

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon July 25, 2021
Luke 23: 34 "Father, Forgive Them"

24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus. 27 And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. 28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' 30 Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' 31 For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" 32 There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. 33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots. 35 And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God." 36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself." 38 And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS 39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." 40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." 43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." 44 Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' " Having said this, He breathed His last. 47 So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" 48 And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. 49 But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

I. Introduction

- a. Commenting on today's text, John Calvin wrote, "By this expression Christ gave evidence that he was that mild and gentle lamb, which was to be led out to be sacrificed, as Isaiah the prophet had foretold, (53:7.) For not only does he abstain from revenge, but pleads with God the Father for the salvation of those by whom he is most cruelly tormented. It would have been a great matter not to think of *rendering evil for evil*, (1 Pet. 3:9;) as Peter, when he exhorts us to patience by the example of Christ, says that he did not render curses for curses, and did not revenge the injuries done to him, but was fully satisfied with having

God for his avenger, (1 Pet. 2:23.) But this is a far higher and more excellent virtue, to pray that God would *forgive* his enemies.”¹

- b. Luke 23:34: “Father, Forgive Them”
 - 1. The Setting: v33 “there they crucified Him”
 - 2. Jesus prays to His Father in Heaven
 - 3. Jesus asks His Father to Forgive
 - 4. Jesus tenderly acknowledges their ignorance of their evil
 - 5. Questions to know, love and obey God
- II. The Setting: v33 “there they crucified Him”
- a. 33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.
 - b. About crucifixion: “Once the victim had arrived at the place of execution, executioners fixed him or her and the crossbeam to a tree or wooden post. Pseudo Manetho (third century ad) describes how crucifixion must have looked: “Punished on their tortured [bodies], they see the stake (i.e., cross) as their fate. In the bitterest of torment, they have been fastened with nails, [to become] evil banquets for birds and terrible scraps for dogs” (*Apotelesmatica* 4.198f; Greek text in Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 9). This brief description indicates that crucified persons were in a state of torture, that they were attached to their crossbeam and perhaps the wooden post or tree by nails, and that their corpse often was left to the scavenger animals. Seneca describes a similar image: “Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain, dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumours on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long—drawn-out agony?” (Ep. 101; translation in Gummere, *Seneca*). This text indicates that death by crucifixion took a long time. The “ugly tumors” were probably the result of the precrucifixion tortures.”²
 - c. So, in the midst of this kind of physical torment, and also moving toward the moment when He would be left alone upon the cross, Jesus does not turn His focus upon His own suffering. As the perfect man, Jesus keeps His focus upon His Father and His Father’s mercy.
- III. Jesus prays to His Father in Heaven
- a. “Father”
 - b. In this relation of Son to Father, we see both the eternal Divine love of the Son toward the Father, and the perfect human submission of Jesus, the only unfallen One.

¹ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 300). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

² Fiensy, D. A. (2016). [Crucifixion](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

1. Andrew Murray “There are three great motives that urge us to humility. It becomes me as a creature, as a sinner, and as a saint.

1. The first we see in the heavenly hosts, in unfallen man, in Jesus as Son of Man.

2. The second appeals to us in our fallen state, and points out the only way through which we can return to our right place as creatures.

3. In the third we have the mystery of grace, which teaches us that, as we lose ourselves in the overwhelming greatness of redeeming love, humility becomes to us the consummation of everlasting blessedness and adoration.

4. In our ordinary religious teaching, the second aspect has been too exclusively put in the foreground, so that some have even gone to the extreme of saying that we must keep sinning if we are indeed to keep humble. Others again have thought that the strength of self-condemnation is the secret of humility. And the Christian life has suffered loss, where believers have not been distinctly guided to see that, even in our relation as creatures, **nothing is more natural and beautiful and blessed than to be nothing, that God may be all**; or where it has not been made clear **that it is not sin that humbles most, but grace**, and that it is the soul, led through its sinfulness **to be occupied with God** in His wonderful glory as God, as Creator and Redeemer, that will truly **take the lowest place** before Him.” (“Humility” by Andrew Murray)

c. So, here in the midst of His unmatched suffering, Christ remains fully human, unfallen, the perfect creature in His unbroken fellowship with His Heavenly Father, and in His continued occupation with His Father’s wonderful glory, and in His making Himself nothing, taking the lowest place.

1. Jn 5:19 “Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”

IV. Jesus asks His Father to Forgive His tormentors

a. “Forgive Them”

b. “Them”: some dispute, but should be taken as a prayer on behalf of all those participating in His torment, Jewish and Gentile, leaders and crowds, soldiers and scolding bystanders.

