

Jesus' Forgiveness

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[0:00] If you would turn back in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23. And this morning we're going to be focusing together just on verse 34.

! Luke 23 verse 34. And Jesus said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Well I don't know if anyone might have seen or seen clips of the memorial service held in America a few weeks ago now for Charlie Kirk.

And the impactful moment when his wife stood up to speak. Her husband had just been gunned down in front of hundreds of spectators. Livestreamed to the world. Graphic videos circulated of the assassination in minutes.

Now left a single mother with two children under the age of five. What would she say? And this is what she said. My husband Charlie, he wanted to save young men just like the one who took his life.

[1:04] That young man. Another young man on the cross. Our Savior said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. That man, I forgive him.

I forgive him because it was what Christ did and is what Charlie would do. The answer to hate is not hate. The answer we know from the gospel is love. And always love.

Love for our enemies and love for those who persecute us. And so impactful was that there are a few weeks later. Some of you may know Tim Allen, the American actor.

Maybe most famous. This is my level. The voice of Buzz Lightyear in Toy Story. He wrote on X. He said, that moment deeply affected me. I've struggled for over 60 years to forgive the man who killed my dad.

I will say those words now as I type. I forgive the man who killed my father. Peace be with you all. His dad had been killed by a drunk driver in 1964.

[2:04] It's powerful, isn't it? Forgiveness. And Erica Kirk referenced the very words we're thinking about together today. What Jesus said on the cross. Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

They don't know what they are doing. Amazing words from the Lord. As he is being crucified, Father forgive them. And we're going to see this morning that Jesus came to bring forgiveness.

That was his mission. He came so that we might be forgiven. That we might have our sins forgiven. That we might be brought into a right relationship with God. And know eternal life and joy and hope.

Do you know the Lord's forgiveness this morning? Have your sins been forgiven? Jesus has made it possible. Jesus has done it all.

And all we have to do is receive what he wants to give to us. As we look at this verse this morning. I just want to look under three headings with you. Forgiveness first of all is Jesus' mission.

[3 : 06] Secondly to see that forgiveness is Jesus' delight. And thirdly that forgiveness is Jesus' invitation. So it's his mission. It's his delight.

And it's his invitation. First of all. It's forgiveness is Jesus' mission. I think the words of Jesus would be remarkable at any time.

But they're even more remarkable in the context from which they come. He is in the process of being crucified. Crucified men did not speak like Jesus spoke.

Oh, they raged. Oh, they raged. Oh, they raged. And they swore. They spat. And they cursed. But never did one speak like the Lord Jesus.

He said, Father, forgive them. Jesus has been led out of the city of Jerusalem to a hill on the outskirts. He's had large nails driven through his hands and his feet.

[4 : 02] And he's been lifted up on a wooden cross to die. On either side of him, two criminals. One on his right hand, one on his left. These rebels, these were no ordinary thieves or criminals.

I suppose we would probably call them terrorists now. They were people who hated Roman rule of Israel and so sought to use violence to overthrow that. They would carry out violent attacks, terror attacks.

And Jesus is here, as Isaiah prophesied, he's numbered with the transgressors. The sinless Savior dies numbered with the transgressors. But from the cross comes a word, and it's a word of peace, and it's a word of reconciliation.

Father, forgive them. As Jesus speaks, God speaks, and what God says is, Father, forgive them. That's incredible, isn't it?

Even in these moments of his agony and of his suffering, Jesus is crying out for our forgiveness. And there's a certain logic to that, because why has Jesus gone to the cross in the first place?

[5 : 08] He's gone to the cross to save us. He's gone to the cross to deal with sin. He's gone to the cross to atone for our sins so we could be forgiven and have peace with God. And that was only possible through his sacrifice as our substitute upon the cross of Calvary.

The cross was the means whereby God's perfect justice and holiness and his divine mercy could come together. Sin gets what it deserves, but God can freely forgive sinners like us.

Sin gets what it deserves, but God can freely forgive us. And, you know, the Bible presents to us that our greatest need is for our sin problem to be dealt with. It's a barrier between us and God.

It creates multiple issues. It creates issues on our side. It makes us rebel against God. It makes us want the things that are bad for us and not want things that are good for us.

