

Luke Ch23v26-34 - Sayings On The Cross

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Preacher: Martin Parker

[0 : 00] So we're going to read from Luke chapter 23 starting at verse 26 down to verse 34.

Luke 23 starting at verse 26. As the soldiers led Jesus away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.

Weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.

Then they will say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, cover us. For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

[1 : 39] 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, 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.

I'm going to ask Martin to come up. Martin is a good friend, personal friend, and a friend to many of us here. So we welcome you. It's good to have Alwyn as well today.

So, over to you, Mr. Kingman. You might like to keep that passage open in front of you this morning as we look at this together.

It's good to be back with you again and a joy to be with you. But more than that, a privilege to open up God's Word and to share it with you this morning. People have long been fascinated with the last words of the rich and famous.

[2 : 50] Apparently, Elvis Presley's last words to the audience at his very final concert were, I hope I haven't bored you. Reflecting on his life's work, Leonardo da Vinci said, I have offended both God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.

It's hard to believe, isn't it, that those whose abilities were recognised by so many could be left at the end of their lives feeling as though they had achieved so little.

Well, the Gospels contain some of the last words of the Lord Jesus. But rather than being filled with remorse and regret and uncertainty, we find many of the last words of Jesus are filled with confidence, with purpose and with certainty.

Now, there are seven of these moments on the cross and the passage that we read this morning contains the first of these. It's a prayer and you'll find it in verse 34.

Jesus says, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. A plot to kill Jesus has been forming for some time.

[4 : 15] The Jewish religious leaders can't get rid of Jesus quickly enough. Jesus has been put on trial, falsely accused and condemned to death, even though he is not guilty of any crime.

But here is Jesus, and rather than longing for his own vindication, he is praying for the people responsible for his death.

Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. What we witness here is, first of all, the fulfilment of prophecy.

Much of the life of the Lord Jesus had been foretold and foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The prophets had spoken of the place and manner of his birth, but even more so, the Old Testament had spoken graphically about the nature of his death.

We sang earlier that song, Man of Sorrows, pointing us to Isaiah 53, where we read of one who was despised and rejected by man.

[5 : 38] One who took up our pain and bore our suffering. One who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

One who, we're told, was cut off from the land of the living. And at the very end of that chapter, Isaiah writes, he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. Now maybe at some point in your life, you have been numbered with the transgressors. A couple of your classmates have got up to mischief in the classroom.

The teacher arrives back and wants to know what has gone on. Of course your friends don't un-up. And what happens? Well, the whole class get into trouble. You're treated as though you have done something wrong, even though you have done nothing wrong.

That's what Isaiah is saying here about Jesus. He is numbered with the transgressors. Even though he has done nothing wrong, he's treated as though he were a criminal.

[6 : 55] He's completely innocent. And he's treated as though he were guilty. Here's how Luke recorded in the passage that we read.

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. And when they came to the place called the skull, they crucified him there along with the criminals.

One on his right and one on his left. You see, Jesus was numbered with the transgressors. Now, as the Gospels recount the trials of Jesus, it's pointed out over and over and over again that Jesus was innocent of any crimes.

You ever Pilate's wife pleading with him? Don't have anything to do with that innocent man. Pilate tells Jesus' accusers, you brought this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion.

I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for the charges against him and neither has Herod's. Pilate finally washes his hands in front of the crowd who continue to call for his crucifixion and declares, I am innocent of this man's blood.

[8 : 18] Pilate. Yet here Jesus is, numbered with the transgressors.

Now, anyone should be able to see that this is the greatest injustice. And yet it is the very reason that Jesus had come into the world.

to die in the place of sinners, to take the judgment that we deserved upon himself, to die in our place, to be numbered with the transgressors.

But if all that we can see is the injustice of the crucifixion, we have yet to understand the good news of the Christian message.

Because the good news is this very injustice. Jesus was numbered with the transgressors. Jesus took the place of sinners so that you and I could be forgiven for our sins.

[9 : 33] But Jesus is not only numbered with the transgressors. We see him interceding for the transgressors. The prophet Isaiah continues, for he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

Now, to intercede is to go between, to plead on another's behalf as a lawyer would argue his client's case before a judge. And isn't that exactly what Jesus is doing on the cross as he prays, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

He is interceding for the transgressors. In fact, Jesus' death is the very foundation on which this request can even be made.

Jesus can make this request because he is dying in the place of sinners. He's not asking God to ignore their sin. He's not asking God to turn his back on this injustice.

He's not asking God to pretend that this never happened. No, Jesus is interceding for the transgressors. He is pleading for the forgiveness of sinners.

[11 : 01] sinners. And he can make such a request because he is taking their place. He's taking the judgment that they deserve.

