

The Seven Last Words of Christ: Part 1 of 7

(subtitle: Father, forgive them)

Luke 23:33-34 New American Standard Bible

³³When they came to the place called *The Skull*, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. ³⁴But Jesus was saying, **“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”** And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

Note: 1. The French philosopher Voltaire once said, ‘A hundred years from my death (1778) the Bible will be a museum piece.’ A hundred years after his death the French Bible Society set up its headquarters in Voltaire’s old home in Paris.

(https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/get_involved/bible_sunday/2016_resources/Bible-Sunday-Sermon-notes.pdf)

2. Palmerston (British prime minister in the 19th century).

Introduction

One of my hobbies is collecting the last words people said at their deathbeds. Here are some examples: Voltaire (1778) --- (as the bedside lamp flared up) ‘*What? The flames already?*’ Palmerston (1865) --- ‘*Die, my dear Doctor? ---That’s the last thing I shall do!*’

On his deathbed, John Wesley (1791) fervently spoke his last words, repeating the same thing twice: “*The best of all is God is with us. The best of all is God is with us.*” (<https://www.bible-bridge.com/john-wesleys-last-words/>). Beethoven (1827) — *I shall hear in Heaven.*

Concerning the last words people say, William Shakespeare once wrote:

“*O, but they say the tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony. Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain, for they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.*”

People breathe the truth at their deathbeds, don’t they? They also utter things that matter to them the most. They don’t waste their last breath on something meaningless or trivial. With their last words, they want the audience to remember what they say. That’s why I decided to preach on the seven last words of Jesus where He speaks to us the way of

God, the way of truth, and the way of life. So, starting today, and during the season of Lent, we are going to listen to what Jesus had said on the cross as He was dying.

Content

1. Father (v. 34).

Jesus began His petition for the soldiers with a word, “Father!” We also know that the Lord’s Prayer begins with “Our Father.” Yes, the Lord hears our prayer and pays attention to our petition when we call on His name. So, remember next time when you pray, call Him, “Father.” It will get His attention. It establishes our relationship with God. It reminds God of who He is to us and who we are to Him. He is our loving Father in Heaven. When we call our Father, it lays out the ground of our petition upon which we build our case before God. Begin your prayer with calling Him, “Father.” He will listen to you.

2. Forgive them (v. 34).

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them.” What’s that mean ‘to forgive’ here? To forgive them means not to hold their sin against them. To pardon their wrongdoing and remember not. Here, we see Jesus giving up His right to revenge. Remember: Jesus wasn’t basking in the Sun. He was in excruciating pain. He was crucified. He was bleeding profusely from both hands and feet. Every muscle and organ were agonizing and convulsing due to the nerve attacks. Yet, He did an unthinkable thing in human eyes: asking the Heavenly Father to forgive the ones who drove the nails in His body.

Why did He ask for forgiveness of those who crucified Him, who inflicted Him such an enormous and excruciating pain? Who were they, after all? They were the Roman soldiers who beat Him up, flogged Him, mocked Him, spat on Him, and even cast lots to steal His garments (v. 34). They were the worst kind, anyone’s nightmare, the cruelest, and the meanest bunch of soldiers who were callous to human suffering and casting lots in front of the dying! Yet, Jesus asked God not to hold them accountable for the horrible act they committed to Him.

Folks, we can learn from Jesus about forgiveness. For instance, His forgiveness was proactive. He did so, before even anyone asked. In fact, I believe in His heart Jesus already forgave them before He asked His Father to do the same: forgive. Jesus didn’t even wait until the soldiers said sorry. He was so disciplined that He instantly forgave His enemies.

I wonder if we can do the same if we were in His shoes? To forgive our enemies instantly. Can we forgive those who insulted us, harmed us, hurt us, and even crucified us? Before you say, “Not me,” consider another believer who just did that not with his own might but with Christ’s help. His name was Stephen, one of the seven deacons in the Early Church. He was witnessing Jesus to the Jewish crowd one day, and he was stoned to death by the same crowd. Before he passed away, he said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” (Acts 7:60). Wait a minute! Not long ago, the crowd heard the same forgiving prayer from Jesus. This time, they heard it again from the mouth of Stephen the follower of Jesus.

