

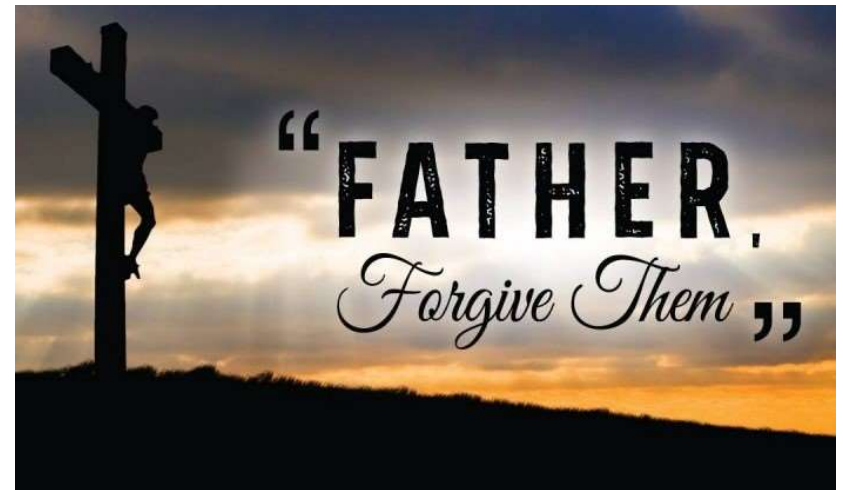


World Christian Fellowship

www.wcflondon.com
wcflondon@gmail.com

Father Forgive them!

Luke 23:34, *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.*



The scene around the cross is ridiculous and unfeeling.

The soldiers are well versed with the details of crucifixion. Perhaps this team would have conducted several crucifixions this week already. The first time they saw a crucifixion they may

have been moved by its brutality, but now they are emotionless.

First, the soldiers begin with the cruel process,

- nailing the criminal to a cross,
- hoisting him up,
- the cross swaying forward,
- until it is secured with wedges at the bottom to hold it upright in the hole,
- when that task is done, they sit around the base waiting for the criminal to die,
- Waiting sometimes for days.
- To pass the time they gamble,
- deciding by a casting of lots who will be awarded the victim's last possessions.

That is the scene.

But in the midst of it comes an astounding, powerful word from the "criminal" on the centre cross:

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

High Priestly Prayer- Unselfish!

What is Jesus saying?

Jesus is saying a prayer, a request to God Almighty.
It is remarkable, however, that Jesus isn't asking for Himself!

I would be terrified and overwhelmed, trying desperately to retain my composure.

My prayer would probably be:
"God help me!" if I could utter any sounds at all.

But Jesus' prayer is one of complete unselfishness. He is concerned for the people who are responsible for crucifying Him.

Jesus is asking God to forgive them.
Instead of thinking of Himself and His own needs.
Jesus is thinking of those whose souls are in much greater danger than His own.



The first thing I learn from this word is love.

At His last extremity, Jesus loves.

As with so many of the details surrounding Jesus' death, this priestly intercession on behalf of His own killers was done in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Isaiah 53:12, *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.*

These words were probably spoken while our Lord was being nailed to the cross, or as soon as the cross was reared up on position.

It is worthy of remark that as soon as the blood of the Great Sacrifice began to flow, the Great High Priest began to intercede.

The whole meaning of the cross is summed up in this one act of intercession.

John 3:17, *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

Certainly, any mortal man would have desired only to curse or revile his killers under these circumstances.

The forgiveness Christ prayed for is freely offered to all!

Revelation 22:17, *And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*

In fact, God is eager to forgive repentant sinners. The prodigal son's father is a vivid picture of God's eagerness to forgive.



The Lord pleads for every sinner to be reconciled to Him (**Ezekiel 18:3–32; Acts 17:30; 2 Corinthians 5:20**).

To those who repent from sin, He promises to lavish freely with forgiveness. If that offer was extended to those who murdered the very Author of life, how much more is it available to us today?

It is important to understand that Jesus' plea for His killers' forgiveness did not guarantee the immediate and unconditional forgiveness of everyone who participated in the crucifixion.

He was interceding on behalf of all who would repent and turn to Him as Lord and Saviour.

His prayer was that when they finally realized the enormity of what they had done and sought the heavenly Father's forgiveness for their sin, He would not hold the murder of His beloved Son against them.

Divine forgiveness is never granted to people who remain in unbelief and sin.

Those who clung to their hatred of Jesus were by no means automatically absolved from their crime by Jesus' prayer. But those who repented and sought forgiveness, like the centurion, or the thief on the cross, or the priests, or the people in the crowd—all who later embraced Him would find abundant mercy in answer to Christ's petition on their behalf.

