

Luke 23:26-38; Luke 6:27-36; Father, Forgive Them I. The Need for Forgiveness II. The Request for Forgiveness

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we begin a series on the 7 last sayings of Jesus on the cross. We will spend the next 7 weeks considering the 7 times that Jesus spoke on the cross before He offered up His Spirit to the Father. This series will bring us right up to Good Friday. Now when we think of forgiveness, we think of a sin that is known and confessed. But what about sins of ignorance? Let's say, for example, that a person's sin is committed without knowing the truth. Like a person who has been convinced that a baby in the womb is just a lump of cells. If a pregnant mother really and truly believes this lie- that their baby is not a human person- and thus that life can be ended- does that make their abortion any less of a sin? Or perhaps one closer to home- what if you are speeding in your car because you are not paying attention? Will the officer let you off simply because you were ignorant? Today we consider the first saying of Jesus on the cross from v. 34- Father, forgive them for they know not what they are do. With this theme: Jesus Christ asks for forgiveness to be extended to those who acted in ignorance.

I. The Need for Forgiveness

In our first point we will consider who it is that needs to be forgiven. When Jesus prays- Father forgive them- who is the "them" that Jesus refers to and why do they need to be forgiven? It is instructive to note as we start that Jesus is currently on the cross- He is hanging on a tree having been nailed to this wooden pole. But even in the midst of this suffering, pain and excruciating anguish- who is on His mind? He is not so consumed by this present trial that He thinks only of His escape- rather He prays! Father, Forgive them. Now there were various groups of people present- and all of them had committed various atrocities over the last day. There were the Scribes and the Pharisees- the Jewish rulers like the chief priests and Sanhedrin that had orchestrated these events out of jealousy. These men had rejected Christ and they were the instigators of this sham trial. These are the rulers of v. 35 who scoffed at Him saying-

He saved others, let him save Himself. We will do nothing to help Jesus- let Him save Himself! If He healed others- can't He heal himself? These we ignorant of Jesus true identity to be sure! Added to these religious rules, we have the common crowds. They had gathered for a spectacle- they were here for the show to see what would happen as v. 48 says. This is the group that has been whipped up in a frenzy- they were persuaded by the rulers to cry out for Jesus blood. Although not instigating the trial- they were swept up in the moment and participated in this rejection of Jesus. These too were ignorant of all that was truly going on. The next group is found in v. 36- these are the Roman soldiers who at Pilate's command have carried out the order to crucify Jesus. They add their mockery by saying – if you are the King of the Jews, Save Yourself! If you come down, we will honor you as King! These men may not have known a lot about Jesus- but they knew enough to ridicule Him concerning His identity as the King. We even have the criminals in v. 39- those two thieves that were hung on two crosses next to Jesus. These add their scorn by saying- Are you the Christ? Save yourself and save us! So there are plenty of people around Jesus who were even now- at this very point- sinning against Jesus by their rejection of Him and their words of abuse that they threw at Him. The common theme is clear- basically they were all saying- save yourself Jesus! Prove to us all who you are! You say that you are the Christ- that you are the King- then let's see it! When in actuality, the way in which Jesus will prove His identity is by not saving Himself! It would be in His choosing to remain on the cross- in His choosing to die for the sins of the people- it is in this choice that His identity as Christ the King is made clear! It is in His submitting to death that He in fact secures salvation for the lost! He refuses to save His own skin- refusing to give up and give in- in this obedience to the will of the Father He proves who He is and secures our deliverance! So who is the "them" that Jesus prays for? Surely all those present! But in addition, we can think of the entire Jewish nation! The people as a whole had not acknowledge Him! Although Jesus came to His own, his own did not receive Him as John 1 states. Who is Jesus praying for on the cross? His people- who have made themselves enemies of God! Those who hated Him, rejected Him and denied Him! Yes, they acted in

ignorance- but their ignorance does not lessen the horrendous nature of their sins! They are crucifying the Lord of Life! The one who came to save them! But we can include ourselves in this prayer as well- for it was our sin that made His death necessary! He is on the cross for us as well! We too need to be forgiven! And yes, sometimes we sin in ignorance as well. We don't always guard our tongues and our eyes. We fall because we are not paying attention. But ignorance of God's Word is not innocence! Any rejection, rebellion and ignorant breaking of God's Law is a sin! And all sin needs to be pardoned! In asking the Father to forgive them, Jesus is making it clear that they need to be forgiven! All mankind sins and falls short of the glory of God as Rom. 3 says. The fact that they acted in ignorance does not excuse them- they still sinned and that sin still needs to be pardoned. Just as the people who lived in Nineveh did not know their right hand from their left- they were ignorant of the truth- they had never heard the gospel- and yet they still needed to repent! That is why the LORD sent Jonah- so that they would no longer be ignorant and so that they might repent and flee the coming wrath! The same applies to our world today- the unreached people groups who have never heard the gospel are living in ignorance. The untouched tribes of Africa or the interior of India have never heard of Jesus Christ. They are ignorant- and yet their ignorance does not mean that they are free from sin! They still need to repent and believe! And it is for this forgiveness that Jesus prays! That is why the gospel still needs to go forth- so all men might know their sin- acknowledge the truth- and find forgiveness in Christ!

