

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 23:32-43

Reading: Matthew 27:32-44

Parallel Passages: Matthew 27:32-44, Mark 15:22-32 and John 19:17-27

Sermon #103

December 20, 2020

“Father Forgive Them”

The trial is over, Jesus has been scourged and survived. Simon was forced to carry the beam of the cross as the procession made its way from the Praetorium through Jerusalem to Golgotha or Calvary. Now having arrived at Calvary need to observe in this passage there are 3 crosses of crucifixion and on the center cross the rightful King Jesus will die between 2 criminals. I want you to take notice of 2 contrasts Luke and the other Gospels present. The first, is the contrast between the crucified Jesus and the people responsible for His crucifixion. The Jewish leaders claimed to be righteous before God and the Romans claimed to be just, but the kangaroo courts of the Jews and Romans knowingly convicted an innocent man and then tortured and mocked and ridiculed Jesus, these acts reveal their sinful, hateful and yes, evil hearts. In contrast Jesus does not respond by having them struck dead or asking God the Father to make them suffer for their sin, but Jesus asks the Father to forgive them.

The 2nd contrast is between the 2 criminals who are crucified on either side of Jesus. These criminals represent the 2 different responses to Jesus. One criminal responds by rejecting Jesus and mocks Him. This criminal is like the other mockers; the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers and most of the people in the world. They will suffer for eternity. The 2nd criminal's response provides us with a picture of the blessing of the gospel's call. He responds to Jesus in humility that comes from seeing his own sinfulness and Jesus' purity. He repents and looks to Jesus in faith that he will be granted entrance into God's kingdom. The result of his

faith and Jesus' promise is this repentant man would be in paradise in the presence of the Lord that very day. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior we come into His presence, we are indwelt by His Spirit, we are reconciled back to the Father and heaven is guaranteed.

A **Key Truth** to lock onto this morning is, *Jesus the innocent Lamb of God prayed for His enemies to be forgiven and God forgave.* What does this mean for us? We were enemies of God and Jesus has prayed for our forgiveness and it has been granted for 2 reasons; first because Jesus atoned for all sins on the cross and second, by His grace He instills in us saving faith. Further, as those saved by grace, we are called to emulate Jesus and pray for our enemies and for the enemies of God. We are to pray they will come to know Jesus and be forgiven.

So, as we prepare to study the Word of God, let me pray for us and those who need Jesus.

THE FATHER'S WRATH AND FORGIVENESS (v. 32-34)

As we begin in Luke chapter 23, verses 32 to 34, here immediately, Luke introduces the two men who were being led away with Jesus to be crucified. He does this as a way to cause us to anticipate something. Luke wants us to look to the contrast between these two and this why I talked about the 2 contrasts as I gave the backdrop of our study.

Reading beginning at verse 32, “Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with *Jesus*.³³ And when they came to the place that is called *The Skull or Golgotha*, there they crucified *Jesus*, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.³⁴ And *Jesus* said, ‘**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**’” In 3 short verses, Luke shows us that the Romans and the Jews

crucified Jesus. Two criminals and Jesus were marched to the historic spot, Golgotha, “the place of the skull”. The beginning contrast is between Jesus the innocent and the two criminals. All three will meet the same fate, all three will be put to death by crucifixion. All three will die a death of horrific torture.

Next, I want us to see that Jesus’ response is so different from the response of all the others. No one would show Jesus the least bit of mercy or kindness. In fact, all they did was to mock Him and beat Him. Jesus, on the other hand calls out to His Father and makes a request from the cross, “**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**” I want us to stop and think about this request for a minute. Jesus asks that God would forgive the Jews who lied and manipulated and relentlessly sought His death and the Roman soldiers who beat Him, mocked Him and crucified Him, and He does this while hanging on the cross dying.

A few questions that are raised here, were these Jews, politicians and Romans ignorant of who Jesus is and what they were doing? If they had not known what they were doing, why, then, was Jesus asking God to forgive them? If they were ignorant of their actions would they still be guilty? After all, the Roman soldiers were just doing what Roman soldiers did. What were they guilty of? God made this clear through His apostle Paul, ¹⁸“**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**” ¹⁹“**For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.**” ²⁰“**For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**” ²¹“**For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**” (Romans 1:18-21) They are guilty because they chose the world

instead of God, they are guilty because they chose to ignore God. They were guilty of choosing ignorance. Jesus was attested to them by God. He taught and healed the sick, He raised the dead and forgave sin and they refused to believe. They chose to not know who they were crucifying. They chose to believe Jesus was crazy. That is why they mocked Him as a king and by their actions God would hold them accountable. Jesus had taught on this very concept earlier in Luke chapter 12, for Jesus is Master of the universe, so certainly He is Master of those involved in His crucifixion. Jesus taught, ⁴⁷ “that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” (Luke 12:47-48) Whether they knew their Master’s will or did not know they stood guilty before God, but Jesus intercedes and asks, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Even though they chose ignorance, Jesus asks that they be forgiven.

