

CRIES FROM THE CROSS

A Journey into the heart of Jesus.

1. A Cry for Pardon – Lk 23:34

Many times you might have asked or thought yourself like, ‘how can I forgive him if I can’t trust him? How can I forgive someone who keeps breaking a promise? Why should I forgive someone who doesn’t ask for it? and why should I forgive when you are the one who wronged’? And on...

Yes, Forgiveness sounds like a marvellous idea until you are the one who has to do it. Perhaps nowhere do we find our question about forgiveness answered more clearly than at the cross. The saviour's first cry was one for pardon for His enemies. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). Forgiveness was the essential theme of the teachings and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. During His ministry Jesus often forgave those who needed His mercy. “Son, your sins are forgiven,” He said to the paralytic (Mark 2:5). Jesus explained that He had the right to forgive sins because He had the credentials of deity. Now, on the cross, He did not exercise this divine prerogative. He asked the Father to do what He had previously done. Sacrificed as the Lamb of God, He refused the role of deity. Yet His heart was burdened for those who had instigated and committed history’s greatest crime. He prayed that the unforgivable might be forgiven. He began His earthly ministry with prayer and finally He ends with a Prayer on the cross. How is our Prayer life?

In this **first cry** from the cross, Jesus called God “Father.” He shall do so again as He breathes **His last**: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). But in the **middle cry**, He will shout, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34, emphasis added). That, as we shall learn, was His darkest hour, so dark that even nature resonated as the light of the sun was blotted out. In that moment, the Son experienced the full penalty for our sins and even the Father withdrew His blessed presence. The Reverend Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Church, asked, *“Is your faith shaken by the wickedness of sinners or the weakness of saints?”* Yes, sometimes our faith is shaken. But the presence of the Father remains firm in the presence of unrestrained wickedness. He knew that He could depend upon His Father, even when evil seemed to be out of control. Is your Faith shaken because of..?

When man had done his worst, Jesus prayed, not for justice, but for mercy; He pleaded that His enemies would be exempt from the just consequences of their evil deeds. And He prayed, not after His wounds had healed, but while they were yet open. Words of forgiveness came from His lips when the nails were being driven into His body, when the pain was the fiercest, when the jolts of anguish were the sharpest; He prayed as the cross was lowered into the hole with a thud. It was then, when His nerves were yet the most tender, when the pain was the most unfathomable, He who was the victim of history’s greatest crime prayed for the criminals. He prayed aloud so that we might know we are included in this prayer. Already the night before in the garden of Gethsemane, He remembered us. (John 17:20–21). He prayed with tears and loud voice to the one... (Heb. 7:25), He prayed for them that crucify Him (Isa. 53:12). The prayer begun that evening continued on the cross, and even today He is at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. Be assured, He will never forget us. Judas knew he had betrayed a friend; Pilate knew he had condemned an innocent man; the Sanhedrin knew that they bribed false witnesses to make the charges stick. All of these people were not ignorant of the facts of their guilt, but they were ignorant of the enormity of their crime. For whatever

reason, they did not know that they were crucifying the Son of God. Don't overlook the fact that even sins of ignorance need forgiveness. Jesus did not say, "They don't know what they were doing, so let them go free." **God never lowers His standard of justice to the level of our ignorance. Sins committed in ignorance are still sins.** The guilt of those who crucified Jesus was real and objective regardless of how much they understood or did not understand. Contrast their knowledge with ours. They did not know that a resurrection would follow the crucifixion; they did not know that a church that would change the world would grow out of Pentecost; they did not know that a New Testament would be written that spells out in detail God's plan of the ages. Can you forgive the deliberate disobedient?

Are some sins "unpardonable"? The answer is no, for **if the murder of the Son of God was "forgivable" for those who sought forgiveness, then all sins can be forgiven. There is no unpardonable sin for those who come to Christ for forgiveness. For those who refuse Him, all sins are unpardonable. The cross can repair the irreparable.** "By this prayer from the cross," writes Clarence Cranford, "Jesus was building a bridge of forgiveness over which his tormentors could come in penitence to the Father." If you are ever tempted to think that God takes sin lightly, look at Calvary. Skull Hill, as Calvary was called, reminds us that God can't "lighten up." His searing holiness demanded an infinite penalty. And although God forgives us because of Christ, it is neither His job nor His obligation to do so. He forgives us because of undeserved mercy toward us whose just punishment is hell. **The cross is the bridge of redeeming love;** on it, we walk across the chasm to God, who graciously provided forgiveness for those who believe. If we do not understand this, we do not understand the gospel. Should we pray for those who do not ask for our forgiveness? Yes, Jesus prayed for His enemies before they became His friends. Of course we do not know the future response of those for whom we pray. We do not know whether they will seek God's forgiveness, or, for that matter, our forgiveness if they have wronged us. Yet, Jesus taught His disciples to "pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 nkjv). In human relationships, when forgiveness is requested, reconciliation is never a certainty. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). The goal of forgiveness is always reconciliation, that is, the uniting of two divided hearts. But when forgiveness is not requested, the offended party must still choose to "forgive" in the sense that the injustice is turned over to God. If not, the hurt and anger will destroy the human psyche and grieve the Holy Spirit.

Where sin is not taken seriously, forgiveness is received too lightly. Even sincere repentance must be updated with daily surrender to God and responsible disciplines. Our entire lives must be characterized by repentance. No one act of repentance in and of itself guarantees a future life of obedience. The first cry from the cross echoes the one word without which we cannot be saved: *forgiveness*. Then as now, it is freely granted to those who humbly receive it. Thankfully, the death of Jesus made the answer to this prayer a reality.

The lessons we learn from the cry of pardon:

1. It was the fulfilment of the prophetic Word.
2. Forgiveness of sin is a divine act.
3. The divine estimate of sin and its consequent guilt.
4. We see the blindness of human heart.
5. We see the implementation of His own teaching.
6. We see man's great and primary need.
7. We see the triumph of redeeming love.