**“Father, Forgive Them”**

Luke 23:26-56

Key Verse: 34a

**“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”**

After he had been arrested, Jesus went through trials by the religious leaders, the High Priest, the Roman governor Pilate, King of Judea Herod, and then back to Pilot. During the trials, he was slapped, struck, and beaten. He was mocked, ridiculed, clothed in a purple robe and crowned with thorns. Finally, he was handed over to be crucified. Yet, through it all, nothing but the truth was revealed: Jesus was innocent. He is the Son of God, the King of the Jews, and the promised Messiah. Jesus was condemned in our places as the Son of God.

In today’s passage, we see How Jesus takes away the sin of the world and what he accomplished through his death. Sacrificing himself as the perfect lamb of God, Jesus takes away all our sins but gives us amazing grace of forgiveness of sins. As we follow Jesus’ way to the cross, we may witness Jesus’ suffering and death for our sins. In response, we humbly come before the cross of Jesus in repentance, praying “Jesus, Remember me.”

**First, Father Forgive Them (26-34a)**

Verse 26 says, **“As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.”** This verse reveals how severely broken and exhausted Jesus was. After being handed over to soldiers, he was flogged with a whip that had pieces of bone and metal embedded in its end. How a whip works is due to a principle called “the conservation of energy.” As you crack a whip, the motion causes the tip to snap at speeds exceeding 900 mph, creating a sonic boom. Each strike tore through the skin, cut deep into muscle, and even exposed bones. The blood loss was immense, leading to extreme weakness and shock. Often many victims of such brutal beating lost consciousness or even died. Jesus, weakened beyond endurance, was not able to carry His cross. So, the Roman soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry it behind Him.

At that time, Simon was not a follower of Jesus. He must have felt so unfortunate to be forced to carry Jesus’ cross. But Tradition holds that this moment became a turning point for him and his family, leading them to become followers of Jesus. What seemed like Misfortune can often turn into a life-changing encounter with a Savior. Later, Simon must have felt so honored to be able to help Jesus carry his cross.

As Jesus was led to Golgotha, which means “the place of the skull”, a large crowd followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. They were really sorry for Jesus, the innocent man who had been mocked, beaten, severely flogged, and condemned to crucifixion. But Jesus did not thank them for their tears. Listen to what Jesus said. Verse 28 says, **“Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.’”** Jesus said “Do not weep for me.” He did not seek their pity or sympathy. Rather, he wanted them to recognize the purpose of his sacrifice and turn to God in repentance.

We should not feel sorry for Jesus. Jesus was not a victim of anyone. Instead, he was fulfilling the will of God, by taking upon himself the sin of the world as the Lamb of God. Though the suffering was immense, with every step, he was winning a great victory to bring the salvation of all people. So, Don’t be sorry for Jesus. If we do so, we are actually missing the point of the cross. Rather, we must weep for ourselves and for our children. Why? Look at verses 29-30. Jesus was warning about the coming judgment of God upon Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem was fulfilled in 70 A.D - when the Roman general Titus led a devastating siege against the city. Though Israel was God’s chosen people, this judgment came upon them because of their sin - they rejected the Son of God out of their wickedness and unfaithfulness. Jesus’ warning was not just for Israel - it is for us as well. Because of our sins, we too will face the terrible judgment of God. In Revelation 6, John describes the coming of God’s judgment. Rev 6:16-17 says, **“They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?’”** Because of our sins, we are all destined to die and after that to face judgment (Heb 9:27). This judgment will be so terrible that sinners will wish that an entire mountain could cover them to hide from the Lord’s wrath. So, when we look upon the cross of Jesus, we should weep, but not for Jesus. Rather, we should weep for our own sins that cause Jesus to suffer; we should weep for the sins of our children that send Jesus to the cross.