He's taking the judgment that you and I deserve. Now it's only when we grasp that that we understand the Christian message.

The apostle Paul would describe Jesus as the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. The apostle Paul had come to understand that the death of Jesus on the cross is the very death that he deserved.

He was the one who should be abandoned by God and rejected. Not Jesus. But the son of God loved him and gave himself for him.

Jesus is numbered with the transgressors and he makes intercession for the transgressors. You see these words of Jesus on the cross hold out the possibility of forgiveness.

[12 : 24] Now perhaps you have messed up so badly that you've asked yourself this question how could God possibly forgive this?

Maybe it's because of the gravity of the sin that you've committed. It is too big for God to forgive. Perhaps it's because of the frequency of your sins that you have committed.

There are simply too many for God to forgive. But these gracious words of Jesus on the cross surely point to the possibility of forgiveness.

No matter how big no matter how many after all what sin could be greater than putting to death the eternal son of God who had come in human form.

John MacArthur writes the sin they were guilty of was so unbelievably horrific that if these people had not actually heard him pray for their forgiveness they might have assumed that their sin was unforgivable.

[13 : 49] they might have assumed that their sin was unforgivable. After all what sin could be greater than this?

What the apostle Paul describes elsewhere as crucifying the Lord of glory. if there's a possibility that this sin can be forgiven then there is no sin too big there is no sin too many that the death of Jesus cannot pay for it and the forgiveness of God cannot cover it.

Now of course they do not know what they are doing. Jesus puts this sin of the crucifixion in the category of sins of ignorance.

He prays Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Now exactly who Jesus is referring to isn't very clear.

Does he mean the soldiers who have nailed him to the cross? Is he referring to the crowd who have called for his crucifixion? Is he talking about the Roman authorities who have sanctioned his death?

[15 : 15] Could he even mean the Jewish religious leaders who have plotted to kill him for some time? But the Apostle Paul seems to take the broadest and the most generous of those interpretations when he writes in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 8 none of the rulers of this age understood it.

For if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. If they had really understood who Jesus was none of the rulers would have sanctioned his death.

Not the Jewish religious leaders not the Roman authorities Pilate would not have handed him over to the crowd and the soldiers would not have nailed him to the cross none of them they would not have dared to plot the death of the creator of the world to seek to destroy the one who is immortal and eternal to pass judgment on the one who alone would pass judgment on every human being who ever lived.

If only they had understood who Jesus was they would not have dared to lay a finger on him. But they did not understand this was a sin of ignorance.

But sins of ignorance still make us guilty. That's clear from the fact that Jesus prays for their forgiveness.

[17 : 03] Forgiveness isn't needed when someone hasn't done wrong. It's their guilt that requires forgiveness. But you know that too if you've tried to plead your case with a guard who has pulled you over for speeding.

Do you know what speed you were doing? The guard asks. No, I thought I was doing the right speed. Didn't you see the 50 kilometre sign as you entered into the village?

Sorry officer, I didn't see the sign. The guard starts to take down your details. Your ignorance is not going to free you from your guilt. Your ignorance will not protect you from those three penalty points and that now, believe it or not, 160 euro fine.

But it's the same in all kinds of areas of life. Whether it's paying your income tax or not putting money in the parking meter, your ignorance does not free you from your guilt.

A fine still has to be paid, whether you knew you were breaking the law or not. You see, there's an expectation that you should know the law and obey it.

[18 : 16] If you're driving on the roads, there's an expectation that you know the rules of the road and that you obey them. It's your responsibility to know them.

You should know better and ignorance is no excuse. Now, the same is true here. Jesus has spent three years in public life, teaching to vast crowds, healing the sick, demonstrating his power over nature.

He has clearly identified himself as the promised Messiah. For anyone who wants to know the truth about Jesus, there has been more than enough evidence.

I didn't know just won't cut it. Ignorance is no excuse.

Now, perhaps there are some people here this morning who've had a very casual approach to Jesus. Jesus' identity is not something that you've really given that much thought to.

[19 : 27] And to be honest, you're quite content in your ignorance. And your hope is that perhaps your ignorance will save you. Sorry, officer, has perhaps worked for you before.

But it does not work, and it will not work with God. Sins of ignorance still make us guilty.

now, perhaps this prayer of Jesus still leaves you with some puzzling questions. How, after all, was Jesus' prayer answered?

And what exactly is Jesus praying for? After all, if Jesus is God, doesn't he have the authority to forgive sins?

Hasn't he declared other people to be forgiven? Like the lame man whose friends brought him to Jesus, or the woman who was caught in adultery?

[20 : 33] If Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, why is he praying to his heavenly father to forgive them? Now, the answer to Jesus' prayer is not by an indiscriminate pardon.

