

“Modeling Forgiveness” Luke 23:33-43, Sermon Notes
Pastor Marc Wragg
Saving Grace Bible Church
October 15th, 2017
Morning Worship Service

Text

“And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.³⁴ But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.³⁵ And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.’³⁶ And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,³⁷ and saying, ‘If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!’³⁸ Now there was also an inscription above Him, ‘THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.’³⁹ And one of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, ‘Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’⁴² And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’⁴³ And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.’” (Luke 23:33-43 NAS)

Textual Purpose: to record the final acts and sayings of Christ before He died

Sermonic Purpose: to demonstrate the forgiveness of Christ both privately and publicly on the cross

Intro

We have been talking about forgiveness. I know for some time now and I trust I am not wearing out your patience

- This topic is so practical that it literally impacts everyone in this room
- There are endless applications
- We all need forgiveness and each of us need to be regularly forgiving others
- And I am sure I have not even begun to answer all of your questions

I have purposed to lay down the biblical principles taught by Christ. I have purposely stepped out of the fray of the modern forgiveness discussion to see simply what is said and then to press into the discussion today

- Last week I finally told you how to forgive
- After explaining why we forgive, when we forgive, who we forgive, what forgiveness produces, we finally saw how
- Today again we will clarify how we forgive and illustrate it with the work of Christ on the cross
- Obviously when we look at forgiveness it is important to look at the cross

Luke 23:33-43

Admittedly there are some textual difficulties with this text

- There are some early text manuscripts which do not have the saying of Christ as recorded in verse 34
- This may even be demonstrated in your translations
- In my translation there is a foot note explaining early manuscripts exclude this saying
- Some put the beginning of verse 34 in brackets
- The NET bible has the first part of the verse, Jesus' saying, in italics indicating it is likely not an original saying
- "The absence of these words from such early and diverse witnesses as [Ɱ75 B D* W Θ ita, syrs copsa, al] is most impressive and can scarcely be explained as a deliberate excision by copyists who, considering the fall of Jerusalem to be proof that God had not forgiven the Jews, could not allow it to appear that the prayer of Jesus had remained unanswered."

There is also strong support for this verse to be included

- While some early manuscripts do not have this statement, others do
- Net Bible: "It is included in Ɱ*2 (A) C D² L Ψ 0250 |¹, (13) 33 Ū lat sy^{c,p,h}. It also fits a major Lukan theme of forgiving the enemies (6:27-36), and it has a parallel in Stephen's response in Acts 7:60. The lack of parallels in the other Gospels argues also for inclusion here."
- This is one of 7 statements Jesus makes on the cross as recorded by Luke
- The pattern of Luke's writing favors the phrase being original – See Jesus' comments in Luke 6:27-36
- The likelihood that the scribes did not understand how to apply the message so they removed it explained why it was excluded
- The harder reading is likely the better reading

I personally land on the side of this verse being part of Luke's original writing

- But mind you I am not building my whole case of forgiveness on this verse
- Actually, we are going to use this section of scripture to illustrate what we have been saying for the last 7 weeks
- Everything we have said about forgiveness being unconditional and expressed both privately before God from the heart and publicly in demonstrations of restoration are clearly demonstrated in this context
 - This text, far from being a difficult text to understand how Jesus could forgive His enemies can be understood clearly when we apply Jesus' teaching on forgiveness to His own life
- AND if we did not have this verse we still had Acts 7:60 and Stephen's example
- I also understand that this passage is hard for many to understand what is being taught here
- Because it is hard to understand is also a good reason for supporting its placement here. Scribes would be more inclined to remove difficulties and add words to bring clarity. So the harder reading is typically, though not always, the best reading

Also as you might imagine, those who take the conditional forgiveness view tend to lean towards calling this verse a textual variant and not really paying attention to it

- The argument goes like this
- Well obviously Jesus did not forgive everyone so He can't be praying for their forgiveness here
- "Jesus prayed that those who crucified him would be forgiven in the future – he did not thank God that they were already forgiven." Brauns pg 145
 - Actually neither is true about this text
 - He did not pray for them to be saved in the future
 - Nor did He thank God for a present forgiveness
- Metzger says that Jesus could not be praying for the Jews forgiveness because they were invaded later by Rome and judged
 - How could Jesus pray for their forgiveness and then have the Jews judged by Rome?
- So if people still suffered punishment then Jesus was not really praying for forgiveness or granting forgiveness

Let the record show we brought up the argument and we will address it as we unfold this text

What is forgiveness?

