

Some Last Words Part 6
Luke 23:39-43

There are so many, many kinds of sin that we hide within our hearts, most of them not easily recognizable to our friends and neighbors, but they are there, nonetheless.

In today's passage, as our Lord hung there on that cross, He was dealing with every manner of sin. And for those of us who have Him as our Savior and Lord, He was paying the penalty, in full, for every one of them even and especially those that might be hidden away in our hearts and unknown to us.

In the Book of Matthew chapter 6, the Lord spoke about one of those "hidden" kinds of sins and He gave us a curious command concerning them. It has to do with our own "forgiveness of sins". There in those words, right after teaching us the precious words of the "Lord's Prayer", He said to us,

¹⁴ . . . if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15)

These words are very curious to me for several reasons. And they bring some very serious questions to my mind. The questions . . . "what exactly is God implying about the actual forgiveness of a person's sin? Does my forgiveness or lack of forgiveness have some impact or consequence within the courts of God either for me or for that other person?"

Sin can be, and often is, a clever predator. As with Cain, sin lurks behind every door desiring to have each one of us. And these words of warning from the Lord Jesus about our refusal to forgive another person for some perceived sin they have committed against us is an excellent example of how we can carry "roots of bitterness" within our hearts for a lifetime, often not even knowing that they are there.

But here, our Lord is declaring plainly that that sin can go no further than our last breath. It must be wiped away else we might not be permitted to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Oh dear Christian, sin, in any of its disguises is not a small matter to God. No sin of any kind will be permitted to enter past the gates of heaven.

And here, with these simple words of our Lord, He is giving both a remedy and a warning concerning some of our deeply held sins. Here, He is telling us, you and me that yes, our forgiveness of another person for their offenses against us is far more important than we might realize. And that we have need to deal rightly with those sins, else we might not be allowed to enter into His kingdom.

Folks, it is so important for us to exercise great care as we read and try to understand the truths that our Lord gives to us within these scriptures. We really must always consider the "context" of God's instructions and commands, and then very carefully apply them to the truth we are considering.

Here, in His instruction given in Matthew chapter 6, our "forgiveness" has a limited scope of application. We are able to forgive another person's transgressions insofar as they are only offensive to us personally. And under the prescribed circumstances given here by the Lord, we really must forgive them.

But we must also understand that our forgiveness of that person and of their sin does not include the excusing of that person's sin against God. Their sin against God is a whole separate matter and must be dealt with separately from us.

Here in our study of these words of the scripture passage that we're considering today, the Lord Jesus is telling us about "His part" in the forgiveness of sin. And may I say, "His", our Lord Jesus' part is by far the most important part!

Let's continue then with our study of some of the last words that Jesus spoke as He hung there on the cross. And in John chapter 19 we read,

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" ²⁹ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. ³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:28-30)

In an earlier study, we considered these first words,

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (John 19:28)

And we were reminded that as we read and consider the words within the scriptures that these words are ever and always "divine words of truth".

While they might sometimes appear to have only a natural meaning or context, they are never to be considered so lightly. We are to know that each word within the pages of these scriptures is truly "God breathed" and Spirit-filled", having deep Spiritual context and meaning, ever and always revealing the divine purposes of God.

And for that reason, we who are devoted followers of Christ must never allow ourselves to be content with the simple and natural meanings that our minds first perceive as we read these words. But rather, we must always want to drink more deeply from their fountain, having eager expectation, always knowing that the Spirit of Christ lives within them and desires to reveal more and more of God's Spiritual truths to us. We read about that in 1 Corinthians chapter 2,

¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Corinthians 2:13-14)

For this reason, I beg of you and me to never allow our relationship with Christ and the presence of His Holy Spirit within us to languish. We have received a precious gift from God and we must press on further into the provisions of understanding that His Holy Spirit has put within us.

Here within these few words is a divine mysterious puzzle, filled with sweet glorious truths and precious meaning. Listen again to these words given in John chapter 19,

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" ²⁹ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. ³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:28-30)

Some questions . . . What were those things that Jesus had accomplished? And what were the scriptures that were fulfilled? And why did Jesus thirst and receive the sour wine vinegar? And what did He declare to be "finished"?