So, the point I want to make here is that even with the severe beating and mistreatment Jesus received by the Jews and the Romans, He still loved them and was concerned about their judgment or as in His parable, the beating they would receive would be severe to light. The Scriptures are clear; all sin, whether great or small, whether intentional or by ignorance, all sin separates one from God and every person is due His wrath. So, Jesus out of concern for their very souls asks, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

As God, Jesus lived a human life obeying His every command found in Scripture. He commanded, ²⁷ “to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27-28) Jesus lived what He commanded, perfectly. So, my beloved, in this

time of great turmoil we are living in, before we start pointing our fingers at these people who were responsible for Christ's death, or people sinning against God today, we must look at ourselves and our sin. They sinned by choosing ignorance. What about us? Could Jesus rightly say about us, Father forgive them they know exactly what they are doing? Is knowing something is sin and doing it anyway worse than not knowing? What is the result of all sin? Unrepentant sin separates one from God.

Luke also wants his readers to understand that everything taking place was the fulfillment of O.T. prophecy. Not just Isaiah 53 which is often referred to but also, King David in his Psalm 22, really the whole Psalm, but let me read just a portion beginning in verse 14, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— ¹⁷ I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." (Psalm 22:14-18) Almost 1000 years before Christ's birth David wrote this Psalm that portrays the crucifixion of Jesus. It is so accurate, even to the point of the soldiers casting lots for His tunic. One might rightly ask, what is important about knowing the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' tunic? It means the Lord was hung on the cross nearly naked because this was another way in which to humiliate Him. However, even in humiliation, God is working. It had been predicted from before time and God revealed many of the details to Isaiah, David and other writers of the O.T. God shows us there is a significance concerning this. Before sin entered into the world, the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were innocent before the fall.

Reading from Genesis chapter 2, God tells us, “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:25)

For the Israelite, to be stripped of clothing signified gross indignity and humiliation of their human identity. In every way, Jesus became sin for us. Even to the point of identifying with Adam and Eve and the original sin. His sacrifice went back to the very beginning and washed away even the sin of Adam and Eve. His death reaches back to those in the O.T., to those who abused Him and crucified Him, and to all who God’s calls in the future; for you and me and our children and grandchildren and their children and on and on. All God’s people have been saved because of the death of Christ.

JESUS SACRIFICES HIMSELF FOR FORGIVENESS (v. 35-39)

Four times in verses 35 to 39 the word “save” occurs. Reading beginning at verse 35, “And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’”³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine³⁷ and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” Those who are scoffing, mocking and railing are the ones Jesus prays for. Jesus will not save Himself. It was not that He could not save Himself, Jesus had the power to do so. It was for their sakes and our sake that He did not save Himself.

Again, Luke is writing theological history. He reports that the rulers scoffed at Jesus. Scoffed means “to turn up one’s nose,” hence “to despise” or “to deride.” This Greek word is rare in New Testament writings, so Luke uses it to key us in on

something. Returning to Psalm 22, ⁷“All who see me **mock** me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; *they say*, ⁸‘He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’” (Psalm 22:7-8) Luke uses the Greek equivalent to what is translated in Psalm 22 as “**mocked**” or in verse 35 of his gospel account the word “**scoffed**” to clue us in on the fact that even the scoffing and mocking of the rulers was in God’s foreordained plan. Luke takes his reader back to Psalm 22 and shows them that this Psalm is all about Jesus.

To the religious leaders, Romans and the soldiers, Jesus was a hoax and a buffoon. They humiliated and beat Him. They insulted Him and made fun of Him. What Pilate meant for ridicule, in God’s providence, really ended up speaking the truth that remains forever. Historically, in Roman executions, the victim’s crime was written on a placard and placed either around his neck or nailed to the upright beam above his head. Since Jesus was not condemned to death for any crime, the plaque read, as Luke tells us in verse 38, “**This is the King of the Jews**”. In John’s gospel he reveals that it was Pilate who commanded the plaque read, “**This is the King of the Jews**”. Pilate wanted to get back at the Jewish leadership for putting him in a very awkward position and the plaque served this purpose. The Jews did not like it at all and went to Pilate to have him change the sign. Reading from John chapter 19 beginning at verse 19, “**Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’**” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in **Aramaic**, *the common language in Judah*, in **Latin** *the language of the Roman empire*, and in **Greek** *the international trade language*. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, “The King of the Jews,” but rather, “This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’” (John 19:19-22)

God's plan for salvation would not be changed even by the horrified Jewish leaders who had been called to serve God, but failed miserably.

