

Your Greatest Need

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Preacher: Andrew Macleod

[0 : 00] We'll turn back with me then to Luke chapter 23 and again we can just read in verse 34 where Jesus said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Perhaps over these four months or so that you've been getting the puzzle book out, maybe you've been doing a crossword or two.

It's usually when I go traveling that I would ever attempt such things like Sudoku or the crosswords and usually when I start a crossword I'll do my best, I'll attempt some of the answers.

But I'll get bogged down, I'll get stuck and instead of persevering I'll just move on to another crossword a few pages later.

I'll abandon that one because it's got too hard. We're going to spend some time this morning at Calvary listening to the first of Jesus' crosswords.

[1 : 13] He had seven statements he made upon the cross recorded for us in scripture and it's crucial that we don't abandon any of them just because it gets too hard.

You know, none of us asked Jesus to go to the cross for us. None of us asked him to plead for our forgiveness. And yet by the Holy Spirit I hope and pray that we will see this morning that Jesus was here attending to your greatest need and presenting you with the greatest gift.

The first saying of Jesus on the cross is this one. Verse 34. Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

So let's just mull over these words and note the recipient, the request and the reason. The recipient, the request and the reason.

Well, we begin then with the recipient. As he was placed onto his wooden beam, the Roman soldiers took these six inch nails and hammered them into his hands and his feet.

[2 : 40] And as the cross was lifted up, Jesus' blood poured down. And it is in these moments that he says, Father.

That shouldn't really surprise us. For to whom else would he go? Just the previous day we can read of him praying to his father in Gethsemane.

He was in turmoil about all that lay ahead and if it be possible that this pass by him. Nevertheless, he continues to submit to the father's will.

Now on the cross, he's not praying for an alternative route. Even though the scent of sin was sickening, his gaze was set on the love of his father.

And you know, whatever your situation today, you may be overwhelmed as you see the sin in your life.

[3 : 47] Well, lift your gaze and lift your voice to the father. And you will instantly be lifted from your pit and toward the palace.

The first and last of Jesus' seven saints are addressed to God, the Father. Father, forgive them.

And then lastly, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. It's Luke that records both of these here in verse 34 and then again in verse 46.

So that the whole of the work of Jesus on the cross is covered by prayer. And you know, this is Christ's supreme act of worship.

And he comes to the climax of history here to do business with his father. But Luke is what he's saying here in the cross through Jesus' sayings both to the father.

[4 : 55] Luke is summarizing the whole of Christ's earthly ministry in this way. After all, in chapter 3 of this same gospel, he tells us that Jesus was being baptized and praying.

The ministry that was inaugurated by baptism in the waters of Jordan and now culminating at the cross at Calvary was marked by Jesus praying.

He began his ministry praying and he ends his public ministry praying. But going even further back, Luke tells us that when Jesus was just 12 years old, Mary and Joseph found him in the temple discussing with the theologians of the day.

They questioned him. But the child, Jesus, replies, And now here he is on the cross.

Jesus doing the father's business. At the beginning of the cross, he had intimacy with the father.

[6 : 16] At the end of his time on the cross, he prays with intimacy with the father. But in the middle of his time on the cross, he ensured that you and I for eternity could have intimacy with the father if we would believe in him.

That is why Jesus is on the cross. So that sinful men and women like me and you are able right here and right now to pray, Abba, fathers.

This is the recipient of Jesus' prayer and of ours, the fathers. Well, secondly then, the request.

F-O-R-G-I-V-E. Seven letters. Forgive. And if we find this word in our crossword, then it may be marked as seven down.

Down because forgiveness is deep. Deeper than you expect and deeper than you believe it is. Jesus' forgiveness is all-encompassing.

[7 : 37] On this day, a choir from the pit of hell sang out. The powers of darkness raged all around.

The people sneered at him. He saved others. Let him save himself. They gambled away his clothes, his fragments of dignity.

The soldiers mocked him, spat upon him. If you are the king of the Jews, then save yourself. Both criminals on the cross, they hurled insults at him.

What sounds, what sights, what sense our Lord Jesus experienced as evil and wickedness, the result of our sin, rose up at Calvary.

It was here, at this point, that Jesus prays, Father, forgive them. I don't know about you, but my question over and over as I read and reread the crucifixion account is, why?

[8 : 54] Why? Why did he request their forgiveness? Why did he plead on their behalf? We can read about how evil and wicked they were, sinful men and women just like we are.

And yet he prays, Father, forgive them. This is love. Isaac Watts, when he wrote the hymn, When I surveyed the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory damned, he surely was aware that on this wondrous cross was displayed to him this intimate love.