Last week, as we studied these words, we learned that God has a divine plan that was put into place before time began and was being worked out in Christ as He hung there suffering and dying on the cross.

That yes, He was, and is, the eternal Son of God, but that He was, and is, also the Son of Man. And that His humanity was absolutely essential as He became the sacrifice of atonement, and shed His precious blood to pay the penalty for our sins.

May I say those words to you and me over and over again and implant them so deeply within our memory that we will never forget them. That if you and I are ever to be saved, Jesus had to shed His blood and die there on that cross. It is only through His shed blood, that you and I can have eternal life.

Please understand that you and I can never personally bear to suffer the true penalty for our own sins. If we did, we would have to spend the rest of eternity in hell, because eternal damnation really is our true and just penalty.

And we must never fall victim to the belief that so many, many among us have adopted that we can, in some way, do something of ourselves that will save our own souls. It can never be!

The only remedy, our only rescue from that terrible penalty for sin must be that someone else would intervene and pay our penalty for us.

A question that seems to confuse most people, especially us now with our modern-day modes of reasoning is, "But why must someone "pay" that debt? Why can't our debt for sin simply be forgiven and forgotten?"

After all, is that not what we do with each other every day? When we offend someone, we give them a quick, "I'm sorry" with the expectation that the other person will say, "Well, it's OK". And then we resume our activities as if the matter were completely over and done with.

And even when an offense is very serious and we have to beg and plead for forgiveness, our hope and our expectation is still much the same, that the other person will give us their forgiveness and the relationship will move on forward with the offense satisfied completely.

But please understand, that is not the way that sin is dealt with within the holiness of God.

Sin is a vile thing to God. And whether our sin is in our relationships with other people or it is in our direct relationship with God, it is still all the same. No matter where the sin is committed, it is ever and always first against God. Those words of David in Psalm 51, as he confessed His sin to God . . . verse 4,

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight--
That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. (Psalm 51:4)

Yes, the effect of our sin often offends and hurts other people, David had conspired against his friend, Uriah, and had Uriah killed.

And David had also committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. But although those sins were a vile wrongdoing against Uriah and Bathsheba, the sin itself was against God.

That is the nature of sin. It is always first against God. And God is where we must always begin as we seek to find forgiveness for the wrongs we have done.

And please, may we understand that sin, in all its forms and concepts is not just vile to God, the problem is much greater than that. God is "Holy" and His Holiness cannot permit the presence of sin, any sin, no matter how seemingly small it is. Before a person will ever be permitted to enter into God's Kingdom Presence their sin must be removed, paid for in full, and wiped away so completely it will be as if it had never been committed.

Folks, there really is no such thing as a "little white lie", or some of those other silly excuses we apply to our sinful behaviors.

Sin of every kind must absolutely be removed, wiped away and "paid for in full", else we can never enter the eternal presence of God.

Again, you and I might not be able to realize the absolute necessity for that reasoning, but regardless of our ability to understand, it is still an unchangeable law of God.

Simply put, all that we do in this life, each and every action and behavior that we take part in is indelible, unable to simply be pushed aside. And each of those things has its own individual recompense.

And while yes, we might seem to be able to cleverly avoid some of the penalties for our sins while we are still in this life. But when it comes our time to breathe our last breath, we must understand that not even one of our sins will be permitted to remain with us as we enter into the kingdom of God.

There is a Greek word “hilasmos” that is found in several places in the New Testament, and bible scholars use it to define the special payment that God requires for satisfaction for the debt of our sin. That word is translated in two ways, “propitiation” and “expiation”. Both words have similar meanings, but each has a special separate purpose as it relates to the payment for the debt of sin.

One of the meanings within the word is that it is a form of payment, a payment that meets the exact value of the debt. And that debt must be removed from our souls, “expiated”.

The other meaning within the word declares that it satisfies the debt completely, “propitiated”.