FEAR GOD AND RECEIVE FORGIVENESS (v. 40-43)

Understand that in Luke's amazing Gospel we see the 2nd contrast between the 2 criminals. Reading at verse 40, "But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?'⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.'⁴² And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'⁴³ And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" Luke quickly gives us the contrast of these two thieves. The first thief was mocking Jesus right along with everyone else. He joined the Jews, the Romans, Pilate, Herod, and the people in mocking Christ who is both Man and God. But Luke does not address what went on prior to verses 40 to 43. I want you to see something with me, namely, both thieves were mocking Jesus when the day began. The elders and scribes stood mocking Jesus saying,⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him."⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, "I am the Son of God."'⁴⁴ And **the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.**" (Matthew 27:42-44)

Mark's gospel account adds a few more details in chapter 15 beginning at verse 27,²⁷ "with *Jesus* they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.*²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!'³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself.³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may

see and believe.’ **Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.**” * *Some manuscripts include verse 28.* At some point while they hung on the cross, God answered Jesus’ prayer, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** The Father heard our Lord’s prayer and immediately opened the heart of the one thief and he believed. What a picture of sovereign grace! Salvation is not of works. Both criminals were wailing and mocking and then one was visited by God and was converted.

EVIDENCES OF REPENTANCE (v.40-43)

We have studied the doctrine of repentance in the past. It is a turning away from sin and turning to God. We have looked at the fact that repentance is a change of the mind about sin. What was once alluring and tempting is no longer a problem because we now rely on the power of God the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.

Again, I call us to verses 40-43. Here, hanging on a cross next to Jesus is an example of one who repents. Let’s examine what it looks like. I will share 7 evidences that the one thief has repented and has been changed.

1. His concern for others found in verse 40, as he tells the other criminal, **“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”**
2. He fully acknowledges his sin in verse 41, **“we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.”**
3. He confesses Jesus’ innocence, **“but this man has done nothing wrong.”**
4. He has faith in Jesus to save him. We know this by what he says in verse 42, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**
5. He prayed to Jesus for his soul, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

6. He shows humility and dependence upon Jesus when he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
7. He recognized that Jesus was in fact King, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

How did this thief on the cross know all this and was able to say it in a few simple straight forward words? My answer is God showed him the truth and opened his heart to believe and he believed.

In this account we also see another amazing truth; Jesus’ will is to save sinners. This criminal who hung next to Christ had earlier insulted and mocked Jesus and yet, by God’s amazing grace now he had become a believer, a follower of the truth King and Christ. We know this man was sincere because Jesus who is God and therefore all knowing, responds to this man saying, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Notice Jesus does not say that this man that he would be with Him in the last day or at the end of time or at the final judgment, but his Lord and our Lord says, you will be in paradise with me TODAY! Jesus is the God of the living and not the dead. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all others who went to sleep in the Lord. Everyone here who has lost a loved one who was a believer, know without a doubt, they are with Jesus. When they closed their eyes and breathed their last breath here on earth, they opened their eyes and saw Jesus Christ. Beloved, when our turn comes, we do not need to fear death because when we close our eyes we will, a split second later, open them in the presence of Jesus our Lord!

JESUS, KING OVER THE REPENTENT AND NONREPENTENT (v. 34)

Finally, Jesus is King and Lord even over His enemies. God the Father always answers Jesus’ prayers. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know

not what they do.” We now fast forward to Peter in Acts chapter 2 and his sermon at Pentecost. Thousands of people were hearing the gospel preached each in their own language and their hearts were melted and they asked what they should do. ³⁸ “Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:38) I think many there that day were also there on the day Pilate asked the crowd what they would have him do with Jesus and they said to Pilate, ²² “Let him be crucified!” ... ²³ they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!” ... again, they shouted ²⁵ “His blood be on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:22-23, 25) Jesus prayed for His enemies that day saying, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”**

Jesus not only prayed for people, in general, but even for the wicked priests who turned Him over to Pilate and had Him beaten and killed. Where do we see this? Look with at Acts chapter 6, verse 7, **“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”** Jesus prayed to the Father for the Roman soldiers that abused Him and crucified Him and the Father answered. In Matthew’s account we read, ⁵⁴ **“When the centurion and those who were with him, 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!’”** (Matthew 27:54) I hope you are seeing, with me, just how intently Jesus was to save those who were His enemies. The writer of Hebrews put Jesus’ determination into words, ²⁵ **“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”** (Hebrews 7:25) Jesus loves all sinners and calls them to repent and those who God has given ears to hear respond. Jesus prayed for His enemies and God forgave them because

Jesus died the death that atoned for all sin for all time and by this God forgives.

Jesus commanded, ²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

(Luke 6:27-28) My beloved the question before you this day, “If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, what are you going to do concerning those who are your enemies, those who are the enemies of God and the world which is opposed to God?

May we emulate our Lord and pray for the lost, even those who are our enemies and show them love, grace and mercy without compromising the Word of God. Amen!