

An Example in Forgiveness Matthew 27/Luke 23

The world we live in, the people we encounter, the lies, the cheating, the distrust, the gossip, the backbiting, and the selfishness do not give us much cause to want to forgive people or show them mercy.

Most of the time when we are wronged the first thing we do is well up with anger because our pride was challenged or our trust was broken. Next we tend to think up a plan to “get back” or “get even” with the person who wronged us.

Some of us harbor anger, hate, and bitterness for years letting it swell inside of us like a cancerous tumor slowing growing and taking over us until we cannot seem to function.

Un-forgiveness can cause individuals to have physical problems, emotional problems, mental problems, and definitely spiritual problems.

Un-forgiveness can cause people to do some of the most horrendous things to others including splitting churches, families, and businesses.

The inability to grant genuine forgiveness is not just limited to the lost world; it is prevalent within the church as well.

The church, the family of God will never experience true revival and a pouring out of the Spirit of God as long as those in the body harbor un-forgiveness toward one another.

Last week we discussed the betrayal and the trials of Jesus. We saw that as Jesus faced different people and different circumstances how the reactions varied. We asked some very pointed questions to place ourselves in those scenarios and to make us think hard about how we react to Jesus under various circumstances.

Today we will follow Jesus from the pronouncement of his fate from Pilate to the beating, to the actual crucifixion. We will notice how even in the midst of insults, blasphemies, and beatings Jesus still seeks forgiveness for his perpetrators.

May we seriously consider your actions in light of Jesus'. He willingly forgave the very people who conspired against him, who lied about him, who betrayed him, who coward away from him, who took the flesh off of his body, who spilled the blood from his brow, who drove the nails in his hands, and who hung him on the cross to die.

Can we honestly convince ourselves that we have the right to harbor un-forgiveness, bitterness, anger, or hatred toward anyone after knowing the example Christ left for us?

As we go on this path with our Savior today, may we see what Jesus underwent not only for the forgiveness of the very ones who killed Him, but for you.

Let us remember, Christ died for your sins and mine. He died for your envy, your anger, your greed. He died for our lusts and our vulgar speech. He died for the times we choose to live for the world instead of Him.

Thinking of Christ's example, think in your mind of people, or a person that you have not forgiven. I want you to consider your reason for not forgiving them. And then after this message I want you to ponder if you have the right to harbor bitterness or un-forgiveness after the example that Jesus has given.

I. SCOURGED AND BEATEN (Mt. 27:26-32)

When we left Christ last, He had been returned to Pilate by Herod and now Pilate is going to present Christ along with Barabbas to the crowd.

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. ²⁸ They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹ And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. ³¹ After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him. ³² As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

As we read and hear the passage, we may rush over it because we do not want to hear, or because many of us have read over them so many times. But it is imperative to keep a proper understanding and a constant remembrance of what our Savior underwent for us.

Let us examine these verses so that we may get a better understanding of exactly what Jesus voluntarily went through for us.

Just as Pilate released Barabbas, he has Jesus scourged. Now remember Christ had already been beaten, ridiculed, and mocked by the Jewish courts, now he will undergo even worse treatment by the Romans.

I want to give you a better understanding of what scourging was. Jesus would have been stretched over a pillar with his hands tied; his shirt removed so that his back and chest was bare. A Roman soldier would then take a whip with many ends and entangled within the leather cords would be pieces of metal, glass, or bone.

A Roman soldier would then proceed to give thirteen strokes on the back and then thirteen strokes on each shoulder for a total of 39 lashes.

This would literally tear the back to ribbons. Sometimes it would even tear out an eye. Many men died undergoing it. Few retained consciousness.

Christ's back was one mass of open, raw, quivering flesh, gushing with blood.

As if that was not enough, Jesus was taken to the Praetorium which was Herod the Great's palace that Roman governors used while in Jerusalem.

