

Some Last Words Part 2

Luke 23:32-39

One of the favorite pastimes that I often enjoy is that of being a “people watcher”, a “people watcher”, sitting quietly observing the behaviors of people, perhaps in a park or in a shopping mall. Sometimes, if it seems appropriate, I also engage them in conversation.

And I confess that there are some times when I have been surprised, even alarmed at some of their behaviors, seeing and hearing them say and do things that seem obviously wrong to me, sometimes very wrong, but them not seeming to have any recognition of the wrongness that they are involved in.

And I've wondered, is it simply me and my personality that senses a rightness or a wrongness about the things I'm seeing and hearing, or is something altogether different taking place? Why does the wrongness I observe seem so blatantly wrong to me, but not so to them. Do they not know that their behavior is wrong?

And yes, I'm aware that the culture of our day has a lot to do with the definition that we apply to those terms of “rightness” and “wrongness”, with one of the most popularly accepted euphemisms being “what is true for me might not be true for you and what is true for you might not be true for me. We each have our own truth”.

And that kind of thinking, where there is no firmly established standard of truth that's being applied, can bring about a real confusion as to whether a situation or a behavior is truly “right” or it is “wrong”.

But why am I visiting these ponderings within my mind as we study about some of the last moments of our Savior's life as He hung there on that cross?

It's because of those very special words that He spoke there in verse 34 where he said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!”

Sadly, within our human condition, though it often be unrecognizable to our senses, we can each suffer from a very serious form of “blindness”, a “blindness” that prevents our being able to see certain of the conditions and the behaviors that well up within our hearts and minds, veiling the real “truth” about many of

the things we see and hear, preventing us from knowing the real truth about the “rightness” or the “wrongness” of the things we do.

And also sadly, this form of “blindness” has no human remedy. It is completely incurable through human effort. No forms of medication, no intervention therapy, no rehabilitation methods can help its condition.

But thanks be to God, He, the Lord Jesus does have a remedy for our blindness. And that remedy begins with those words that He spoke while hanging there on that cross when He said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!”

And thanks be to God also that His intercession doesn’t end with just those few words. Our Lord knows our hearts. And He knows that we need more. He knows that we need His ongoing intercession abiding within us to help us moment by moment as we navigate our way through the sinful conditions of the cultural effects that swirl all around us each day.

And so, just as He promised in John chapter 16, as He ascended into the clouds of heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit to live and to abide within us, to “guide us into all truth”, His ongoing presence opening our “blind eyes” so that we could know and follow His ways of truth.

And oh dear Christian this is such an important part of God’s ministry to our souls. With His Holy Spirit abiding within us we are able to “see things” and to “hear things” that are hidden from the eyes of those who don’t have His blessed Holy Spirit.

But for us, as we yield our hearts to Him, His Holy Spirit enables our eyes to see and our ears to hear. And what a precious gift that is to us.

Let’s pause for a moment and read these precious words of our passage again today, and then we’ll talk about them. These are given in Luke chapter 23, beginning in verse 32,

³²Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.(with the Lord Jesus) ³³And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He

saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"(Luke 23:32-37)

Crucifixion was especially designed with the intent of being as unbearably awful as it usually turned out to be, with death coming very slowly and painfully, the sufferer having to constantly push himself up against the painful nails in his feet so that his lungs could gasp another breath of air.

But death was inevitable. In spite of all the many troubled efforts to stay alive, sometimes suffering for as long as two and three days, unable to push himself up any longer, the condemned man would slump forward and die of suffocation.

These scriptures record that Jesus suffered there on the cross for about six hours before He finally "gave up the ghost" and breathed His last.

The criminals on either side of Him lived a short while longer, their suffering being cut short only because the hour of the Sabbath was approaching and at the request of the Jewish leaders their legs were broken so that they would go ahead and die and could be removed from the cross before the Sabbath began.