That's not what's happening at the cross. We might think it sounds like that. As though Jesus is granting a pardon to anyone who is involved in any way with his crucifixion.

It might appear that Jesus is throwing out pardons as freely as Donald Trump in the last week of his presidency. But that's not the case at all. In fact, Jesus has just warned of a coming judgment.

Jesus has told the mourning women that instead of weeping for him, they should weep for themselves and for their children. Indeed, the coming judgment will be so severe that mothers will wish that they had never had children.

And grown men in fear will long that the mountains would fall on them and cover them. this is no indiscriminate pardon where everyone escapes judgment.

[21 : 55] Instead, Jesus is doing the very thing that he had taught his followers to do. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 and verse 44.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. you. Jesus isn't like that long line of disgraced politicians who set standards for the average member of the public and then disregards those standards themselves.

No, Jesus lives out what he has taught. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Now, it is a difficult thing to pray for those who have hurt you.

It is not easy to wish good for someone who has caused you harm. And left to ourselves, we want just the opposite.

we wish for bad things to happen to the person who has hurt us. And rather than praying for them, we would call down curses from heaven if we could.

[23 : 14] God, but the Christian is to leave judgment with God. No matter how much someone has sinned against you, their sin is primarily against God.

However much someone has hurt you, first and foremost, they have disregarded the commands of God. However much someone has harmed you, they have rebelled against their loving creator.

And the offence against you, no matter how great it may be, that offence peels into insignificance in comparison to their offence against God.

If anyone has the right to demand justice, surely it is the man who is hanging here upon the cross. But here is Jesus, God the Son, come in the frailty of human flesh. And he speaks these words, if you like, not as the eternal Son of God, who has the authority to forgive, but as a human being like you and I, praying for those who are persecuting him, loving even his enemies.

[24 : 54] Here in the dying hours of Jesus' life, we see the perfect human being, what you and I are meant to be, praying that his Father in heaven would forgive those who have treated him so terribly.

Now I'm sure we've all heard it say, I'm sure we've repeated this, to err is human, to forgive divine. And maybe we say it thinking that gets us off the hook.

But as human beings made in the image of God, to be like God, here we see Jesus in his perfect humanity, praying for those who are persecuting them and praying for their forgiveness just as he has taught us to do.

You see, the answer to Jesus' prayer doesn't come by an indiscriminate pardon, but through the declaration of the gospel message.

the answer to Jesus' prayer begins, if you like, some weeks later. On the day of Pentecost, after Jesus has risen from the dead and returned to heaven, Peter stands up in front of a large crowd and he declares Jesus to be both Lord and Messiah.

[26 : 24] He tells the many Jews who have gathered for this festival that God had shown Jesus to be who he claimed to be by miracles, wonders, and signs, but that they, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by kneeling him to the cross.

He tells them of the resurrection, of Jesus' return to heaven, that he will come from heaven again to silence all of his enemies. And the crowds are moved in their hearts to ask, what shall we do? What will we do? And Peter's response couldn't be any clearer. Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

Here is the answer to Jesus' prayer, an answer that comes through the gospel message, that every person who turns from their sins and trusts only in Jesus, receives the forgiveness of sins.

Every sin, no matter how big, no matter how many. And why? Because the only truly innocent person who ever lived was numbered with the transgressors and made intercession for the transgressors.

[28 : 09] The sinless one took our place so that we who turn from our sins and trust in Jesus might know the forgiveness of God.

And it was for this very reason that Jesus had commissioned his first disciples to declare this good news, this message of forgiveness that comes through the cross of Jesus.

And it's for this very reason that God has placed his people in this very town. It is the very reason that this church exists.

It is the reason every gospel church exists. To bear witness to the forgiveness of sins that they have found only in Jesus.

And to declare that same promise of forgiveness to everyone who will turn from their sins no matter how big, no matter how many, and trust only in him.

[29 : 24] Let's pray together. Father, as we think of the one who hung on that cross, we know of all people he did not deserve to be there.

We know that only he was completely innocent of all sins. and yet we thank you that you have helped us to come to understand that he hangs there not for the wrongs that he has done, but for the wrongs that we have done.

Father, we know that it was we who deserved to face your judgment, that it was we who deserved to be cut off from the land of the living.

But, Father, we thank you that that judgment fell on Jesus instead of us. And we thank you that there is no sin too big, that there are no sins too many, that cannot be covered by the forgiveness that is found in Jesus, because he has paid it all.

And so, Father, we pray that you might remind us of the forgiveness that we have received, and that we might look to Jesus, not only as the one who forgives us of sin, but shows us what it means to love and to forgive those who have harmed us.

[30 : 54] And we ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. We're going to stand and sing a song together before Johnny comes to lead us around the Lord's table.