So, what makes you sorry or weep? Tonight, many football fans - either Kansas City Chiefs or Philadelphia Eagles - will weep over the loss of the super bowl game. Others may feel sorry if the stock market drops, if they lose their job, or if they fail a class. On the other hand, some may take pride in being powerful or successful sinners in the world. But when we look at the cross, we should weep tears of repentance for our sins - pride, envy, lust, ignorance, greed. We should weep for our children when they are consumed by pragmatic and please-seeking culture. We should weep for our friends when they suffer under the power of sins - addictions, emptiness, lust or a sense of meaninglessness. It is because sooner or later we will all stand before God and face his dreadful judgement. Are you really sorry for your sins? Then, come under the cross of Jesus with tears of repentance.

Let’s read verses 32-34a together. **“When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** The Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, along with two criminals -Mark tells us they were robbers - one on his right and the other on his left. There was Jesus, hung on the cross, bloodied, beaten, with a crown of thorns pressed into his head. We know that nails were driven into Jesus’ hands, probably through the wrist and also into his feet, fasting his body on the cross. He was enduring the most agonizing form of execution ever devised by man.Beyond the physical torment, it was shameful, humiliating and cursed death.

Now why was Jesus on the cross? Because he came to pay the price for our sins. Our sins nailed him on the cross. Isaiah prophesied that “Surely he took up our pain, and bore our suffering… he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4-5) Are we really sorry for our sins? Let us listen to Jesus’ words in his excruciating pain? Verse 34a says “Father, forgive them, for they did not know what they are doing.” Jesus prayed, not for himself, but for sinners - who nailed him on the cross - it includes all of us. His prayer was not for revenge, but for forgiveness. What can we learn from Jesus’ prayer on the cross for us?

First, Jesus loves us. His love for us is sacrificial - he gave his life for our sins. His love is unconditional - he loves us even while we are sinners, enemies of God. Romans 5:8 said “But God demonstrated his own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This love is amazing love of God that heals our wounds. This love is an amazing love that empowers sinners to die to sins, but live for righteousness. (1P2:24) Even if I am broken inside and out, Even if I am defiled deep within, Even if I were the very one who nails him in my arrogance - Jesus still loves me. For this love is unfailing love.

Second, we are sinners who need forgiveness and God is willing to forgive us. For this purpose to forgive our sins, God sent his son. For this purpose, Jesus came into this world as a man. For this purpose, Jesus offered himself as the sin offering. Now for this purpose, Jesus intercedes for us even in his suffering, praying “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” We may have many needs. But above all, we need forgiveness. Because forgiveness is the only way for us to be free from the power of sin; be free from the sense of condemnation; be free from the burden of guilt. In Hebrews 10, we see this, “[Jesus] said [to God], “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He set aside the first to establish the second. and By that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ Once for all… For by one sacrifice he had made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Through Jesus’ sacrifice, we have been made Holy; All our sins are forgiven; The blood of Jesus washes away all our sins.

 “Forthere, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!” Who was Jesus praying for? It was for the Romand, for they did not know that they were killing the Sonof God. God. It was for the Jew for they did not know that they had rejected their own king, the promised Messiah. It is also for all sinners for we sinners reject God’s love and truth and go astray. However, God forgives all our sins. Not because we are somebody nor do we deserve his grace. Simply because of Jesus’ sacrifices and because of Jesus’ prayer for us.

 Are you certain of God’s love for you? God loves sinners so much that he has declared His love on every page of the Bible. Isaiah 43:25 says, **“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”** Psalm 103:12 says, **“as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”** Hebrews 8:12 says, **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”** We may remember how Jesus prayed for us on the cross. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

**II. Jesus, Remember me (34b-56)**

 Picture Jesus hanging on a cross, bloody and between criminals. What a shameful and horrible way to die. How do you see Jesus on a cross? Look at verse 34b -38. The roman soldiers, the crowd of people, the religious leaders, and even one of the criminals mocked Jesus, saying -“If you are the Messiah, the chosen one, save yourself; If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” They all questioned Jesus’ identity and power. To them, Jesus on the cross was a Nobody, a Failure, just one of Criminals, and powerless victim who could not do anything.

