

Forgiven

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2020

Preacher: Rev Malcolm Maclean

[0 : 00] Well, we can turn back to the chapter we read, Luke 23, and read again verse 34. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

As I'm sure we all know, there are seven recorded sayings of Jesus from his time on the cross. And this one here is the first one. And I think the point of us being told about these particular sayings is that each of them is a window into what took place at the cross.

They enable us to look inside, just like a window does into a building.

If we want to, often if we want to see what's inside a house, we just look through the window. And if we want to see what was going on in Jesus on the cross, we need some windows.

[1 : 39] And the seven sayings are a set of them that help us understand to some extent what was happening at the cross.

No gospel records all the seven. Some of them record more than one, and others just describe the event and maybe have one of the saints.

Luke himself gives us one that's not mentioned elsewhere, or two that's not mentioned elsewhere. And that is the one we're going to think about.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And he also mentions the one that was said to the penitent criminal.

And verse 43, truly I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise. And if Luke hadn't been guided to tell us about them, we wouldn't have known about them.

[2 : 50] These two interesting sayings of Jesus. I want us to, maybe you may think this is rather discouraging.

I want us to think about eight things that come through this saying, but that will not take too long for any of them.

The first one is that this intercession by Jesus, when he prays on behalf of some individuals, this intercession is a fulfillment of prophecy.

In Isaiah 53, which has often been said, it looks as if it was written at the foot of the cross, because there the prophet is given a lot of insight into the sufferings of the Messiah.

There at the, he didn't know it would be at the cross, but he is describing the cross, and he goes into a lot of details about the suffering of the Messiah. And he says there, in verse 12 of Isaiah 53, that he would pour out his soul to death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

[4 : 19] So at the same time, Isaiah says, at the same time, as the Messiah will bear the sin of many, he will also make intercession for transgressors.

And here he is, at the onset of his time on the cross, which, humanly speaking, was relatively short, a few hours.

But here he is, and I'm sure Jesus was conscious of what the Old Testament said about him, and that when he would begin, as it were, to experience what it was like to bear the sin of many, that he would, at that same moment, be making intercession for transgressors.

And, that combination, of course, is very, um, striking, that the sufferer, because crucifixion was a terrible experience, and one would not normally expect a sufferer from crucifixion to be too concerned about other people.

But here we find that Jesus, he fulfilled this prophecy. And that in itself is a wonderful insight into the accuracy of God's word, isn't it?

[6 : 00] God's word expresses accuracy in lots of different ways. and we can see it sometimes in places that we wouldn't expect it.

And, one frequent way, way where, in which it expresses accuracy is timing. And Isaiah gave the timing when this prophecy would be fulfilled.

so that's the first point. Yes, the intercession was a fulfillment of prophecy. But the second one is the precision of his intercession.

who is he praying for? Well, some people give different answers to the, to the, to that question.

And, some people extend it as wide as they possibly can. one common suggestion is that he was praying here for the Jews who were deriding him at that particular moment.

[7 : 18] And that the answer to his prayer occurred on the day of Pentecost when Peter, as we know, reminded his audience that they had crucified the Son of God.

And, of course, if one wants to hold that view, then it's probably in a sense valid, but I don't think it fits in with the grammar of the verse.

The, all we have to look at is the plural pronouns in verses 33 and 34. it says there in verse 33, there they crucified him.

That's obviously the soldiers. And then we're told in verse 34, and Jesus said, Father, forgive them. And then in the next line, we're told, and they cast lots to divide his garments.

[8 : 39] So, it looks to me as if the normal rules of how you construct a sentence indicates that the people he prayed for were the soldiers.

There would normally be five soldiers. There would be the centurion, and there would be four others helping him.

And it's an amazing thing, isn't it, to think about. It would be an amazing thing for him to pray for the ones who were shouting at him, that is, the Jewish leaders, and so on.

But to actually pray for the ones who were crucifying him, gives another dimension to it altogether. So, I think he is praying specifically for the soldiers. These soldiers would be Gentiles, and they're mentioned in Psalm 22, and in Psalm 22, using Jewish descriptions of Gentiles, the psalmist calls them dogs.

[10 : 11] They were the ones that crucified him, but Psalm 22 doesn't say what would happen to the dogs. But Luke tells us, as I hopefully will see.

so there's great precision here, and Luke does tell us, doesn't it, at the start of his gospel, that he wrote things accurately.

I mean, sometimes a statement can be made in a general sense, and sometimes it can be made in a precise sense. And Luke here has been very precise.

Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. At the same time, we could say it's a very surprising intercession, isn't it?

I mean, these soldiers are guilty of a terrible sin. they alone, out of all the billions of humans who have ever lived, or who are going to live, they are the only ones who literally crucified the Son of God.

[11 : 35] mean, others participated in his condemnation, such as the priests and Jewish leaders who clamored for his execution, and Pilate, of course, vacillated, and in the end gave in to the voice of the mob, and got Jesus crucified.

But the ones who actually did it are these five soldiers. And Jesus does say they don't know what they're doing, but he's not suggesting that a sin of ignorance is allowable.

in the Jewish rituals, there was a sacrifice for sins of ignorance, and in a very literal sense, these individuals who are acting sinfully in ignorance have got their hands on the sacrifice.

But they were still guilty of a terrible sin, weren't they? Crucifying the Son of God. If they hadn't been forgiven, what would be their sentence?

it's surprising too, because at that particular moment, they are more interested in his clothes.

[13 : 34] I mean, they're not deaf. They can hear the words of Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

But their response, in verse 34, is to cast lots to divide his garments. In one sense, they probably did that to every individual they crucified.

But here they are fulfilling what Psalm 22 said the dogs would do. They divided his clothes.

And we know from the Gospel of John that his outer garment, they kept that separate because they didn't want to divide it. So it is surprising, isn't it, that Jesus would pray for individuals who, having just nailed him to the cross, would then start gambling at his feet.

So it is surprising. Connected to that, we could say there's the awareness of his intercession.

[15:04] I don't mean his awareness of what the soldiers were doing, but his awareness of what the one he was praying to would think of his intercession.

I mean, that's the secret to an intercession, isn't it? It's not enough just to make a plea. You have to know that the person you are approaching with the plea is willing to hear it.

Otherwise, there's no point in making it. And here's Jesus, and he doesn't say to the soldiers, I forgive you, although we can easily see that as part of his outlook.

But he says to his heavenly father, and when he says this, we should of course remember that he said about himself, he that has seen me has seen the father.

So at that particular moment, Jesus knew that his father, who had just observed these soldiers engaging in this action, Jesus knew that his father would want him to pray for the soldiers.

[16:42] And that gives us an amazing insight into the heart of God. Here was his beloved son, his eternal companion.

now come to the place where the father and the son had spoken about always, because their interest in the cross had no commencement.

It had always been in their heart. And now that they had arrived at the cross, and a real engagement is going to take place between the father and the son, when the father was to make him sin.

Yet at that time, as this very unusual and unprecedented experience was starting to occur, the first words of Jesus on the cross were the ones his father wanted to hear.

Father, forgive them. Jesus knew that. That's what his father wanted to hear.

[18:03] He had taught about the father, hadn't he? We know that from John 3 and 16, that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, and so on.

He had spoken about the father of the individual we call the prodigal son. But the parable's not about the son.

The parable's about the father, and how he responds to both his sons. and here's five prodigals.

And what should the master storyteller do who has spent his public ministry encouraging sinners to believe in the love of the father?

What should he do now? And the answer is, pray to the father who wants to hear such intercessions.

[19:17] So Jesus did. In addition to his awareness of his intercession, there's the eagerness of his intercession.

translation. The English translation is a bit flat, because the verb that's Jesus said, the verb's in the imperfect tense.

And as got taught in school, an imperfect tense is a continuous event in the past. Jesus didn't say this petition once.

He was praying this petition. He's repeating it. It gives us a real insight into his eagerness for this petition to be answered.

these soldiers, Jesus had wanted for them total pardon.

[20:41] And just as with anyone else who when they pray for something they want, they just don't say it once, but they say it again and again and again.

the savior there, he did that. Then there's the effectiveness of his intercession.

we can look at this in two ways. One way is to think about it rationally and any other one is to think about it just in what the Bible says about its effectiveness.

forgiveness. Rationally, just ask a simple question. Could Jesus pray a wrong petition?

question. Could Jesus ask for something that he knew he wouldn't get?

[21:54] Could Jesus make a prayer that his father would say, that's a wrong prayer? And of course the answer to that question is no.

Jesus knew what kind of prayer should be offered. And therefore we should expect it to be answered just merely from that kind of argument.

But when we look at what the scriptures actually say what took place, then we do see that his prayer was answered. Luke tells us some of the things that the soldiers did.

in verse 36 he tells us that they were mocking him. But we could say that up until then all they had heard was what he had said in his prayer about them.