Jesus and Stephen both had one thing in common: in the midst of suffering and dying caused by their enemies, they forgave them. It is beyond anyone’s imagination! One thing is for sure: they both had room in their hearts for their enemies. They both asked God to forgive the perpetrators. Ah---that’s the sure mark of Jesus’ followers: forgive.

Let’s ponder the meaning of following Jesus a little more. The follower of Jesus imitates their Master and Lord Jesus. We are the followers of Jesus. We are the Christians. We follow Jesus’ path. We imitate His thinking patterns, His words, and His actions. Stephen did that. So should we forgive those who trespass against us whether they repent or not.

3. **For they don’t know what they are doing** (v. 34).

It is obvious that Jesus forgave the soldiers because of their ignorance: *they don’t know what they are doing*. Really? It seems to me that the soldiers surely knew what they were doing. They were just doing their job, you may say, which was to crucify the criminals for an agonizing death. To punish the criminals through utter humiliation before the crowd. In Jesus’ eyes, however, they still didn’t know what they were doing to Him the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Jesus pitied them, because they were ignorant of what was going on Golgotha. They were not concerned about their salvation at all, either. They were so spiritually blind that they failed to see the Savior dying right before their eyes. In human eyes, it was Jesus the Crucified to be pitied. In God’s eyes, however, it was the soldiers the spiritually blind to be most pitied.

By the way, didn’t Jesus say that whatever we do to the little ones who have faith in Him, we do to Him, and whatever we do to Him, we do to God? (Luke 9:48, 10:16). That day, the soldiers made fun of God. They humiliated God. They crucified the Lord. The worst sin anyone ever can commit. Anyone who knows God won’t do such a horrendous crime. That’s why Jesus says, they don’t know what they are doing.

Three Lessons:

First, *it is God's will for us to forgive each other proactively.* Can we forgive those who did so much harm to us, insulted us, mocked us, humiliated us, lied to us, stole our properties, and even murdered our loved ones? Worse even when they refuse to say sorry? The answer is still yes. Don't get me wrong. Humanly speaking, it is impossible and insane. But, with God's help, we can forgive one another (Philippians 4:13) giving up our right to revenge and leave it to God. By forgiving, we say to God, "Justice will be served by You not by me." Forgive proactively. Don't wait until they come and say sorry.

Next, *the key to forgiveness is the relationship with God.* To be exact, the key to forgiveness is knowing God. When you don't know God, you cannot forgive others. If you know God, however, with the desire to love Him, you can and you will forgive anyone. Let me say it again. The reason why we ought to forgive, and the reason why we can and we will forgive our enemies is God: The Lord. He commands us to forgive. We want to please, honor, and love Him by keeping His commandments. By the way, to forgive, is not an option or suggestion. It is a command. We are expected to do the same as Jesus did. If you love Me, Jesus says, do what I command you to do (John 14:15): that is, forgive and love your enemies. We choose to love God, we choose to love Jesus, we choose to keep His commands, therefore, we choose to forgive. If you love God, forgive.

Thirdly, *compassion/mercy is the basis of forgiveness.* Recently, I memorized one good verse. Micah 7:18: *Who is a God like You, who pardons wrongdoing and passes over a rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because **He delights in mercy.*** He delights in mercy. His compassions never fail. Jesus exercised the same divine mercy on those soldiers. The same mercy enables us to pity those who trespass against us. Only God can give us such compassion to forgive others. Without Christ-like compassion, it is impossible to forgive anyone. Forgiveness begins and ends with mercy and compassion: the understanding that those who trespass against us don't know what they are doing. Have mercy on those who trespass against you.

Conclusion

Jesus was born to save us from our sins. He lived a life of forgiveness. He died to grant us forgiveness and life. Even His dying wish was to forgive those who crucified Him. We are called to follow Jesus and His steps to forgive one another.

Practice forgiveness daily, because without it you will not see God in Heaven. Start forgiving today. Be proactive. Don't wait until you stand before God. Do it today and everyday as if this is the last day of your life! Remember Jesus. Remember Stephen. You too can do it through Christ who strengthens you. Amen.