Once there the soldiers continued to mock our Lord. What was ironic is that they dressed him up in a fine robe, placed a crown of thorns upon his head, and kneeled to him as an insult to him, but that is precisely what they should have done; they just did not realize it.

Verse 30 declares that even after all of the pain and suffering that the Roman soldiers gathered to beat him in the head with the reed. This beating fulfilled the prophecies given by Micah 5:1, *"... with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek."*

Exhausted from a sleepless night, severely wounded and broken by his scourging and multiple beatings, Jesus was given His cross to carry but was unable to continue.

The Roman guards order Simon, more than likely a Jew coming from North Africa to partake in the Passover, to take the cross and carry it for Jesus.

As we look at this wretched episode in the life of Jesus we should feel and know a few things.

1. We should know that Jesus loved us and thought of us even during all of this. He could have given in and died on the scourging pillar, but he knew that he must undergo the cross.
2. We should know that as the Father gave Jesus the strength and the courage to endure such horrible tragedies; he will also give it to you.
 - a. Beloved, remember when you are in a trial, when the road seems hard that God is there for you and he will give you strength when you need it.
 - b. Whatever you are going through in life, God is there for you: family problems, financial troubles, relationship issues, work situations, addictions, strongholds, attitudes, and behaviors.

God has your best in mind. All you need to do is give him your all, your heart, your everything and he will start to work on you. God does not promise overnight fixes, because most of your issues did not start overnight.

God does promise he will come to you, save you, restore you, and give you His Holy Spirit. And that He will walk by your side through it all.

II. CRUCIFIED (Mt. 27:33-37)

³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, ³⁴ they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.³⁵ And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there ³⁷ And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

They arrived at the site of the crucifixion called Golgotha. The site was more than likely at the city gate so that the execution would be as public as possible so that it would be a warning to others.

Verse 34 tells us that they tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh to drink. Women in Jerusalem normally prepared a mixture like this to offer to those undergoing execution. This mixture would have dulled the pain. Jesus refused so that he would be fully conscious for the event.

The Roman guards divided up his clothing. A Jew wore 5 articles of clothing: the inner robe, the outer robe, the sandals, the girdle, and the tunic.

This was also a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18 in which David prophesies, *“they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”*

Mark 15:25 tells us that they crucified him during *the third hour* which was 9:00am. None of the gospel writers tell us in detail what took place during a crucifixion. They did not have to because the original readers would know exactly what Christ was enduring.

Sometimes the upright beam was already erected, and the prisoner was nailed to his cross and hoisted by ropes upon the upright pole. Other times the cross was attached to the upright, then the prisoner was nailed to the cross, then the whole piece was lifted into place to be dropped into the hole.

From medical staff, historical writings, and archaeological excavations we have been able to get a good understanding of what took place during an execution.

Frederick Farrar describes crucifixion in this way:

“A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly-dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, shame, long torment,- all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness.”

“The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries-especially at the head and stomach-became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood, and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst, and all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety, which made the prospect of death itself seem delicious and an exquisite release.”

One thing is clear. The first century executions were not like the modern ones, for they did not seek a quick, painless death nor the preservation of any measure of dignity for the criminal. On the contrary, they sought an agonizing torture which completely humiliated him. And it is important that we understand this, for it helps us realize the agony of Christ's death.

Take a moment. Stop and consider Jesus sacrifice for you.

And this is not even the worst part. He has not undergone the Father's wrath yet. We will discuss that next week.

Did he deserve any of that? Did you deserve him to go through that for you? Are you worthy enough to receive the gift? No, you are not. Not a person on this earth is, ever has been, or ever will be.

That is the beauty of the mystery of God's love for you. He has no reason to love us. We are just as guilty as the worst murderer or criminal behind bars.

But God, because of his wondrous love for you, He allowed Jesus to undergo all of that. And Jesus voluntarily went through that so that you might know true life; so that you might know true peace, true joy; so that you might experience heaven with Him as you place your faith in him.