Christ's prayer was a token of mercy offered to all who heard.

Jesus prayed aloud for their sakes (**John 11:42**).

Their sin was so unfathomably heinous that if witnesses had not actually heard Him pray for His killers' forgiveness, most might have assumed they had committed an unpardonable offense.

One might even think that God incarnate would wish to call down some thunderous blast of judgment against such wicked men.

But Christ was on a mission of mercy.

He was dying to purchase forgiveness for sins.

Even at the very height of His agony, compassion filled His heart.

1. Love

'Father'

A term of trust, confidence, and endearment

His love is not merely for those Roman military who put Him on the cross.

His prayer reveals a gentle love for God himself.

At the moment He begins the long course of death through excruciating pain, He speaks in love to the only One who can deliver Him, God Himself!

He was not speaking for Himself, but for others.

He speaks in love.

Think about the word "Father" in this prayer and consider the alternatives.

"God" is the generic term for deity.

"Lord" is a term of respect and honour for one who is exalted in rank. This term was substituted by the Jews to avoid saying the divine name of Yahweh or Jehovah when reading the Scripture.

"Almighty God" would be a bit formal at the desperate hour of one's crucifixion, but it would express God's great power.

"Creator God" is a common substitute for "Father" among Christians who want to avoid the paternalism they see in the word "Father." But "Creator God" is not a term of relationship, rather one of function and awe.

"Father," on the other hand, is first and foremost a term of relationship and endearment.

It is a family term.

Spoken within the family circle it was often expressed as "Abba," which, roughly translated, might correspond to our "Dad" or "Daddy."

come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ *And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

Another followed immediately, with the conversion of a centurion, one of the soldiers who had crucified Christ.

Luke 23:47, *So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"*

Other answers to His prayer came in the weeks and months that followed the crucifixion—particularly at Pentecost—as untold numbers of people in Jerusalem were converted to Christ.

No doubt many of them were the same people who had clamoured for Jesus' death and railed at Him from the foot of the cross.

Acts 6:7, *Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

A great number of the temple priests later confessed Jesus as Lord.

Mercy not a Divine Shortcut



Conclusion:

How was Jesus' prayer answered?

In innumerable ways.

The first answer came with the conversion of one of the thieves on the cross next to Jesus.

Luke 23:40–43, *But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You*

Jesus had used this intimate Aramaic word to address his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before crucifixion.

Mark 14:36, *And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."*

It is also the cry of the Spirit of God within us, helping us reach out to God.

Romans 8:15, *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

Galatians 4:6, *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*

In this prayer at His last hour, Jesus addresses the God of the Universe with the simple term "Father."

Jesus invites us to do the same.

When Jesus' disciples ask Him how they should pray, He gives them a model prayer.

Matthew 6:9, *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*

By beginning His prayer with the word "Father," Jesus expresses at the same time a love and a confidence, a trust.

One who doubts might pile up signifiers of God to strengthen His shaky faith, but one who calls Him simply, "Father,"

- Knows him,
- Trusts him, and
- Confident in the outcome.

2. Them/Us

Who Does the "Them" Refer To?

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus prays that the Father would forgive "them."
Who are "they" for whom He prays?

Let's consider the possibilities.

Soldiers.

He could be praying for the Roman soldiers who routinely put men to death on this site of Golgotha.

be made. ²⁶The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

²⁸"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³²Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' ³⁴And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ³⁵"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Matthew 6:12 *KJV*



*And forgive us our debts, as we
forgive our debtors.*

Matthew 6:12, *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*

He is speaking of sins as a debt owed to God which must be paid.

The Lord's Prayer asks God to cancel our debts as we cancel others' debt of sins committed against us.

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

Jesus illustrates the concept of forgiveness in terms of massive financial debt owed to a king.

Matthew 18:23-35, *Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment*

They destroyed a human life, brutally, without compassion, but they didn't initiate the action. They had no choice.

They were merely following orders. Only after the fact did they realize with awe and terror what they had done.

Matthew 27:54, *So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

It could have been the soldiers He was forgiving.

Pilate

Pilate might have been a better candidate!

However, against all law he had given the order for the crucifixion. He had found Jesus' innocent of the crimes with which He had been charged.



John 18:38, Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.

John 19:6, Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.”

Matthew 27:17-18, Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”¹⁸ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

Yes, each of us have plenty enough sin to condemn us. But God is looking deeper. He has made a way that we do not deserve, because He knows that if we really knew the truth, we would embrace His Son.

Jesus' prayer on the cross tells me that God has found a way to forgive us.

4. Forgive

What does it mean to Forgive?

The word in Greek is ***aphiēmi***, with the basic meaning of "to send away."