However, one criminal saw Jesus quite differently. Look what he said in verses 40-42. **“Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”** Then he said, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** What’s amazing here is that this criminal confessed his sins, admitting that he deserved to be punished. Most Criminals do not admit they are guilty. Even when they do, they often don’t think they should be punished. However, this man recognized his sin before God. He also acknowledged that Jesus was innocent.

But the most remarkable thing he did is that he cried out to Jesus - “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Though everyone mocked Jesus, this man believed that Jesus was the king of Jesus, the promised Messiah. He knew that he deserved the death penalty; He did not deserve the grace of forgiveness of sin at this last moment of his life. Even so, he believed that Jesus surely loved him and forgave his sins. Definitely, he heard Jesus’ prayer, as if he prayed, “Father, forgive Him…” There was nothing he could depend on. But, only by faith in His love, he asked for Jesus to have mercy on him, saying “Jesus, Remember me!” Only by faith in Jesus, the king of the Jew, he prayed “Jesus, remember me when he come into your kingdom.”

Jesus did not respond to any of the mockers, but he responded to this man of faith. In verse 43. Jesus said, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise”** (43). His faith was rewarded with forgiveness. This Criminal teaches us how to receive the grace of God. First and Most of all, we must admit that we are sinners fully deserving of the death penalty. We must believe that Jesus loves us and forgives our sins. Only by faith, we must ask Jesus to have mercy on us. “Jesus, remember me…” His story gives hope to many - that no person is too sinful and no sin too great to be forgiven. As long as we are still breathing there is hope for Jesus is love.

 Look at verses 44-46. It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. Then, the curtain of the temple was torn in two (from top to bottom.) (Mt 27:51) When the price had been paid and sin was broken, God ripped the curtain of the temple in two from top to bottom. The curtain was a symbol to the Jews of barrier or separation from God. Because of sin, we cannot come into the presence of the holy God or we will die. But through Jesus’ sacrifice, the atonement for sin, Jesus broke the barrier. Hebrews 10:19-20 read “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.” God accepted Jesus’ body and blood as the atonement for all our sins. In this way, Jesus made peace between God and us; he reconciled us to God and restored our relationship with God. Because of what Jesus had done, we come to God freely; praise God freely; worship God freely; we serve the living God. We do not have to go to Jerusalem to see God; we do not have to bring a sin offering for a priest to sacrifice for our sins in the temple. Because by the sacrifice of himself, Jesus takes away the sins Once for All.

The moment of Jesus’ death now came. Look at verse 46. Jesus called out with a loud voice. “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

 No one took away his life, but in fact Jesus offered his life to God. Usually, death brings us to tears of sorrow. However, the death of Jesus had brought great victory on those who witnessed the cross of Jesus.

 The Centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” There was another man named Joseph of Arimathea. He was a secret follower of Jesus, possibly due to fear or uncertainty. But when he witnessed Jesus' death on a cross, he came out of the shadows. The death of Jesus convicted him that Jesus is the Messiah, and empowered to overcome fear. So, he boldly went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. It could be career suicide. He could be kicked out of the council and from the Jewish society even. He took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb. Joseph gave Jesus an honorable burial. The women witnessed all these to the end. Joseph prepared for what comes after His death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Through this passage, we learned the fact that Jesus stuffed and died on a cross in the middle of the criminals. How would you respond to Jesus who loves, who prays for you, who sacrifices himself for you? Jesus sacrificed himself as the perfect lamb of God for our sins.

We can choose to do one of two things. The first one is to continue to live in ignorance of God’s forgiveness and remain in our sin. Then, we cannot avoid God’s judgement. The other one is to come to the cross of Jesus, acknowledging we are sinners, confessing our sins by depending on His love, and asking His mercy - “Jesus, Remember me.” Then, all our sins will be washed away. We will have a new life, new identity, new heart, new spirit. There will be on condemnation in Christ Jesus. The cross is not a human tragedy in which we should cry endlessly for Jesus but it is the symbol of forgiveness and an open invitation from God. So let us come. Amen. Jesus takes away all our sins.