III. FORGIVENESS IN THE MIDST OF MURDER (Lk. 23:34-38)

One of the most powerful prayers in the midst of suffering was uncovered from the horrors of Ravensbruck concentration camp. Ravensbruck was a concentration camp built in 1939 for women. Over 90,000 women and children perished in Ravensbruck, murdered by the Nazis. Corrie Ten Boom, who wrote *The Hiding Place*, was imprisoned there too. The prayer, found in the clothing of a dead child, says:

“O Lord, remember not only the men and woman of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering, our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.”

We are not always given the best and easiest of circumstances to offer forgiveness. Many times, we will have to forgive our spouse, our children, friends, co-workers, exes, even people that straight up hate us, when they don't deserve it.

Isn't that the meaning of forgiveness? We give it freely when it is not deserved.

Even after being beaten, scourged, beaten some more, mocked, ridiculed, and hung on a cross Luke tells us in 23:34-38 that Jesus asks this of his Father.

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.”

Reminds me of the story of a little girl's prayer: A little girl was being punished by eating alone in the corner of the dining room. The family paid no attention to her until they heard her pray: “I thank Thee, Lord, for preparing a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

When I think of Christ's forgiveness, not just to my sin, but to the very people who participated in his execution, I am put to shame.

In all of this Jesus taught us a great lesson. The gift of forgiveness is a precious treasure that should never be taken lightly.

Even before his death Jesus had pity, sympathy, and care for the very ones who took part in his death- the Jewish leaders who thought him a heretic, the fickle crowd who swayed to and fro, Pilate and Herod who were more concerned with popularity than justice, the Roman guards who scourged, mocked, beat, and nailed him to that cross.

For the believer, can you now ever justify not forgiving someone, no matter the depth of the cut?

Jesus has set the bar for us. I can never withhold forgiveness from an individual after knowing that I have been forgiven; after knowing that Christ has forgiven those who murdered him.

Is there any bitterness, or malice, or hatred in your heart? Do you harbor un-forgiveness toward anyone for anything?

Would you allow God to give you the strength to forgive? Would you follow your Savior's example and forgive those who have harmed or hurt you?

Restoration may be impossible, but that is not fully up to you. Your responsibility is to forgive. Would you forgive today?

IV. SALVATION IN THE MIDST OF MURDER (Lk. 23:39-43)

³⁹ 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 are suffering 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."

Two criminals were crucified with Jesus; one on his right and one on his left. One believed in Christ and was saved that very day, and the other participated in the insults.

These men were more than likely collaborators with Barabbas and guilty of insurrection and murder.

These two men demonstrate a sad truth that is all too real. People can encounter the same truths about Christ, the same grace, mercy, and forgiveness, yet respond differently.

The first man wanted Jesus for what Jesus could do for him and if Jesus wouldn't fulfill his wishes then he didn't want anything to do with him.

He simply gave an excuse as to why he didn't want Jesus.

The second man realized who Jesus really was and what he really was offering, and humbled himself and took Jesus at his word.

What about you? What kind of man or woman are you?

Are you willing to accept Jesus at his word, as is, or are you busy making up excuses as to why you can't accept or follow Jesus?

If you choose to give excuses, you can expect nothing from Christ.

If you choose to accept him at his word and dedicate your life to him, you will experience a wonderful rebirth and a mercy that is renewed each day.

No matter your guilt, no matter your sin, no matter your life; if you come to Jesus with a sincere heart and truly believe in him and honestly ask him to forgive you of your sin he will.

You will immediately be given a new life, a new Spirit, a new destiny, and a new eternity.

Many times, even we as Christians, as disciples, we tend to make up excuses as to why we can't follow Jesus or obey his commands. We treat Jesus like a toy at the bottom of the cereal box. If we don't get the one we want we get all mad at him and act as if he is does not love us.

But the question remains: will you accept Jesus at his word and allow his forgiveness to be applied to you in such a way that your whole life is changed.