We don't desire God or the things of God by nature. But it also creates an issue on God's side. You know, in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned, God put them out of the Garden.

[6 : 09] And God put the barrier there, the flaming sword and the cherubim that prevented them coming back in. It's an offense against the holiness of God.

But what you see in the Bible is that God, though he's the wounded party, the offended party, he comes and he makes reconciliation possible. I'm so thankful that God's so unlike us.

Have you ever been in that situation where you've fallen out with someone and say, well, I'm not making the first move. They can come to me and they can apologize to me. And then maybe we'll make up.

And then maybe we'll be able to sort it out. But after what they've done, I am not going to them. God doesn't do that. God is the offended party, the wounded party. And yet he comes.

And he comes to make reconciliation. And he comes to repair this relationship and to bring forgiveness. Remember that time early in Jesus' ministry when he's in a house and the house is full of people.

[7:11] And then this paralyzed man arrives. His friends carry him there. They can't get into the house. They climb up onto the roof and they dig through the roof and they lower him down in front of Jesus.

Remember the first thing Jesus says to him. Son, your sins are forgiven. And that, of course, offended many of the people present.

The religious people present didn't like that. They knew that only God could forgive sin. And they're right. But they didn't understand that it was God right in front of them who was forgiving this man's sin.

This is the offer before us this morning. Jesus is the one who offers forgiveness. Jesus is the one who has the authority to forgive sin.

To forgive my sin and your sin. And we're called to come and have our sin dealt with. Come and to have peace with our creator. Father, Jesus came to deal with sin.

[8:09] And the only way was through the cross. Forgiveness is free. But it certainly wasn't cheap. Because it cost the Son of God his life.

Someone once said to me, when you're offered something for free, nothing in life is free. It's only free if someone else has paid for it. That's true, isn't it? There's no such thing as a freebie. It's only free because someone else has paid.

It's the same with our forgiveness. It's free to you and to me. But it's free because Jesus has paid it all. Jesus' mission was to save sinners.

To reconcile us to God. And he does that through the cross. But secondly, forgiveness is Jesus' delight. Jesus doesn't just show us that it's his mission.

But it's his delight. Now, what do I mean by that? We can have a mission. We can have a task to accomplish that we do. But we don't take any pleasure in it.

[9:07] Maybe husbands. You've been given a list of things to do by the missus. And maybe we do it grudgingly and resentfully sometimes. We get it done. But we might not take much delight in doing it.

Maybe your boss at work has given you jobs to do. And you've done it. But you've not been particularly happy about doing it. And you've done the job that's asked of you. But you've not delighted in it. Jesus does more than just accomplish the mission.

Jesus delights in it. He delights to bring forgiveness. He delights to receive sinners. He delights to meet with us. How often that voice goes through our heads, doesn't it?

Have you ever had that feeling where you've fallen into temptation and you're thinking, Oh, he must be fed up of me. He must be fed up of me with the same things over and over again.

He must be thinking, what, you again? That's not what his heart's like. He delights to meet with sinners. He delights to restore us. He delights to forgive.

[10:11] Jesus doesn't just offer forgiveness. He delights to forgive. In the Old Testament, there's a prophet called Micah. In Micah chapter 7, he describes God like this.

He says, Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy.

There's that word. He delights to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

And, you know, I think we see a wee hint towards that in our verse this morning. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Where do we see that it's not just Jesus' mission, but it's his delight?

Well, I think we get a hint of that in the fact that what Jesus says here is not a pronouncement. What Jesus says here is a prayer, isn't it? It's not a pronouncement. It's a prayer.

[11:13] What do I mean by that? Well, go back to the story we referenced, the paralyzed man lowered through the ceiling. Jesus there makes a pronouncement. He says, son, your sins are forgiven.

It's a statement. It's done. Your sins are forgiven. But that's not what he says here. What he says here is a prayer. He's praying to the Father. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

They don't know what they're doing. He's talking to his heavenly Father, and he's asking that the Father would forgive them. It's a prayer for divine grace, divine pardon, divine forgiveness.

And isn't that in and of itself quite a moving thing? Jesus prays for the very ones who were crucifying him. In many ways, the greatest sin, act of wickedness the world had ever seen, God came into the world in the flesh, and we killed him.

