

42-23-01-Last Word #1-Forgiveness

Cross, forgiveness, understanding, prayer, Lent

Luke 23:34

On the Cross, Jesus both purchased forgiveness and proclaimed it.

INTRODUCTION: (Gen 22:1-14 as the Scripture Reading)

–Those who think Jesus never preached from a wooden pulpit forget His sermon preached from Peter’s boat... *and* they forget Calvary.

–The Cross was Christ’s final pulpit where He preached seven last messages in the last 6 hours of His earthly life. They are called “***The Seven Words of the Cross.***” These will be our focus this Lenten season.

–The 1st “last word” is *forgiveness*, from Luke 23:34a, *Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* **HOM.idea.**

–His 1st little sermonette from the Cross was actually a prayer, *and...*

I. This Prayer Revealed the *Father’s Mercy*

A. It showed *Christ’s confidence* in the Father during His suffering:

1. Quiet-times of solitude are *conducive for prayer* (Jesus enjoyed them, too. BUT this showed us we can pray anytime, anywhere.)
2. When tempted to question His Father’s will, He trusted Him.
[Bad examples from *earthly fathers* have led some to doubt God the Father.]
3. Christ’s faith was stretched to the limit on the Cross, but He’d already committed Himself in Gethsemane to “drink this cup”....

B. This prayer showed *His confidence* that forgiveness was part of the Father’s will (He knew exactly what His suffering was for, so He knew not only that His prayer was heard, but that it would be answered.)

C. It showed *His confidence* in Scripture. [Jesus surely saw the parallels in the story of Abraham’s test of faith, when Isaac, his *25 y/o son*, let his *100 y/o father*, with a knife in his hand, tie him up on a sacrificial wood pile!]

1. Abraham had heard, “your only son...whom you love” – Jesus had heard, “a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love...’”
2. Abraham had heard, “Father?...but where is the lamb?” – Jesus had heard, “Behold the Lamb of God who take away the sin of the world.”
3. Isaac carried the wood for the offering – Jesus carried His cross.
4. After a 3-day journey, Abraham told his servants, “We will worship and... come back to you” – Jesus told us He would rise in 3 days – Luke 9:22. And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

TRANS: Jesus *knew* He was the sacrifice that the angel told Abraham God would provide. He *knew why* He was fastened to a wooden cross, why the knife that Isaac missed would soon pierce His side, and why, as He told the Jews in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” Yes, Abraham was *glad* for Isaac to stay alive! But another Son, the Father’s own, would die and rise 3 days later. Jesus *knew* His Father’s merciful plan to bring *forgiveness* to lost humanity, so He prayed with *confidence*, “Father, forgive them...” **On the Cross, Jesus both purchased forgiveness and proclaimed it.**

II. This Prayer Revealed the Son’s Ministry

- A. Jesus prayed it as He hung between *earth & heaven* (symbolizing His ministry as Heaven’s Intercessor for earthly humanity)–
1. We need an Intercessor [In StarTrek’s “Insurrection” episode, Picard chides a rebel, Golna, for his plan to destroy his own people, he responds, “*Is that the way a Federation officer pleads for his life?*” Picard replies, “*I’m not pleading for my life; I’m pleading for yours. You can still go home, Golna.*”] (On the Cross, Jesus was pleading: You can still go Home!)
 2. Our need for an Intercessor draws us to the Cross– John 12:32, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”
- B. By the Incarnation, God exemplified intercessory prayer (putting into *practice as a human* what He *preaches as God!*)
- C. The Cross began a new phase of Christ’s intercessory ministry:
1. He now intercedes in Heaven– Heb 7:25-26a, Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to **intercede** for them. **Such a high priest meets our need...**
 2. Jesus still intercedes on Earth through us, the Church, His Body:
 - a. We are earthly temples where He continues carrying His Cross.
 - b. Our response to the Cross is to be like His: interceding for our persecutors– Mat 5:44-45a, ...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

TRANS: *Human nature* tends to hold on to hurts, until they turn into painful bitterness. *Divine nature* calls us to forgive, and Jesus showed us how to do it while the hurting was still happening! He also added a phrase to this prayer that is both powerful and perplexing: “*for they do not know what they are doing.*” This is so significant, because it shows that...

III. This Prayer Revealed the Spirit’s Mission (“they do not know”)

- A. Ignorance is dangerous, even lethal– Prov 10:21 (NKJV), The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of wisdom.
- B. The lost at the foot of the Cross lacked the knowledge of salvation:
1. The soldiers were *utilitarians, pragmatists* [The Romans were experts in *know-how*.]: “*What matters is getting the job done.*”
 2. The crowds were *hedonists, relativists* [“*Hosanna!*” today, “*Crucify!*” tomorrow]: “*If it feels right, do it! Truth changes with the times.*”
 3. The priests were *power brokers, the elite*: “*It’s right, if it fits our agenda, our values. Don’t bother us with the facts.*”
- C. Christ’s prayer created an environment of hope for lost humanity (the *pragmatists, the hedonists, the power brokers of every age*):
1. He knew their perspectives had been distorted by selfishness...
 2. Only a demonstration of undeserved love could reach the lost [The centurion, who *expected cursing*, heard instead a prayer *forgiving him*, and it *changed his heart– Mark 15:39*, And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”]

CONCLUSION:

–[European singer, Henriette Sontag, was slandered by a rival, who even disrupted her concerts. Years later, when this rival went blind, the singer befriended her and saw to her needs. When people asked why such kindness to one who had been so cruel, she said, “*She didn’t realize what she was doing.*”] It’s not *easy* to forgive. *Forgiveness* wasn’t *easy* for Jesus to *purchase*. But He showed us how to do it by practicing what He preached, [Poem by an *unknown author*:

“Father, forgive them,” Jesus prayed,	O heart of Christ ! O truth divine,
“They do they know not what,” he said;	Was ever love so great as thine?
With heart compassionate he pled	Though doomed to crucifixion’s throes;
For foes intent his blood to shed.	Thou didst forgive thy bitter foes.

His back with stinging scourge was torn,	O Christ, our Advocate in heaven,
His head was pierced with crown of thorn,	Pray thou our sins may be forgiven;
A cross his foes prepared for him,	Impart to us thy gentleness,
And yet he pled with God for them!	And give us grace our foes to bless.]

–God help us to follow our Lord in being always ready to pray that prayer, and to pray it truly, whenever we are hurt by others: “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*”