

# Finding Forgiveness at the Execution: Luke 23:32-43

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to start in at verse 32, as we think about Jesus' death. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Jesus to be executed.

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, He saved others. Let him save himself if he's God's Messiah, the Chosen One.

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, If you're the King of the Jews, save yourself.

There was written a notice above him which read, This is the King of the Jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him.

[ 1 : 18 ] Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us. But the other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence?

We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus answered him, Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. Let's pray.

Father, these are familiar words. It's a familiar scene to us. We've sung about the death of the Lord Jesus.

We've read about it. And we pray that as we look at it afresh, that is what it will be. It will be fresh to us today.

[ 2 : 33 ] That this event in history would touch our lives today.

And would fill our hearts with joy. And would send us out motivated afresh. To live for you.

To serve you. To enjoy you. And to look forward with absolute assurance.

That we too will be in paradise. Father, help us now we ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Look at verse 34.

They're the most extraordinary words. Father, forgive them. This is why Jesus has come.

[ 3 : 43 ] This is the climax of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. In fact, this is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan. Just flick back a couple of chapters to chapter 18, verse 31.

As Jesus himself read the scriptures, the Old Testament, it became clear to him why he had come.

Verse 31. Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man, that's Jesus, will be fulfilled.

He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him. They will insult him. They will spit on him. They will flog him and kill him.

Back to chapter 23. And now as Jesus faces into the fulfillment of all that was promised, as Jesus now faces death, he prays, Father, forgive them.

[ 5 : 10 ] It's an incredible moment because, well, just picture the scene. Look at who Jesus is speaking to from the cross. Jesus is offering forgiveness to those who are killing him and mocking him.

Verse 35. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. These were the same people who, hours earlier, were vying for his blood.

If you look back at verse 20. Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, Crucify him!

Crucify him! But Jesus not only offers forgiveness to this bloodthirsty crowd. Look at verse 36. The soldiers also came up and mocked him. These were the same soldiers who just, hours before, had punched him, beaten him, and nailed him to the cross.

[ 6 : 19 ] Father, forgive them. Now, I don't know about you, but if I were Jesus, I would want revenge.

I'd be asking the Father to let the same things happen to them. After all, it's what they deserve. But not Jesus. He's not bitter.

He's not angry. Peter, one of the disciples, the one who had denied him, witnessed these events, and he later wrote about them and recorded them in his book, First Peter.

This is what he says. When they hurled their insults, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. But what's even more amazing, Jesus is speaking these words to us.

[ 7 : 28 ] Father, forgive them. Forgive me. Forgive you. You see, we all need forgiveness. We've all turned against God, blamed God, ignored God.

Like the disciples, as we saw, we betray him. We deny him. In fact, God takes our behavior towards one another personally.

God has made us. He owns us. We belong to him. And he loves us. So every time I hurt someone with my words or harm someone with my actions, it's not just the other person who is offended.

God takes personal offense because we belong to him. So every time we sin against another person, we are acting in defiance against God.

We are sinning against him. So we just don't need forgiveness from others. We all need to be forgiven by the Father.

[ 8 : 38 ] God takes to be forgiven. But how can I be forgiven? How can you be forgiven of all those private sins, the ones we keep locked up that no one knows about?

Or even the shameful ones that, well, people have seen and do know? Well, first, forgiveness is costly.

Look again where Jesus is when he offers forgiveness. Verse 33. When they came to the place called the skull, they crucified him there along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. He's offering, for Jesus is not offering forgiveness from the comfort of a seat by the pool.

Jesus is hanging from a cross. He's being executed. He is being tortured to death. Crucifixion was designed by the Romans to make people suffer.

[ 9 : 50 ] It could take days for people to die. You died slowly in agony and in pain. Listen to how one doctor describes what would have happened as someone was crucified.

As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. Air can be drawn into the lungs but it can't be exhaled.

Jesus fights to raise himself in order to get one short breath. Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as flesh is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against the timber.

The heart is now struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The lungs are making a frantic effort to grasp, to gasp in small gulps of air.

You see, the point is, forgiveness is not easy, it's costly. Tim Keller in his book *The Reason for God* illustrates the point very well.

[ 11 : 16 ] let me read to you. Imagine that someone borrows your car and as he backs it out of the driveway he strikes a gate, knocking it down along with part of a wall.

Your property insurance doesn't cover the gate and garden wall. What can you do? There are essentially two options. the first is to demand that he pay for the damages.

The second is to refuse to let him pay anything. There also may be middle-of-the-road solutions in which you both share the payment. Notice that in every option the cost of the damage must be borne by someone.

Either you or he absorbs the cost for the deed. but the debt does not somehow vanish into thin air. Forgiveness in this illustration means bearing the cost for his misdeed yourself. So let's just think about that for a moment.

[ 12 : 28 ] If that's your car how would you respond if someone is taking your car and crushed it? Well you can either take revenge that means you make them pay for what they did and they have to cover all the costs or you can forgive.

You see true forgiveness means that you refuse to make them pay and you bear the cost yourself. If it's revenge well they pay and they suffer.

If it's forgiveness forgiveness you pay and you suffer. You see forgiveness is never easy it's costly. If someone hurts you through the words they say you can take revenge and say hurtful words back to them.

You can make them suffer or you can forgive and refuse to say hurtful words back. You have to absorb the hurt.

You have to bear the suffering yourself. You see forgiveness is never easy it's costly and that's what's happening on the cross.

[ 13 : 49 ] Jesus is taking my sin your sin Jesus pays Jesus suffers rather than take revenge rather than pay back Jesus pays the debt Jesus offers forgiveness.