The word occurs often in Greek commercial papyrus fragments of the time with the idea of "to release from legal or moral obligation or consequence, cancel, remit, pardon."

The word was used in legal documents to describe releasing a person from an office, severing a marriage obligation, or cancelling a debt that was owed.

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus uses the verb ***aphiēmi*** in the context of debt.

They were spiritually insensitive because they loved darkness rather than light.

Therefore, they did not recognize that the One they were putting to death was the Light of the World.

1 Corinthians 2:8, *"None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

Acts 3:17-18, *"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled."*

Paul himself, who persecuted Christians to their death, did it because he just didn't understand.

1 Timothy 1:13, *"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."*

What I learn from this First Word from the Cross is that God is merciful!

Far more merciful than any of us deserves.

Yet, the pressure of the Jewish leaders and his fear of a riot "forced" him to go against his own better judgment. He signed the death warrant and then publicly washed his hands.

Matthew 27:24, *When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."*

The double-faced act of a self-serving politician desperate to hold onto power.

Perhaps Jesus was forgiving Pilate for the weakness of his character.

Chief priests and scribes.

These were the prime force behind the crucifixion. Once Jesus had cleansed the temple of their greedy trade in animals and money changing at outrageous exchange rates, they were determined to kill Him.

Matthew 21:15, *But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant.*

Matthew 21:23, *Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"*

Matthew 21:45-46, *Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. ⁴⁶ But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.*

Matthew 26:3-4, *Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, ⁴ and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.*

Behind the scenes they had paid off Judas for his insider betrayal.

Matthew 26:14-16, *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.*

They sent temple soldiers to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

were behaving wickedly, and they knew it. Most were fully aware of the fact of their wrongdoing.

Does God hold those who put Jesus to death responsible for their sins?

Yes.

He is a just God. They had seen Jesus' miracles and heard the Truth spoken by the Son of God Himself and had yet sought His death. There was plenty of rope to hang them with all justice.

They knew this was a crime.

Their hearts were corrupt.

But what was lacking was a full understanding of the magnitude of their sin. That they lacked.

The soldiers and the crowd could easily see that a great injustice was being done, and yet they all gleefully participated. Many of the taunting spectators at Calvary had heard Christ teach and seen Him do miracles. They could not have really believed in their hearts that He deserved to die this way.

But they were ignorant of the enormity of their crime. They were blinded to the full reality that they were crucifying God the Son.

1 Peter 3:18, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,*

Jesus is under no illusions. He knows why He has come to earth.

He explains it with utmost clarity to his disciples.

Mark 10:45, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

You and I made the cross necessary. We are the ones He prays to forgive.

3. Do

Did we know what we were doing?

Are people forgiven only if they don't know what they are doing?

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

The phrase *"for they do not know what they are doing"* does not suggest that they were unaware that they were sinning. Ignorance does not absolve anyone from sin. These people

Matthew 26:47, *And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.*

They tried to get people to testify falsely against Jesus before the Sanhedrin.

Matthew 26:59, *Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death,*

Brought Jesus case before Pilate.

Matthew 27:1-2, *When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. ²And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

Stirred up the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified.

Matthew 27:20-23, *But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" ²²Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" ²³Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"*

It may have been the chief priests and scribes that Jesus was forgiving.

Pharisees and Sadducees.

They were treated Jesus like early enemies.

Jesus' plain teaching about the Kingdom of God offended them both.

The Sadducees sought to discredit Jesus.

Matthew 22:23-24, *The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, ²⁴saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.*

The Pharisees were the first to actively plot Jesus' death.

Matthew 12:14, *Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.*

If Jesus came to our churches today, many of our leaders would oppose Him openly.

Some might plot to destroy Him.

The real Jesus is just too threatening to established religious power that resists change. It might be the Pharisees and Sadducees who were the recipients of His plea for mercy.

You and Me.

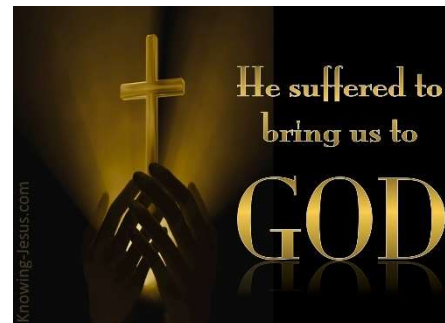
But when you think about it, we are the real ones that sent Jesus to the cross!

- Our sins,
- Our corruption,
- Our weakness and
- Our transgression.

The way we are headed on our own is to our doom.

The gate to eternal life is exceedingly narrow.

Matthew 7:13-14, *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*



Without Jesus' to bear our sins upon Himself, the Righteous for the unrighteous none of us could be forgiven.