We nailed him to our cross. Our creator came into the world, and we sought to murder him. And then even in these moments, you see a glimpse of the heart of God that we read about at the very start.

[12:30] Compassion, grace, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. And you see that here in Jesus at the cross. He shows this compassion. He's praying for others. His focus is still on us and our need of forgiveness.

And even as he himself suffers, he's praying for other people. He shows his grace in doing that. He's slow to anger. He doesn't call down fire from heaven.

Remember how James and John once said that to him. Well, we call down fire from heaven and destroy them. And Jesus said, no, no. He doesn't call down fire from heaven. He calls down forgiveness from heaven.

And he abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness. I think Jesus' words here show us his very heart.

What does his heart desire even as he's being crucified? His heart desires sinners to be saved. Sinners to find forgiveness in him. Notice who he's praying for here.

[13:37] Who is it that's the object of his prayer? In a sense, it's not his disciples. He's prayed for them already in John chapter 17. He's prayed for them already.

Here he's praying for those who are crucifying him. Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. He's praying for those who hated him. For those who crucified him. For those who rejected him.

And yet he prays for them. And he prays that they would find forgiveness. He shows us God's very heart. But here's the big question.

Do you think this prayer of Jesus was answered? Father, forgive them. Was that prayer answered? Well, you can debate it around a cup of tea afterwards, I'm sure.

But I think it was. Where was it answered? Well, I think there's two incidences right in the passage itself.

[14:37] After he says that, we read of two people at least, it would seem, coming to faith. There's the thief on the cross. One thief says, and so simple, isn't it?

He just says to Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. It's such a simple thing to say, and yet there's so much in that. Because do you notice what it implies?

He just says Jesus, but he says, when you come into your kingdom. Who has a kingdom? A king. Just by saying that, he's saying to Jesus, you are the king.

The kingdom is your kingdom. You are the king that God appointed. Somehow he has seen it. The Holy Spirit has opened his eyes and opened his heart. And he said, and Jesus says to him, truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

It's so simple. Remember me. That's all he asks. And Jesus says, you're going to close your eyes in death today. But you're going to open them in glory.

[15:38] You're going to close your eyes on the cross and you're going to open your eyes to see my face in paradise. He received that forgiveness that Jesus wanted to bring. We read about the Roman centurion.

After Jesus died, he praised God saying, certainly this man was innocent. Jesus' conduct on the cross impacted him, spoke to him.

You've got the thief on the cross. You've got the centurion. And then a mere couple of months later came a day called Pentecost where 3,000 people were converted and added to the church.

And this prayer, I believe, found an overwhelming answer. Jesus prayed that people would find forgiveness. And even as he died, some did. And 3,000 added to the church a short while later.

Jesus came to bring forgiveness. Jesus delights to bring forgiveness. And that way, in many ways, there's still joy in the heart of Jesus, even as he suffered.

[16:46] Because of seeing the thief on the cross. Delighting to be. Today you will be with me in paradise. But thirdly and finally, forgiveness is Jesus' invitation.

What Jesus says here is something very personal. It's what he offers to each of us this morning. Or at least, for those of us who know the Lord already, it's a reminder of what he's bought for us.

There's opposite mistakes we can make when it comes to the forgiveness of Jesus. Sometimes we can think of ourselves as too bad. I wonder, have you ever thought that? Have you ever thought that way?

Somehow beyond the grace of Jesus to forgive? There's no such thing. There's no such thing. Jesus makes very clear. He says that whoever comes to him, he will in no wise cast out.

He turns nobody away. As we're about to sing at the end, we're going to sing, His mercy is more. Our sins may be great and they may be heinous, but no one is beyond the grace of Jesus to forgive.

[18:04] There's no one who's too bad. And I know there's that voice in our heads that says, Ah, you don't understand though. You don't know what I've done. You don't know the things that go on in my heart.

Horrible things, unforgivable things. Well, Jesus says, He might not. But Jesus says, I do. He knows.

He knows our hearts. He knows everything about us. There's nothing hidden from the eyes of Jesus. He sees it all. And still he says that he calls to us in love and to come to him and find forgiveness. Or that voice that comes and says, How can there be forgiveness for me when I can't even forgive myself?