Around the cross of Jesus during His final hours of suffering were several people, some were friendly to Him, but most were not. Along with the two thieves who hung on either side of Him, on the ground around Him were the soldiers who crucified Him and were now gambling for His clothes. Also, there was a Centurion whose job it was to supervise the whole ugly event.

Then also, there were some of the Scribes and Pharisees who had worked so hard to have Him killed in this way.

Then lastly, besides perhaps a few remaining curious onlookers, there were several of Jesus' faithful friends and family members gathered there, each of them mourning and grieving for Him. There was His dear mother, Mary, also His mother's sister, the wife of Cleopas, then also, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and also dear faithful Mary Magdalene. And then lastly, there was John, one of Jesus' faithful disciples.

Most of the other people gathered there were not kind to Jesus in His suffering. The Scribes and Pharisees jeered and railed at Him, saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and come down from the cross."

Also, for a while, even His fellow sufferers railed at Him, especially one of them. Thankfully though, one of them eventually did surrender his heart.

While Jesus hung there suffering and slowly dying, most all of those gathered around Him were caught up either in their own grief or in their own self-interests. Thankfully, that was not so with the Lord Jesus. Through the whole painful ordeal, Jesus remained faithful and did not falter in His ministry to the world.

While though limited by His humanity in the things He was able to do in those moments, we are thankful that He left us with seven blessed final expressions of love and provision. And over the next few sessions, I hope to continue to look carefully at each of them.

The order of Jesus' words is not exactly known, but some of them can be assumed. We will simply continue to examine them as we find them.

And here in verse 34, we read that Jesus said,

³⁴ . . . Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34)

A question . . . who was Jesus speaking about with these words. Some preachers and even bible scholars would limit these words to include only those people who were present that day, the ones who took part in His crucifixion. And some would have His words to be little more than a general platitude.

But thankfully, neither is ever so with God's word. Each and every word spoken by the Lord was, and is, of far-reaching and eternal consequence. And that was especially so with these final words of Jesus.

Considering these words . . . most of the onlookers, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees, really should have known who Jesus was, having probably spent many, many hours of study about Him during their seminary training, and especially in their studying of the Psalms and the Prophets.

We know that Isaiah had much to say about Jesus. In Isaiah chapter 9, He prophesied about the days of Jesus' birth. And in Isaiah chapter 35, he spoke about Jesus' ministry in healing the sick and giving sight to the blind.

Also in Isaiah chapter 53, he even prophesied about these very events that were taking place this very day, giving in-depth details of the beating that Jesus had just endured.

And had the Scribes and Pharisees cared to remember, they would have recalled the words of David in Psalm chapter 22 where he gave an intimate account of the suffering that Jesus was enduring as He now hung on the cross.

But they were not faithful! And because they were not, they were easily taken in by the invisible influences of the powers and principalities within the demonic realms that surely provoked them to carry out these awful deeds.

As the Apostle Paul would later write in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 8,

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

Sadly, these men were not true seekers of Christ, and so there they stood, jeering and railing at Him.

But their behavior did not discourage Jesus from His appointed calling. He had come to "seek and to save those who were lost".

And so, in His final moments of life, we see Him still engaged in His mission, with these words, engaged in His divine calling as priestly intercessor. And also, and very importantly so, engaged in His position as the Almighty Judge of all the earth.

Consider these words for a moment! Though in a dilemma that would surely have been overwhelming for anyone else, Jesus did not falter in His calling.

From the first moments of His life until these final moments, He remained faithful to His task, seeking and saving and ministering to those who are lost.

Recall that from His very first days of ministry, over three years earlier, He had come to “His own”, the Hebrew people, but as these scriptures tell us, “They received Him not”.

They had a confused and distorted understanding of who the Messiah would be and how He would return and save them.

Their eyes had been “blinded” by the evil one, keeping them from seeing the truth.

But their refusal to receive Him did not prevent His ministry to them. He continued daily to preach His “good news” to His people, ministering in the synagogues and on the streets.

And then, He also reached out across the barriers of Jewish blood lines to minister to the half-breed Samaritans and to the Gentiles, always, always seeking to save those who were lost.