But by the time we get down to verse 47 we're told what the centurion said. After all the events were over at the cross he gives his verdict and Luke points out and it's interesting to ask the question

how did Luke know this?

[23 : 27] Luke says the man praised God. How did Luke know it was a statement of praise?

Well someone must have told him it was a statement of praise because he says at the start of his gospel that he searched diligently. he doesn't say the man just said this.

He says the centurion praised God and came out with this comment certainly this man was innocent.

The soldiers the centurion may have seen Pilate say that earlier on he may have he certainly would have heard the the criminal when he was rebuking his fellow criminals say that this man has done nothing wrong when he heard that the centurion might have been a bit sceptical but by the end of the time of darkness he had changed his mind.

he had seen all the phenomena darkness at noonday and so on and he turns and publicly praises God and says that this man is innocent first innocent person he had crucified.

[25 : 26] If we turn to what Matthew says Matthew tells us even more in Matthew 27 verse verse 54 we're told when the centurion and those who were with him keeping watch over Jesus as he and the other four soldiers they saw the earthquake and what took place they were filled with awe and said truly this was the son of God remember they're Gentiles how do they know God has got a son where would that idea come to them from well they had heard the one on the center cross speak to

God and call him father and the logical deduction from that would be well he must be the son and we're told that they said this statement filled with all they had never had that experience of any other crucifixion they had performed but here they were at the foot of the cross of Jesus and they realized there as he was hanging mangled truly this was the son of God was his prayer answered of course it was answered do you think his father wouldn't answer this question this petition these five men went from darkness to light at the cross their spiritual experience mirrored what was actually happening around them and we can look through the window and see that salvation was going on in their hearts hearts even as they crucified and guarded and then watched the savior die we can add another argument to it and it's a fairly simple one how do we know that

Jesus said this prayer who was close enough to hear it well the criminals could have heard it but they didn't live to tell the story but the soldiers heard it and they would have told all that they heard and it may be the case that humanly speaking and God uses unusual witnesses it may be the case that the reason we know everything about the cross is because these soldiers passed it on but anyway what a wonderful effectiveness in his intercession two more thoughts really what was all this like for

Jesus what was his experience that's a big question of course and any answer we give is only scratching the surface but at Calvary he saw some of his people for the first time Isaiah says that when he would get there he would seize his seed some of them Luke tells us about some of them doesn't he in verse 26 Sir Simon of Cyrene I mean he's walking into the city to keep the Passover he's forced by the soldiers to carry the cross of

Jesus the real Passover lamb and literally he walks away from all the Jewish rituals but he didn't just walk away literally from them because him touching the cross etc.

[31 : 07] made him unclean clean but Simon we can work out from the rest of the New Testament became clean as a result of being involved with Jesus because Mark when he gives the account of Simon he points out he's the father of Alexander and Rufus and that means that the ones Mark was writing to knew who Alexander and Rufus were and it's generally recognized that initially the gospel of Mark was sent to the church in Rome and when we turn to the list of names at the end of the book of Romans Paul speaks about Rufus and his mother who was a mother to

Paul Simon came up to keep the Passover and found the Passover lamb then there's the soldiers Jesus hadn't seen them before what went through his mind as he watched them nail him to the cross they're going to be my people and it's not far away and then there's the criminal Jesus hadn't seen him before either humanly speaking but there at Calvary Jesus saw his own people for the first time what a comfort that must have been to him he's about to go into the darkness darkness but for who is he going into the darkness and it looks as if

God in his providence put samples of his people right beside him and as he went into the darkness he could see some of the ones he's gone into the darkness for and the ones he could see were not his disciples they had run away but his father placed there ones that would be of comfort to the savior as he provided their salvation and lastly there's our experience who are we like we're like them aren't we and one way or another perhaps we have heard about the cross many times sat

under it as it's been described and our minds were elsewhere like these soldiers more concerned about gambling for his clothes we can have other concerns in our minds when people are talking about the cross but still they believed what would they have done afterwards these soldiers well they would have remembered

Jesus they'd have told people about their unique experience of Jesus and eventually the day would come when they would go to heaven to be with Jesus they're just like us if we're Christians we don't place them in a category of their own they're in the category of Christians as with every other Christian they are giving thanks to God for sending Jesus to be the Savior and I suppose they would want us and with this we'll conclude I suppose they would want us to join them and say truly this was the Son of God and hopefully we will all be saying that may God bless these thoughts to us love you be who may be the