

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM”

Luke 23:26-43 (Key Verse: 23:34a)

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

In this chapter, we will discover that Jesus' suffering was not a tragedy, but rather God's and humanity's triumph. God showed us how strong, how dependable, and how important He is in saving us from our sin through the suffering of Christ. But Christ's suffering seems terrible and futile to those who do not realize that humanity needs forgiveness of sin. Nonetheless, most people on a human level practice forgiveness in order to get along. However, many of us who believe in God likewise worry about God forgiving our transgressions. We understand that when we pass away, we shall be faced with our Creator, who will judge us based on our actions, how we treated others, and how we interacted with Him. Furthermore, our eternal relationship with God depends on God forgiving us of our sins throughout this life because we are all flawed. May God allow us to hear Jesus' request in our hearts. May it transform us when we do. Amen!

Let's look at verse 26; Jesus begins to carry his cross-beam from the Roman praetorium where he'd been flogged, to his execution site, Golgotha (or "The Skull"), outside the walls. Jesus was physically weak from the beatings and torture he had received before to his crucifixion, so they grabbed a man named Simon of Cyrene who was traveling through the region and placed the cross on him to carry behind Jesus. Cyrene was a prosperous port city in modern-day Libya, North Africa. There were Jewish immigrants living there. It's possible that Simon was a devout Gentile who had picked up knowledge from the Jewish immigrants and was now on a mission to find God. He was made to bear the cross by the soldiers, who treated him like a slave. This guy carried the cross of salvation without realizing that it was his own. This man reminds me of someone who received an invitation to church and was unable to decline it. It was really unjust. However, as a result of this encounter, he and his family converted to Christianity. Simon demonstrates what it means to be a good Christian by denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus (9:23).

Let's read verse 27: A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus' enemies condemned him but he still had a large popular following who could only weep as they saw him surrounded by ruthless Roman soldiers who'd crush any attempts to rescue him. Jesus turns to them and says, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children." He means that their sorrow should not be for him but for the impending judgment that will come upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants. He was predicting the future destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus' prediction came true. During the Roman siege, all food was cut off, and people resorted to eating their own children. At that time women wished they had never even borne children. Read verse 30. The suffering would be so intense that people would ask the mountains and hills to fall on them to annihilate them quickly. Jesus is quoting the prophecy of Hosea 10:8 and applying it to the future destruction of Jerusalem. It also describes the time when he will come again (Rev6:16).

Then, what should we weep for? We should weep for the spiritual blindness and rejection of God's grace, symbolized by the cross. Earlier, Luke tells us that Jesus had wept over Jerusalem, seeing its horrible future (19:41–44). Jesus knew God would do this to them because they were rejecting God's Messiah. What should we learn from Jesus' words to these women? Rejecting Jesus seems to be no big deal. But that's not true. There's a future reality coming: those who reject Jesus one day will experience the full fury of God's wrath. Read verse 31. Jesus' final saying isn't a familiar one: "For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" The comparison between green wood that's difficult to burn, and dry wood that will support a blazing fire suggests that if God didn't spare innocent Jesus, who is like a green tree, full of grace and goodness, suffers so much, how much more severe would the fate of guilty Jerusalem be? And how much more will the

sinners, who are like a dry tree, fit for the fire of judgement suffer in hell. Therefore, Jesus challenged them to consider their own hearts and motives because women's tears may not necessarily indicate genuine faith or repentance but rather feeling pity on him.

Let's look at verse 32-33: Jesus was executed by being nailed to a cross, a common Roman method of execution for criminals. The very purpose of crucifixion was utter humiliation for the condemned. Among the Jews, nakedness, particularly nakedness in public, was considered exceedingly shameful. Nevertheless, nowhere are we told that Jesus was naked on the cross. He suffered and died with criminals as a fulfilment of Isaiah 53:12, which prophesied that he would be "numbered with the transgressors." It wasn't enough for them to crucify Jesus; they also put him in between two criminals, to make him look as guilty and shameful as possible. Additionally, Isaiah 53:4-5 speaks of the suffering servant who would bear the sins of many and be pierced for our transgressions, indicating the purpose of Jesus' suffering and death. His suffering and death with criminals demonstrate His identification with humanity's sin and brokenness. People seem to be happy and free, but underneath, so many are suffering from deep shame and guilt. It all started when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and hid themselves. Only Jesus who was crucified in our places can take away our deeply rooted shame and guilt. When we believe in him, we may suffer many things in this life, but in the end, the Bible says we'll never be put to shame, because Jesus took it away for us.