And now here, though limited by His circumstances, His loving ministry continued. Restricted by His shortness of breath, He was not able to preach a long sermon like the one He gave in the “Sermon on the Mount”.

Now, He could only utter a few words. And here, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”.

Though few, these words were very powerful and so very effectual. With these simple words Jesus revealed His purpose, His position and His authority within the majestic inner-workings of the Trinity of God.

His words, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”, firstly affirmed His position as God’s Son, the second Person within the Trinity. Jesus was the “Only Begotten Son of God.

Then next, His words, revealed His commitment as our Advocate, our Intercessor who speaks on our behalf when we are not allowed to speak. And that is especially so within the Trinity of God. Jesus is the only intercessor, the only mediator between God and man.

And His words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", were so very true, none of them, and none of us, truly understand the impact of the things we do. But that was especially so for those in that day who were doing their worst to Him.

I confess that I don't know exactly how the Holy Spirit worked within the hearts of men and women during those days before Pentecost, before the Holy Spirit had been fully given to live within the hearts of believers, before the days that we know now where the Holy Spirit is continually drawing people to know and to receive Him. And then giving moment by moment guidance to our thoughts and behaviors.

It seems that in those days of Jesus, people were so blinded by the evil one that they were almost incapable of really knowing the real difference between right and wrong.

And I know that my words might sound a little bit too "tolerant", but that blindness that we spoke about a moment ago seems feverishly at work in the minds of so many, many people. And in Revelation 3:17, we are each described as being, wretched, and miserable, and poor, naked and blind.

Before we close our time of study today, I'd like to repeat some of the things we've said because they are so very, very important.

First that yes, His words of intercession that day were for those who were gathered there and had mistreated Him so badly. But His pleas for mercy were not just for them alone. Jesus was also being the true and faithful advocate and intercessor for all people of all time, looking back over all the past generations and then also looking forward throughout all future generations, with His prayer interceding for all of us, even you and me.

And also, may I say again that our human minds do so need the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us to understand God's truths and to instruct us about the things we should do, that without God's Holy Spirit, none of us can truly know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil.

It is truly a miraculous thing that Jesus did as He hung there in His suffering. With His words, He was setting into place the provision for the salvation of all those who would receive Him, for all those who would believe in His name.

Curiously though, and almost totally incomprehensible to our frail minds, Jesus was also, ever and always the Lord of Glory, the Supreme Judge of all the earth, the one before whom all men and women will eventually stand in judgment.

So then, as He was hanging there, struggling to breathe, He was our advocate, crying out and praying and interceding for us. But He was also, at that very same moment, the supreme Judge of all the earth.

In His human condition, He was the Christ, the one who could and would die there to pay our penalty for sin. And in His human condition as the Christ, it was necessary for Him to cry out to His Father in heaven, asking the Father to forgive the sins of men.

But then again, and though we may never understand the complexity of it all, Jesus was also at that very same moment, sitting on the throne of glory, taking part in the judgment of men.

At that same moment, Jesus was all of these. He was the suffering and dying Savior, the Justifier, but then, He was also the Just Judge. Listen to these words given to us in Romans chapter 3,

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:23-26)

Oh dear friends, our minds are so very small, and these words are so incomprehensible to us, but they are nonetheless true. God, in Christ was at that moment able to be both the Justifier and the Just Judge, all at the same time.

And so, while His words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" are words of intercession, they are also words of decree, setting into motion the "propitiation", the full and complete atonement and payment for all of the sins of all men throughout all generations, with the final step of His "propitiation" being made full by His "Death" and His "Resurrection" that would take place over the next few hours and the next three days.

Thanks be to God for this indescribable free gift.

As we close, I pray this same prayer for each one of us, and ask that the true intercessor, Jesus Christ, carry this same prayer on into the Trinity on our behalf.

“Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do”.

And we do pray that prayer in your blessed name Lord Jesus! Amen!