- I am making the case that:

Forgiveness is an act of love whereby the debt of sin is unconditionally released by the offended because God has lavishly released us of our impossible debt

- I would go one step further and say that forgiveness is demonstrated in many different contexts and this is why there seems to be great confusion:

Forgiveness is demonstrated privately before God as we pray for and seek the best for the sinner and publicly as we reconcile and demonstrate actively the practice of forgiveness

While forgiveness is always an unconditional act of love, reconciliation is always conditional. The offender may not experience the full benefits of our forgiveness until he has repented

You see forgiveness flows out of love and compassion for sinners. Forgiveness is an act of love

- Matt 18:27

"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt." (Matthew 18:27 NAS)

12x the word for compassion is used in the NT

- Translated as compassion, or pity
- Matt. 9:36, Matt. 14:14, Matt. 15:32, Matt. 18:27, Matt. 20:34, Mk. 1:41, Mk. 6:34, Mk. 8:2, Mk. 9:22, Lk. 7:13, Lk. 10:33, Lk. 15:20
- The compassion Jesus had for the sick and needy
- The compassion of the Father shown toward the prodigal son in Luke 15:20

The Lord forgave because He loved. He had compassion for the sinner

- This is always the basis of our forgiveness
- God's character
- This is also the basis of our forgiveness of others. God calls us to love sinners like He loves sinners

Here is where many get stuck: You can be a forgiving person and still have someone in your life who is not enjoying the benefits of being forgiven. You can even show forgiveness towards others and still they are not repentant and thus have all the benefits of forgiveness

You can be forgiving and still have someone in your life who does not have the full benefit of forgiveness

- This text will demonstrate for us that Jesus, while being murdered, forgave His murderers and sought to show redemptive forgiveness to the repentant criminal

One might say, are we just talking semantics here?

- Brauns would say "yes you are giving an unconditional offer of forgiveness that they must, like a gift, take, open it up, and receive it."
- Here is what I don't like about Braun's illustration of forgiveness being like a gift given that needs to be open, it means that we are not actually forgiving until someone opens the gift. That is to say until someone actually repents we are not forgiving
- The offender then makes us forgiving when they repent and take hold of our forgiveness
- But this does not reflect what we are taught in scripture and to make it work we have to read it back in or imply that this is what is being taught. Or to say it clearly, this is not explicitly taught at all in the scriptures and most certainly as we have seen in the teaching of Jesus Christ

There is not one explicit statement at all supporting the conditional view. And the passages which do seem to implicate a conditional forgiveness are pressed to be applied as normative practice for the Church

Here is what I am saying plainly: We forgive others from the heart. We pray for them. We actively seek the best for them. We desire to demonstrate full reconciliation. We call them to repentance so that they can have the full benefits of our relationship

- Choosing to cover debt
- Choosing to remove debt
- Choosing to cast debt off is an unconditional act of selfless love to undeserving sinners
- The sinner taking our forgiveness
- The sinner walking in repentance to enjoy the forgiveness given is a conditional work on the part of the sinner and only reveals that the victim was forgiving. It does not make the victim forgiving

What is conditional is whether the sinner has the benefits of forgiveness

You can be forgiving someone and they still not repent and take hold of your forgiveness and thus they are not enjoying the benefits of forgiveness

- Your offer of forgiveness
- Your expressions of forgiveness – in prayer and pursuit
- Your demonstrations of forgiveness showing that you are a forgiving person and have willingly forgiven the sinner unconditionally can be rebuffed and not received by an unrepentant offender

Do you see the difference here?

- Brauns says unless the person repents and receives your forgiveness you have not and cannot forgive them
- I am saying, you forgive the person and when they have repented you show them publicly what you have already demonstrated privately, that you forgive them

The proof that this is the NT model is the life of Jesus Himself

Body

In this text we see four parts to God's redemptive love demonstrating the forgiveness of God towards sinners

- 1. The Context of Redemptive Love**
- 2. An Act of Redemptive Love**
- 3. The Need for Redemptive Love**
- 4. The Application of Redemptive Love**

The Context of Redemptive Love vs 33:

“And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.”