Folks, this is all so very, very important to God and He wants you and me to understand how serious our sin is to Him . . . so please bear with me as I say all of this again! The sins you and I commit have an exact debt and an exact penalty. In Romans 6:23 we’re told that “the wages of sin is death.”

And it is as simple and as exact as that. It really is! “The wages of sin is death!” The debt owed when we commit a sin is death, and not just physical death, but eternal death.

And for our debt to be paid for, for propitiation to be effectual, someone must die, either we ourselves, or an acceptable substitute.

I hesitate to use this simple explanation that involves an “acceptable substitute”, but for clarity, I will. One day, we were standing in line to pay our bill at a restaurant when my son suddenly stepped ahead of some soldiers who were about to pay their bill. My son quickly handed the cashier his credit card to pay

for their meal. His payment was an "acceptable substitute" and payment was made in full, the debt was wiped away.

No, this simple explanation is not sufficient to describe what the Lord Jesus did there with His death on the cross to pay for our debt of sin, but it might help a little.

Folks, for the debt of a lifetime of sin by you and me to be paid for in full, for propitiation to be effectual, someone must pay that debt, either we ourselves, or an acceptable substitute. And for us and for our debt of sin, that payment must come from the Lord Jesus. He is an acceptable substitute, the only acceptable substitute.

But why would that be so? . . . It is because Jesus is El Shaddai, God Almighty, The All-Sufficient One, able to meet every need. He and He alone is worthy, and He and He alone is sufficient to pay the full and due penalty for the debt of our sin.

And His death was not only sufficient to pay our debt, His death actually and fully satisfied all the requirements of the law so that our sins could be wiped away and remembered no longer.

That is what is meant by the words given in verse 28, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished."

Somewhere, within all that He was doing there on the cross that day, Jesus did exactly what it took to pay the penalty for sin and to satisfy its debt.

And here, as He declared "It is finished", He was acknowledging that everything that needed to be accomplished had been done.

And may we also keep reminding ourselves that in coming to the earth, Jesus never, for a moment, laid aside His position of deity.

He was and is forever God and judge over all creation. And these words were also a judicial declaration being made from the Trinity of God. All things truly were accomplished and the payment for the debt of our sin was accepted and completely "finished".

May I take one more moment and give a further explanation of these words, "It is finished"? Remember that God wants everyone to fully understand and be without excuse when they stand before Him in judgment.

And the manner and the language that Jesus used as He spoke these words give evidence that He wanted everyone to have a clear understanding of them.

The words, "It is finished", are translated from the Aramaic word, "Tetelestai". And that word gives the same meaning as we would use today when an outstanding debt, such as, a loan, or a mortgage has been "paid in full".

And I have no doubt that God was very intentional in His use of that word, because anyone of Jesus' day and anyone of our day would recognize the importance of having the promissory note that evidences their debt being stamped "Paid in Full".

It means that the Bank or the Loan Company or the Mortgage Company can never again come back to you and demand further payment. Your debt has been paid in full.

May I say further that if you ever do borrow money that you cannot repay, and those who loan you the money simply tell you that you do not have to repay them, having not actually repaid the money, there will always be a sense of debt still outstanding! You incurred a debt that has never been paid.

But not so when the debt has actually been repaid! When a debt has been paid in full and the debt "satisfied", there is nothing left outstanding. Satisfaction has been made!

And that is exactly, "exactly", what took place when Jesus died there on the cross. He paid the debt for your and my sin "in full" and "satisfaction" has been accomplished!

And no one, especially the "accuser" "satan" can ever stand in the courts of God and accuse you and me of our sin. Our sin has been paid in full and the due penalty has been wiped away, fully and completely.

And listen, even more, these scriptures assure us that this Holy thing that Jesus has done for us is a completely free and unmerited “gift”. A gift that you and I do not have to do anything to earn or to repay!

The only thing that you and I are required to do is to simply “receive” His free gift. That is all.

I'll close with those precious words of Ephesians chapter 2.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

Pray with me.