1. Calvin “Of this moderation Luke now presents an instance in our Leader and Master; for though he might have denounced perdition against his persecutors, he not only abstained from cursing, but even prayed for their welfare.”³

c. Forgive: ἀφίημι “to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit”

³ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 301). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

1. Same word as Matthew 18:27 “21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.”
 2. Henry “The petition: *Father, forgive them*. One would think that he should have prayed, “Father, consume them; the Lord look upon it, and requite it.” The sin they were now guilty of might justly have been made unpardonable, and justly might they have been excepted by name out of the act of indemnity. No, these are particularly *prayed for*. Now he made intercession for transgressors, as was foretold (Isa. 53:12), and it is to be added to his prayer (Jn. 17), to complete the specimen he gave of his intercession within the veil: that for saints, this for sinners.”⁴
- d. So, Jesus is asking His Father in heaven to release His tormentors from their great sin-debt. Their sinful actions bring righteous judgment and punishment upon their lives, and instead, Jesus asks His Father in Heaven to forgive their guilt and bring them out from under their punishment.
1. Bock “Jesus thus intercedes for his enemies, portraying the very standard he sets for his disciples ... (Luke 6:29, 35; 1 Pet. 2:19–23) He does not curse his opponents.... Thinking of others, Jesus still desires that they change their thinking (as some do in the Book of Acts) and that God not hold their act against them. Jesus’ love is evident even from the cross.”⁵
 2. Lk 6:27,28 “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”
 3. Mt 5:44,45 “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
- V. Jesus tenderly acknowledges their ignorance of their evil

⁴ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (pp. 1907–1908). Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁵ Bock, D. L. (1996). [*Luke: 9:51–24:53*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1850). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- a. “For they do not know what they do”
- b. Christ, in His humility before His Father, relying upon His Father, is able to pray for His enemies, seeking their best good (for what is greater than God’s forgiveness?), and even observing their evil behavior with a kindly eye, highlighting their spiritual blindness, instead of their culpability.
- c. Henry “The plea: *For they know not what they do; for, if they had known, they would not have crucified him, 1 Co. 2:8. There was a veil upon his glory and upon their understandings; and how could they see through two veils? They wished his blood on them and their children: but, had they known what they did, they would have unwished it again. Note, [1.] The crucifiers of Christ know not what they do. They that speak ill of religion speak ill of that which they know not, and it is because they will not know it. [2.] There is a kind of ignorance that does in part excuse sin: ignorance through want of the means of knowledge or of a capacity to receive instruction, through the infelicities of education, or inadvertency. The crucifiers of Christ were kept in ignorance by their rulers, and had prejudices against him instilled into them, so that in what they did against Christ and his doctrine they thought they did God service, Jn. 16:2. Such as to be pitied and prayed for. This prayer of Christ was answered not long after, when many of those that had a hand in his death were converted by Peter’s preaching. This is written also for example to us. **First, We must in prayer call God Father, and come to him with reverence and confidence, as children to a father. Secondly, The great thing we must beg of God, both for ourselves and others, is the forgiveness of sins. Thirdly, We must pray for our enemies, and those that hate and persecute us, must extenuate their offences, and not aggravate them as we must our own (They know not what they do; peradventure it was an oversight); and we must be earnest with God in prayer for the forgiveness of their sins, their sins against us. This is Christ’s example to his own rule (Mt. 5:44, 45, Love your enemies); and it very much strengthens the rule, for, if Christ loved and prayed for such enemies, what enemies can we have that we are not obliged to love and pray for?**”⁶*

- 1. 1 Cor 2:7,8 “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

VI. Questions to know, love and obey God

- a. Luke 9:22-24 “saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” 23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily, and follow Me.** 24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”

⁶ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1908). Peabody: Hendrickson.

1. In what ways are you currently suffering persecution and mistreatment from others because you are living as a follower of Christ?
 2. How do you respond toward those who are persecuting and mistreating you because you are living as a follower of Christ?
 3. Is your first response to utter, “Father in Heaven”, fixing your soul upon God as your Creator and Redeemer, coming to Him as His beloved child?
- b. Do you respond like Jesus on the cross, with a heart of trust toward your Father in Heaven and compassion and tenderness and kindness toward your enemies? Do you think kindly upon the sad state of your enemies as you pray for them, seeking to think of them as you would have them think of you?
1. Calvin “But it ought to be observed that, when the whole world rises against us, and all unite in striving to crush us, the best remedy for overcoming temptation is, to recall to our remembrance the blindness of those who fight against God in our persons. For the result will be, that the conspiracy of many persons against us, when solitary and deserted, will not distress us beyond measure; as, on the other hand, daily experience shows how powerfully it acts in shaking weak persons, when they see themselves attacked by a great multitude. And, therefore, if we learn to raise our minds to God, it will be easy for us to look down, as it were, from above, and despise the ignorance of unbelievers; for whatever may be their strength and resources, still *they know not what they do.*”⁷
- c. How important is forgiveness to God? How important is restored relationship to God? To you?
1. Mt 5:23,24 “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”
 1. Do you prioritize seeking peace with the brethren so much that brokenness troubles you as Sunday approaches? Does brokenness in relationship with other Christians constantly trouble you and move you to pray/act toward reconciliation?
 2. Mk 11:25-26 “25 “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”
 1. Do you rightly prioritize even broken relationships with any other human being, Christian or not? “anything against anyone”

⁷ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 301). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

2. Do you see by **refusing** to forgive you can place yourself outside of God's forgiveness? Terrifying. (This is different than struggling with forgiveness.)
3. Mt 18:21-34 "21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."