- Here Luke translates the name for his readers
- “And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,” (Matthew 27:33 NAS)

This is the place where they came to crucify criminals

- It was the place where capital punishment was carried out
- Mind you, by this time, Jesus is brought to the cross on false charges
- He was arrested in the middle of the night, in fear of the people
- He was tried in the middle of the night, against the law of the Jews
- He was accused by false witnesses as being a blasphemer against the law of the Jews
- He was turned over to the Roman authorities to be punished
- He was lead to Golgotha and crucified
- Nails driven into His hands and feet
- He was lifted up on a cross. As the strength left His body He would eventually give into His wounds and suffocate

The flogging He received before the crucifixion would speed up the process of His death

- As His body would be convulsing from the pain of open wounds on His back
- As the shock would be setting in upon Him for the nails piecing through Him
- As He would be hanging from the cross it would become harder for Him to breath and He would have stand erect to get more air but each time His legs would become weaker

The need to get breath to keep surviving is the reason why Roman soldiers would break the legs of the criminals so that they would not have the strength to keep breathing and thus they would give into the death penalty they were to receive

Here Luke simply records, "There they crucified Him"

- Luke adds with two other criminals. One on His right and one on His left
- Jesus was crucified with the common criminals
- He was treated like other sinners
- Again He died in our place

An Act of Redemptive Love vs 34a:

"But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'"

- In the midst of being murdered He pours out forgiveness towards the soldiers who had crucified Him

One of the questions in this text is who is Jesus praying forgiveness for?

- Some have concluded the Jews as they were the reason why He was there
- Some say it was the bystanders and crowds which had called for His crucifixion and had come to watch
- Others, for the Roman soldiers who were demonstrating their ignorance for the significance of the events before them

Since the context of what follows addresses the immediate crowd which would include the Roman Soldiers and the criminals at His left and right, I think it is safe to conclude that these were the ones Jesus was specifically praying for. And if others want to expand the scope. Fine I won't argue. The immediate crowd, along with the soldiers cannot be excluded from Jesus' prayer of forgiveness

Now what is Jesus Praying for and Why?

- Obviously He is praying for forgiveness of those around Him

Isn't this strange?

- You would say yeah because He is being murdered so it would be strange to be so gracious to those who were hurting you
- Yes, but there is more that is odd here. When did Christ ever seek permission to forgive or even turn over his ability to forgive? Only here

When Jesus healed the Paralytic, He said "Your sins are forgiven" look at Matt 9:2, 5

- Jesus simply declared you are forgiven
- He did not ask if it was ok with the Father
- There is something different happening here
- Something out of the ordinary for the work of Christ
- Something particularly revealing about His incarnational work

You remember Luke 7:36-50 the woman who was a sinner. Her sins were forgiven her. And He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." (Luke 7:48 NAS)

- Jesus does not say, I have asked the Father to forgive you
- He declares she has been forgiven

Later in this same context the thief on the cross is given the promise of being with Christ in paradise, implying his sins were forgiven

But here Jesus does something different, He turns to the Father and prays for forgiveness

- What is happening here?
- Let me suggest we do not have to throw this verse out because we cannot understand what is happening
- We do not need to believe that Jesus just applied a universal atonement to the whole world and covered everyone's sin

What you have here is a glimpse of perfect humanity applying the teaching of forgiveness towards those who were sinning against Him

- What better proof of the God man going to the cross as a perfect sacrifice, than Christ modeling human forgiveness?

Whenever Christ is demonstrating the forgiveness of God He simply declares it. You are forgiven. You have been forgiven. Or as we will see in a minute, today you will be with me in paradise

- But in this moment, there is something different
- Jesus as the suffering servant
- Jesus as the victim of jealousy and murderous intent
- Jesus, the spotless lamb, treated like a common criminal
- Jesus taking the punishment and wrath all sinners deserve as a man under the law of God
- Jesus the spotless Lamb of God taking upon Himself, as God's perfect substitute the wrath of God and the full consequence of sin, death

As a man He applies His own teaching

- He prays for His enemies
- He seeks their forgiveness
- He demonstrates that He is releasing the debt and seeks that God the Father would do the same
- In effect, He turns over His rights to the Father and lets the Father judge

This is the perfect application of Mark 11:25

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." (Mark 11:25 NAS)

- Luke 23:34 is the perfect illustration of unconditional love poured out on sinners as Christ seeks to demonstrate forgiveness to those who were sinning against Him

Some have said here that Jesus was only offering forgiveness to those around but that He did not actually forgive them:

"The gracious offer is unconditional. Christians should always have a disposition of grace toward those who offended them. This is what Jesus modeled on the cross when he prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Even while he was dying an excruciating death, and before there was any repentance on the part of those who crucified him, he offered grace. We are to follow his example." Brauns pg 55

But let us be clear here:

- There is no offer in verse 34a
 - He was not speaking to the crowds, the soldiers, or the Jews. He was speaking to His Father
- There is no sense that Jesus is saying I would like you to know that I am willing to forgive these people if they will only accept my offer