So first forgiveness is always costly. Second forgiveness means death. If you or I are to experience forgiveness then Jesus must die instead of us.

Look at what the people are saying to Jesus on the cross. Verse 35 the people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him.

They said he saved others let him save himself if he is God's Messiah the chosen one. The soldiers also came up and mocked him.

They offered him wine vinegar which was to kind of kill the pain and said well if you are the king of the Jews save yourself. well Jesus has a choice to make.

[ 15 : 02 ] Does he save himself or does he save you? He can't save both. He must choose. If Jesus chooses to save himself then you die.

If Jesus chooses to save you then he will die. the crowds the rulers the soldiers who are all watching and shouting at Jesus don't realize that if Jesus does save himself they could never be forgiven.

So Jesus chose to die for them. He chose to die for me and he chose to die for you. And we need to understand this no matter how familiar it may be that when Jesus was dying on the cross he was taking the sin of all these crowds all these soldiers all the insults and all the things that we have ever done he chose to die for them he suffered for you and for me but the real suffering isn't the physical suffering it wasn't just the beating and the nails and the crown of thorns it was the spiritual suffering that he was enduring he had to drink the cup just the night before as he was in the garden sweating drops of blood he cries out to the father take this cup from me the cup being the symbol of God's wrath and here and now on the cross he drinks that cup to its very last dregs he suffers hell for you and for me isn't that what Jesus was doing for Barabbas have a look back at verse 18 you know Barabbas as Jesus is put before the crowd verse 18 the whole crowd shouted away with this man release Barabbas to us Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder wanting to release Jesus Pilate appealed to them again but they kept shouting crucify him crucify him for the third time he spoke to them why what crime has this man committed I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty therefore I will have him punished and then release him but with loud shouts they intensely demanded that he be crucified and their shouts prevailed so Pilate decided to grant their demand he released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder the one they asked for and surrendered Jesus to their will that's where we stand Jesus has paid the price for all our hurts all our anger our selfish choices the revenge that we have set out on others the lies the greed Jesus chose to save us by dying for us taking this suffering taking that place exchanging places for us so that we can be forgiven so what are we going to do with this offer of forgiveness how do we experience this forgiveness daily in our lives well let's read verse 32 these two other men both criminals were also led out with him to be executed when they came to the place called the skull they crucified him there along with the criminals one on his right and the other on his left and as

[ 19 : 23 ] Jesus dies they engage in a conversation two criminals two responses look at how the first criminal responds to Jesus verse 39 one of the criminals who hung their hurled insults at him aren't you the messiah save yourself and us this guy is dying he's about to face God's judgment but all he can do is mock Jesus and insult Jesus if you're the Christ if you're God's saving king then save yourself and us you see for the criminal the only value Jesus has is that he might be able to

save him from this torturous death get us out of here Jesus well of course Jesus could save him he could send an army of angels but

Jesus wants him to see that he has come to save him from something far more serious God's wrath it's not that Jesus doesn't care about his physical pain but Jesus wants him to know eternal life you see we can be like the first criminal sometimes we treat Jesus like this that the only value that Jesus has is to help us when we're in trouble to give us something that we want help me get that job Jesus take away this suffering that I'm going through Jesus help me win my match Jesus help me find a partner Jesus but that's not how Jesus works Jesus is not a magic genie who grants everything we wish for Jesus is not there to meet our physical and material desires on our demand he comes to give us something greater forgiveness of sins and life with him how do you treat

Jesus look at the response of the second criminal verse 40 the other criminal rebuked him don't you fear God he said since you are under the same sentence we are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve but this man has done nothing wrong the criminal knows he is about to die but what's more troubling is he knows he will face God that's why he shouts out don't you fear God dying on the cross will mean separation from his friends and from his family but facing God without forgiveness would be something much much worse separation from God separation from his gifts suffering for all eternity he knows he is facing hell and knowing his situation he cries out to Jesus verse 42 and he said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom him he knows he knows Jesus is innocent and he knows he's guilty he's heard Jesus offer a forgiveness from the cross father forgive them and he has come to see that he needs to be forgiven too and he knows that Jesus is the only one who can deal with his sin and he comes with simple words Jesus remember me and Jesus response is quite incredible verse 43 Jesus answered him truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise to be in paradise is well it's to be in the new creation God's eternal kingdom it's this world that we live in made new this world made perfect a world without suffering or pain or death no funerals no hospitals a world without evil and sin a world full of joy and peace and happiness forever and forever and that day that criminal would be with Jesus and everyone who is forgiven by the father will be with Jesus in paradise that is our future that is our destiny with Jesus we will see him we will be with him and we will rule with him in the new heavens and the new earth into

[ 25 : 04 ] John are running tell you about and i know the ones i don't want you to know come before him listen to his words father forgive them listen to the promise with me in paradise know the joy of forgiveness live as free people know the joy know sins forgiven let's pray it's a familiar scene it's a stunning scene to see Jesus crucified executed tortured to listen and hear his words father forgive them father we confess that we have denied you betrayed you we have treated you like as we talked about a magic genie demanding our wants ignoring you when we have nothing to ask for father forgive forgive the times forgive the times where we have spoken out of turn where we have taken revenge with our words on other people where we have held them at distance refusing to forgive and wanting them to hurt and pay father forgive us father forgive us and may we know that fresh beginning the slate wiped clean as far as the east is from the west you remove our sins from us thank you that because we are forgiven we can look forward to paradise itself with Jesus forever and forever thank you in Jesus name amen we are going to sing we are going to sing about the cross but we want to celebrate the cross to see to listen and to know that we can be forgiven let's stand as we sing