Let's all read the key verse 34a: Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**" Jesus is speaking from the cross; and even in this moment of pain and anguish. Jesus looked down from the cross upon a scene that must have been distressing to Him. The Roman soldiers were gambling for His clothing. The religious leaders were mocking Him, and the crowd was blaspheming Him. Even in His agony, Jesus' concern was for the forgiveness of those who counted themselves among His enemies. He asked the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who had mocked Him, spit on Him, beat Him, yanked out His beard, whipped Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and nailed Him to the cross. Jesus asked forgiveness for the angry mob that had mocked Him and called for His crucifixion. He was crucified between the two thieves, and as he hung upon the cross, and while insulted and abused by all sorts of men, and put to the greatest pain and torture.

Jesus prayed, "**Father, forgive them,**" because He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy: "He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). In Arabic, he addressed God as "my Father," but he called him "his Father." He spoke to God as such, not as a man, for in that role he had no father, but as God, the only begotten Son of God, a divine creature. Using this title, he addresses God in the persona of a man, partly to affirm his faith in their relationship and to assure himself that his prayers will be answered, and partly to serve as an example for believers by addressing God as "our Father" and asking for forgiveness—a request that is exclusive to God.

From the cross, Jesus interceded for sinners. Today, risen and glorified, Jesus remains the one mediator between God and mankind. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them," because He was putting into practice the principle He had taught in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43–44). Jesus, the persecuted, prayed for His persecutors.

For they know not what they do meaning, in crucifying him, which was the case of many of them, and of their rulers; they did not know that Jesus was the Messiah, nor the prophecies concerning him, nor the evil they were committing in putting him to death. Not that their ignorance excused their sin; nor was it without sin; nor does Christ use it as a plea for pardon. They were still accountable for Jesus's crucifixion. But while these people were well aware that they were crucifying an innocent man, they were unaware that by doing so, they were calling down the harshest judgments from God on both themselves and their nation. The very creator of their lives has been crucified by them. Jesus's prayer shows that he cares for people and their ignorance. Jesus prayer reveals his compassion over them and their ignorance. The forces of darkness that make life so difficult are simply expressions of our

collective ignorance of God's eternal Presence and Love. So it is with the forces crucifying Jesus: They are not evil, they are ignorant. **"They do not know what they are doing."** Even on the best of days, it can be challenging to cling to this spiritual truth; therefore, Jesus' tender affirmation of it at this most trying and agonizing moment is a true manifestation of God's love.

In praying "Father, forgive them," Jesus revealed His infinite mercy; He still loved them and would forgive them if only they would humble themselves and repent. It is important to note that Jesus' prayer, "Father, forgive them," does not imply that everyone has received unconditional forgiveness without repentance and faith. It does mean that Jesus was willing to forgive them, God's grace and presence was there for them to forgive. Their actions no matter how terrible would not be held against them if they came in repentance before God. The words "Father, forgive them" show the merciful heart of God. This act of forgiveness exemplifies God's grace and love for humanity, as Romans 5:8 states, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Moreover, "Father, forgive them" means that only at the cross of Jesus is the forgiveness of our sins guaranteed. I believe many of us stand here today because Jesus' prayer "Father, forgive them" was answered in our lives.

Forgiveness was extended to everyone who would ever believe in Jesus on the cross. Even the intentional sins we do are covered by the payment made by Jesus for our ignorance. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them," and when we are born again, we too become the answer to his plea. How can we refuse to forgive people who have harmed us if Jesus pardons those who commit egregious sins? We need to understand this if we are all sincere disciples, that is, students and learners of the Spirit of Jesus! Jesus commands us to follow him in forgiving those who wrong us, including our adversaries and persecutors. Actually, the person who is forgiving benefits more from forgiveness than the one who committed the offense. If you don't forgive, you'll become bitter, and like acid, bitterness corrodes its container. Only God takes retribution; we must extend forgiveness. Forgiveness, peace, and healing are free gifts from God to people who trust in him. These are seen as offerings from God, meant not only for the individuals who directly receive them but also as sources of joy for others who witness these acts or experiences. So, in essence, these gifts are not just personal but also communal, uplifting not only the recipients but also those around them who witness the transformative power of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing. Amen!

