to forgive. So often in the world around us we'll see a mindset where something goes wrong you get hurt and we want our responses, we want God or whatever, we want God to avenge us or to vindicate us or to prefer us because we're the ones who've been hurt, they're the ones who've done wrong and it's like, Lord, avenge me and vindicate me and prefer me over them and yet Jesus says that's not how I work.

[29 : 07] Jesus' response is saying, look, you forgive them just like I did and for Jesus that took unbelievable strength.

For us, we will need his strength in order to do that but it's a far, far, far better way to live. It's so different from the merciless unforgiveness that we see in the world around us.

How is it that Jesus could do it? Well, this is the very last thing I'm going to say. He could do it because of one word that I've not mentioned, that word. Jesus could forgive like this because he knew who his father is.

He knew he was loved by God, cherished by God, that he was always the beloved son of the father and that identity, that security in his relationship with his father meant actually forgiving the people around him.

He can do that and that's the key for us. If we want to forgive one another, if we want to forgive ourselves, if we want lives shaped by forgiveness, then we need to constantly remind ourselves that God is calling us to be his children and to rest in that security forever.

[30 : 22] Three little words from Jesus, Father, forgive them. They are reminding us what an incredible savior he is. Let's pray. Thank you.