II. The Request for Forgiveness

So here we have Jesus on the cross- and the first thing that He says is a prayer asking for forgiveness! His is a prayer made for sinners- like you and me! He prays for them- not for Himself! He had no need for forgiveness- He was the perfectly righteous one! He had no crime or deceit that would justify His crucifixion- so He prays for us them- for us! As we come to our second point, we consider the request made and what does it mean. First of all, this request is made to the Father. Father, forgive them. Jesus is asking the Father to forgive- to pardon. That the Father would not hold against them what they were

doing. Although acting in ignorance, it remains that the actions of these various groups are in fact a sinful action. Committed not only against Jesus- but committed against the Father. All sin is a rebellion against God the Father and His Word. To reject the Son is to reject the Father who sent the Son! In the nailing of Jesus to the cross, it is the Father that is being sinned against- thus it is the Father who is called upon to Forgive! To sin against the Son is to sin against the Father. But the Son is praying- forgive them. The Son- Jesus- prays this prayer. The Perfect High Priest who intercedes for His people- praying for even His enemies! Forgiveness of sins is why Jesus came- He came not to be served but to serve- to give His life as a ransom for many as Mark 10 puts it. The very thing that Jesus is asking for is the very thing that He is gaining! He is dying so that His people might be forgiven! His blood being shed is securing the right of pardon for which He is asking! Such is the glory and grace of our God! Forgiveness is being purchased as it is being prayed for! What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is when a deserved punishment is delayed, withheld or cancelled. Forgiveness is when the immediate justice of the sword is suspended or annulled. So how was this prayer answered? How did the Father forgive them? Well, for the nation of Israel, forgiveness came in the form of delayed destruction. Although the nation deserved to be immediately destroyed by the wrath of God for their sinful rejection of Jesus Christ, the Father's forbearance meant that the nation would continue to exist for 40 more years. Destruction was not immediate- it was withheld and postponed in God's patience- they were given time to repent and many did. But there is more! When Jesus was asking the Father to forgive them, this prayer was answered in various ways and with various people repenting. Forgiveness of sins is when your sins are pardoned and your iniquity cleansed. As Jesus taught in Luke 17, if someone sins against you and they repent, you must forgive them. We all sin against God- and we are promised forgiveness if we repent and believe! Or as I John 1 says, if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us our sins. So do we find any of this repentance, faith and forgiveness as applied to the immediate context? Is the prayer of Jesus for the forgiveness of "them" answered? Well, we do have a few examples of an immediate answer. We have the thief on the

cross in v. 40! Where once he blasphemed the name of Jesus- now he asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into His Kingdom. So the prayer of Jesus for the forgiveness of those present was answered with the conversion of this thief on the cross. We also read of the centurion in 47- surely this man was innocent- he says. And the crowds of v. 48- are struck to the heart as they beat their breast in sorrow. And even from the ranks of the priests- in Acts 6:7 we read that many priests became obedient to the faith. Of those who had once voted to crucify Him- some became followers of the way! So the prayer of Jesus was answered clearly as these rebels see their sin, repent and come to believe in the name of Jesus. These too are forgiven! Jesus was being crucified for the very sins that they were committing- and He was securing the answer to the very prayer He was uttering! As the sins of the world are placed upon His shoulders- the world is coming to see Him and confess faith in His name!

To conclude, when we consider the prayer of Jesus on the cross, we see the beauty of forgiveness. It is asked for and purchased by our Savior! In praying this way, He is being faithful to His own teaching. He is blessing those who curse Him- when people crucify and curse His name it is Jesus who responds by praying for their forgiveness! Instead of responding to hatred in kind, He secures eternal blessings by laying down His life! In this He proves His identity- He is the Christ- He is the King- and He proves it by staying on the cross and dying to secure the forgiveness of our sins! In our text we find that Jesus Christ asks for forgiveness to be extended to those who acted in ignorance. And by His death on the cross, He secures the complete forgiveness of all our sins! Father, forgive them Jesus prayed. Our Father in Heaven we pray, forgive us for the sake of Jesus our Lord.