Let us now see the effectiveness and power of Jesus' prayer. There was a strange individual present at the scene of Jesus' crucifixion. Beside Jesus, he was one of the criminals. It's one of the most beautiful parts of today's passage which demonstrates the power and effectiveness of Jesus prayer. Read verse 40-43. As he witnessed what was happening this condemned man heard Jesus' prayer to forgive his enemies. Surprisingly, his spiritual eyes began to open. When he heard his fellow criminal insulting Jesus, he rebuked him and stood on Jesus' side. These criminals on either side of Him were also condemned to die, but their responses differed significantly. One of the criminals crucified with Jesus confessed his wrongdoing and recognized Jesus' innocence, he expressed his faith by asking Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. In response, Jesus assured the repentant criminal of his place in paradise, promising him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." This promise signifies the immediate reception of eternal life and fellowship with Christ for those who repent and believe in him. Despite the thief's past sins and horrible things he did, his genuine repentance led to immediate acceptance and assurance of eternal life with Jesus. Jesus' words emphasize that salvation is not earned through good works or personal righteousness. Instead, it comes through faith in Jesus Christ. We need to honestly believe and trust by faith in God's forgiveness of our sins. This is the sure fool proof and guaranteed grace of God for all of us. I pray that we may genuinely repent and believe. Amen!

When I was a young, developing Christian, I believed that I had grasped the concept of forgiveness since Christ had already forgiven me and still did, up until I had a falling out with one of my closest friends. I was quite close to him, and occasionally people would mistake our names. We used to

encourage and push one another to lead virtuous lives. One of the biggest sacrifices we used to make before classes each day was getting up at five o'clock in the morning to get to campus and read the Bible and discuss together. It has occasionally really tested me, especially in the winter when it's so cold in Lesotho. Despite my repeated attempts to tell him to cancel, he was driven to do so since I could always find him on campus. It was me, making excuses all the time. For him, it was quite simple because he studied in the morning, but for me, it was difficult because I used to study till midnight and found it difficult to get three hours of sleep every day.

Because we were taking different courses during our studies, we got estranged from one another. He had to make new friends, and I had to do the same. Still, we were communicating and stayed close. When we started to disagree on other issues due to the influence of new friends, we started to bother each other. I was taken aback when he started to doubt other biblical doctrines and consider ideas that are not supported by the Bible. The thing that truly makes my heart race is when he treats me badly because of his new friends. I felt like the worst guy alive. I've wanted to break up with this friend for a long time because it wasn't working, but I'm afraid of what people will think because of how well-known our friendship was. I occasionally ignore the phone calls he keeps making to me. He has repeatedly denied me the opportunity to demonstrate him his errors, and we will continue to dispute until we find no solution. It was very hard for me to forgive him. How foolish I was. Since I believed that he had done all of these things on purpose.

There were occasions when I was upset with him for the entire day. I needed time to recover and reach out to him again, even after his attempts at apology. That's when I realized that forgiving someone you don't know well is easy, but forgiving someone you know well is really difficult. Matthew 6:12, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," sprang to mind. However, I tried to justify my error by arguing that it is his responsibility to seek for forgiveness, ignore it, and embrace enthusiasm in its place. Through all of these trials and tribulations that have shaped and assisted my spiritual development, I have come to understand that forgiveness and healing come naturally to those who practice prayer. Because the only way I could be in a position to forgive my friend was to ignore all he had done to me and start spending more time in prayer, both for him and for myself. That way, all of the bad thoughts would vanish and things would revert to as they had been. So please pray with me to learn Jesus heart through this situation, for while I was God's enemy, Jesus prayed, "Father forgive Tsibela, for he does not know what he is doing." Amen

In conclusion, this passage emphasize the profound message of forgiveness demonstrated by Jesus even in the face of immense suffering and injustice. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, forsaken, condemned and deserving God's judgement, Christ died for us. Moreover, "Father, forgive them" means that only at the cross of Jesus is the forgiveness of our sins guaranteed. We too become the answer to his plea when we sincerely repent and believe in God through Jesus Christ. This was God's purpose and plan to reconcile fallen mankind through offering his begotten son to pay the price for us all. It also highlights the transformative power of forgiveness, illustrating how Jesus's act of forgiveness extends to all humanity, regardless of the severity of their actions. Additionally, this passage encourages us to reflect on our own capacity to forgive others, recognizing that forgiveness is a fundamental aspect of Christian faith and a pathway to healing and reconciliation. Ultimately, this passage inspires to embody the spirit of forgiveness in our own lives, following the example set by Jesus on the cross. Amen!