There is a prayer "FOR" forgiveness

- Father forgive them
- Christ is asking for their forgiveness
- Christ is seeking the full pardon of those who had sinned against Him
- Christ is showing His forgiveness of them by seeking their ultimate forgiveness from the Father

Christ is demonstrating for us how we show forgiveness towards those who sin against us

- We seek their pardon
- We do not desire any right to hold on to the sinner's debt
- We entreat God to deliver the sinner

You see Christ is not demonstrating an attitude of forgiveness. He is showing forgiveness. He is demonstrating forgiveness from the heart as He is privately seeking the Father for the sinner's freedom

- This is forgiveness
- This does not mean the sinner is forgiven from God but it does mean that Christ is forgiving and He is demonstrating that He is forgiving
- The person still needs to repent to enjoy the full benefits of forgiveness

Let's make a couple more observations and then bring this all together

The Need for Redemptive Love:

“And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.³⁵ And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.”³⁶ And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,³⁷ and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”³⁸ Now there was also an inscription above Him, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”³⁹ And one of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”

Clearly there is a lot of need for redemptive love in this text

- The soldiers were dividing Christ’s cloths. The spoils of their work
- The people were standing and watching. Some were gawkers. Others, like the religious leaders wanted to see the work completed
- Some were there for love and concern

Vs 35 People were sneering at Him

- Save yourself Son of God
- Mocking Him

Vs 36 Even the Soldiers got into the act, and mocked Him as they offered Him sour wine

- The sour wine was an act of mercy to take away the pain and suffering
- The derision was an act of mockery

Vs 37 describes their mockery

Vs 38 explains why the torment. He was there dying because the Jews rejected Him. Their rejection became the source of intense mockery and suffering

The need for forgiveness was great

As if this was not BAD ENOUGH look at verse 39

“And one of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”

- Even one of the other criminals joined in on the abuse
- Like “come on man and do something here if You are the Christ”
- “You claim to be the Christ save yourself and us while you are at it.”
- “Prove who you are.”

This is the most intense trial ever. Prove who you really are. Vindicate yourself

The Application of Redemptive Love:

"But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"⁴¹ "And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:33-43 NAS)

In the midst of all the darkness surrounding the events of Christ's death are the grand demonstrations of His great love

- One sinner, a criminal, rebuked His fellow criminal
- He believed
- He trusted Christ. He saw that Christ was indeed the Son of God and He stood for Christ

⁴¹ "And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

- Basically saying, Jesus is innocent we are not
- This man is righteous we are not

Then the criminal turns and says to Jesus vs 42

⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

- What is he asking for here? Jesus save me
- The criminal demonstrates saving faith and repentance here
- When you come in Your kingdom, bring me
- Faith in Jesus
- Faith in a resurrection
- Faith in a future work of God
- Faith in a restoration
- Faith in Christ's innocence
- Faith in Christ's work and accomplishments
- Faith in Christ. He believed

The wonderful promise in verse 43

⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

- Oh, the full pardon
- You are forgiven
- You will be with me in Paradise

Obviously to be with Jesus that day in paradise means that he had received salvation and with that, the forgiveness of sins

- No sinner has or will enter into the Kingdom of God without being cleansed by God
- You must have your sins forgiven
- The sins of this criminal were forgiven

Conclusion

So let us reconcile the events

- Jesus prayed for forgiveness
- Yet not everyone was saved
- One criminal went to destruction the other was saved
- Why? One had faith and believed and received the forgiveness of God while the other did not?

What can we conclude from this?

- We should conclude that Jesus was willing to forgive and He sought to show His forgiveness
- Jesus demonstrated forgiveness
- Jesus did forgive the sinner who repented

If you do not repent and believe upon Christ you will not receive the forgiveness of your sins

- God is able to be a forgiving God and still we are not forgiven until we repent and believe

The same is true for us. We can be forgiving towards those who sin against us but they may not experience the full benefits of our forgiveness in the context of restoration until they have repented from their sin

- Their repentance does not make us forgiving any more than our forgiveness makes them repentant. Reconciliation is the condition in which repentance and forgiveness are evidenced and practiced

Someone who is not willing to repent is not willing to reconcile

Someone who is not willing to forgive is not willing to reconcile

Jesus demonstrated He was seeking reconciliation by seeking forgiveness for those who sinned against Him. When the opportunity came and a sinner repented seeking reconciliation, Jesus demonstrated what He had already prayed for the sinner to receive

- We should act the same way
- We pray for sinners, we seek them, when they repent we show them what we have been seeking for them to experience: the freedom from their debt

Sinners don't make us forgiving by their repentance. Sinners reveal our forgiveness as they enjoy freedom from their debt when they repent