In verse 3 of that hymn, he says, Here at the cross, mercy and judgment collide.

You see, our sin does not just disappear. It's dealt with. The wrath of God does not just turn off like a tap.

It is consumed in the sin-bearing Son dying on that cross. How many of us deserve forgiveness?

[10 : 29] None. How many of us asked for this forgiveness? None. And yet Jesus prays, Father, forgive them.

This is love, so amazing, so divine, that it demands what? Our soul, our life, and our awe.

But if today you have not received Jesus' forgiveness, if you have not and will not surrender your life over to him, then God's judgment and God's wrath will wait for you.

You and I can never plead our guilty case before. The most holy God. But Jesus can.

Jesus did. He is interceding on our behalf. And Jesus is the one standing in the gap. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah, He writes as if He could see the scene at Calvary with His own eyes.

[11 : 46] Describing Jesus, He says in Isaiah 53, He was numbered with the transgressors, for He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

That was the promise 700 years earlier, that Jesus would go on our behalf before our God.

But do you know, this is the wonder of the gospel. Because we're told that in Hebrews, in the New Testament, that Jesus is able to save completely all who come to Him.

Why? Because He ever lives to make intercession for us. In other words, because He stood and continues to stand in the gap between sinful mankind and our holy God.

This means that there is nobody who Jesus cannot save. Nobody watching this today has sinned too much.

[12 : 59] Jesus is able to save all of you. Yes, even you, with that sin you committed all those years ago.

Yes, even you with that sin that you think nobody else knows about apart from God. Yes, all of you, with all of your sin, which is, by the way, far more than we even think it is.

Jesus is able to take it all. We can give it all to Him and receive God's forgiveness. Even though the crucifixion was unforgiving, the cross is all about forgiveness.

The recipient and the request. And then thirdly, the reason. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

If they had known who, Jesus was. The creator and the sustainer of life. The promised Messiah.

[14 : 12] The Lord of Lords. The King of Kings. They would never have crucified Him. It was in ignorance that they murdered Jesus.

When all this was over, when Jesus had died and risen and ascended, the apostle Peter reminds the Jews of the fact in Acts chapter 3.

You handed Jesus over to be crucified. You disowned Him. You asked for the murderer Barabbas to be released instead. You killed the author of life.

But Peter says, I know that you did this in ignorance. For Peter, their ignorance wasn't an excuse.

And so he calls them to repent and ask God to forgive their sin. They were without excuse.

[15 : 10] And the same is true for you. If you really knew who Jesus was. If you knew what He really suffered on the cross.

If you knew how loving and gracious He really is and how often He is protecting you, you would never reject Him over and over like you do.

But many of you, or all of you, are not ignorant. You've heard about what Jesus has done for you and how many times.

You know all about this offer of forgiveness. This isn't the first time that you've come to church and the ministers talked about Jesus on the cross and you can have your sin forgiven.

You're not ignorant of that. You're not ignorant of the gospel, but you live your life ignorant of eternity. You live in ignorance thinking you have plenty of time.

[16 : 19] You live in ignorance convinced that you will see tomorrow. If these last four months have taught us anything, it should show us that life is uncertain, that death is sure, that sin is the cause and Christ is the cure.

The root problem for many of you, young or old, is that you are ignorant of the fact that you are a sinner.

Yes, you've heard that you're a sinner. You've read that you're a sinner. You may even acknowledge that you commit sins. However, you don't really believe that your little sins will carry you all the way to hell.

It does not matter whether you believe that you are a little sinner or just not as big a sinner as somebody else on the street or even these folk who go to church.

It does not matter if you have committed in your mind little sins or big sins. The Bible tells us that we have all sinned and we fall short of the glory of God.

[17 : 53] Here is the cure to look at Jesus, our mediator, and we find him praying, Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.

This should assure you that Jesus is more willing to forgive you than you even are to ask for forgiveness. So my friend, come to Calvary and the promise is this.

If you ask, you will receive. If you seek, you will find. If you knock, the door will be opened to you. When you come, you will hear this wonderful word of forgiveness.

Forgiveness that will change your heart and transform your life and give you a promise of glory which is far beyond your thinking.

So will you come and be forgiven? Amen. Let's just bow in a word of prayer. Lord our God, we do thank you for your word.

[19 : 07] Again, we thank you for the finished work of Jesus. whoever lives to make intercession for us. Lord, we do pray that there would be men and women and young people here in your words today in Aberdeen and all over the country and indeed all over the globe who will hear these words of you are forgiven because they placed their trust in Jesus Christ.

Oh, we leave this work to you to the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.