Well, Jesus says, But I forgive you. And if I forgive you, you've got no business refusing to forgive yourself. You are forgiven. Ah, but we might think, But there's things that no one knows.

Hidden things. Hidden thoughts. No one sees. And if people knew what I was really like, they would have nothing to do with me. And sometimes there's that danger, isn't there, where we can be scared in church sometimes to be known.

[19:17] Sometimes we try and put our best front on, our best appearances, our best faces. And yet, I think in many ways, church is to be the place where we can be fully known. And all our faults and all our failings.

With all our struggles. And yet, no love and grace and community. Jesus says, I know everything about you. Nothing shocks me. Nothing surprises me.

I knew you before you were born. I know the sins you're going to commit, even though you haven't committed them yet. I know everything about you, and I will not turn you away. There is forgiveness for you. But you're stuck, you see.

Maybe not just in past sin, but present sin. And you think, I don't know if I can break free from this anytime soon. And Jesus says, you're exactly the kind of person I've come to help.

Jesus says, I came into this world to save sinners. And maybe you say, but the burden that I carry is so heavy. And Jesus says to you, then give it to me, and let me carry it for you.

[20:25] It may be too much for us to bear, but it's not too much for Jesus. No one is beyond the ability of Jesus to forgive.

Jesus has paid it all. Jesus has done it all. Jesus has made it possible. And all we have to do is come to him and ask and receive what he has done. Will you do that? Have you done that?

One mistake that we said, we can think we're too bad. The other mistake that we can make is to think ourselves too good. We can think ourselves somehow above this talk of forgiveness, thinking, well, I'm a good person.

What on earth is the minister on about today? Forgiveness. That's for other people. Well, that's not for me. I'm a good person. That surely doesn't apply to me.

Well, in some ways, that's the most dangerous heart condition to be in. You can see in the gospels how Jesus spoke to the religious leaders of his time and he said to them, truly, I tell you, I think how shocking this would have been, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

[21:37] For John came to show you the way of righteousness and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe.

Sometimes what keeps us away from Jesus is not so much the bad things that we may have done, but our sense of self-righteousness that we don't realize we need it.

You know, when it comes to going to the doctor, it's only when we realize we're sick we go to the doctor. And if we don't realize that sickness is there, we don't go to get help. It's the same with us spiritually.

Sometimes we fool ourselves, we compare ourselves to the wrong standard, we compare ourselves to other people and we think, well, I'm doing okay compared to them. Or we might falsely think we're better than others.

But if we don't have our trust in Jesus, in some ways, we'll be worse off if we know the gospel and have heard the gospel and have been to church and sat under the gospel and never put our trust in the Lord.

[22 : 43] Remember how Jesus said to the people of Capernaum, he said, if the people of Tyre and Sidon had seen the miracles that were done in you, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. You know, one of the reasons God gave us the Ten Commandments, the law, was not this list of rules that we have to slavishly keep.

It's in some ways, it's to show us that we can't keep them and to drive us to Jesus to find his forgiveness. We've all taken the Lord's name in vain. We've all lied. We've all lusted.

We've all coveted. We've all hated. We've all got angry and wanted to lash out. We've all failed to honor our father and mother as we should. If we try and measure ourselves against God's standard, it's there to show us we fall short and we need a savior.

And if we could be good enough to get to heaven on our own, there would have been no need for Jesus to come. But there was a need. And come he did, and he has done it all, and all we have to do is put our trust in him.

So if he's not yet your savior this morning, maybe you are one of those for whom he prays. Father, forgive them.

[23 : 58] Father, forgive them. Maybe you're one he's prayed for for a long time. And maybe today is the day for you to finally come and finally ask and finally receive.

And if he is our savior, may he impress it on all of our hearts this morning. What a grace that we have received. As Jesus said, whoever has been forgiven much, loves much.

And when we realize how God has dealt with us and the forgiveness that he's shown us, the response is love for Jesus Christ. how much we have been forgiven.

And the same reception that we have had, you will get. He turns nobody away. Father, forgive them. May, by God's grace, each of us come to know that forgiveness for ourselves.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Amen. Let's bow our heads and pray together.