

SERIES: “A Journey into Forgiveness”
Do We Know What We Do? – Luke 23:32-43

On Sundays during this Lenten season, we have been taking a “journey into forgiveness.” We’ve been looking at the sins of self-righteousness, betrayal, deceit, injustice, and trying to take the “easy way out” and now we bring our journey full-circle back to the mirror and take a good hard look at who we are.

If we truthfully look at ourselves, we, too, are the insulting crowd, we are the self-righteous religious leaders, we are Pilate washing our hands, we are Judas with a selfish agenda and Peter with a betraying heart; we are Barabbas, guilty yet free.

Today, we find ourselves at Golgotha where Jesus is hung on the cross between two criminals, and we hear Jesus say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (23:34a).

I think we can all agree that we see mankind at his worst at the cross. We see the worst of mankind in four ways in our text.

- a. We see Jesus led out with the worst kind of people. “Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him...”(V32)
- b. We see Jesus led out to the worst kind of place. “When they came to the place called the Skull...”(V33)
- c. We see Jesus led out to the worst kind of profanity. “The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him...the soldiers also came up and mocked him...One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him...” (V35-39)
- d. We see Jesus led out to the worst kind of punishment. “There they crucified him...”

Now if we look closely at the four ways we see the worst of mankind, we should also see a lot of ourselves. We hear the words of Jesus: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” But, do we know what we do? How do we see ourselves in this scene?

First, we see in our passage that Jesus was led out with the worst of people.

We are the thief on the cross--but which one? The repentant one or the hardened heart - that is the question we must ask ourselves. Keeping ourselves accountable, “don’t you fear God?” as the dying thief asked, should be in our minds, as should “today you will be with me in paradise.” That balance of law and gospel to keep us on the right track--the road that leads to forgiveness and everlasting life.

You see, in the company of murderers and violent criminals you and I look pretty good. But in the company of Jesus are we not all criminals? This is why we don’t feel like we’re very good people when we read how Jesus lovingly responded to something negative when we know we would respond differently. When Simon Peter saw Jesus perform one of his first miracles he “fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8). I think we all want to get closer to Jesus because it has certain advantages but the truth is that the closer you get to Jesus the more you are conscience of how bad a person you really are. Ever wondered why the Apostle Paul could call himself “the worst of sinners” and believe it? Isn’t because he was very close to Jesus?

Second, Jesus was led out to the worst of places.

How many of us have gone to some really bad places in our past? Now I don't mean some bad restaurant. I define bad places as places we don't tell our parents about bad. Bad places don't have the Ten Commandments posted on the wall.

Now if someone professes to be a Christian and still goes to bad places don't we take Jesus with us? I think as we go places on the Internet or Cable T.V. we need to ask ourselves, "Would Jesus approve of this place I am going to? Would Jesus go see this movie?"

Third, Jesus was led out to the worst kind of profanity.

How many of us have said some really bad things about Jesus in our past? How many of us grew up taking the name of Jesus in vain and still do? How many of us joined in with others who sneered, mocked or insulted anything to do with Jesus?

And fourth, notice that Jesus was led out to the worst kind of punishment.

If we are completely honest we would all have to say we have hurt Jesus in some way. We may not have physically put him on the Cross but from what we have already looked at we have often hurt his character and his cause. We have nailed Jesus to the cross with our sins.

Now if we agree that we see mankind at his worst at the Cross then we should also be certain that the cross is also where we see God at his best. We see God at his best in the Cross of Christ because the cross is the place of forgiveness.

The Cross of Christ is the place of forgiveness because of three things we see in the words "Father, forgive them because they know not what they do." The Cross of Christ is the place of forgiveness because the will of Christ, the word of Christ and the work of Christ all want to forgive.

It's the will of Christ that we are forgiven. In verse v.34 we read "Jesus said, Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." The words "Jesus said" are better translated "Jesus continually prayed". In other words no matter how much worse it got for Jesus he never changed his will that we be forgiven.

We are not like Jesus. We put limits on our forgiveness. There are certain things we will not forgive. We will go so far and then stop forgiving. By us limiting our forgiveness we naturally think God does the same with his forgiveness. "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matthew 18:21-22)

What is Peter saying to Jesus and what is Jesus saying to Peter? Peter is saying to Jesus that seven strikes is his limit and would Jesus approve. Jesus however is saying to Peter that we are to be like God and never limit our will concerning forgiveness?

Now we need to focus not on Peter's words but on Jesus' words. God forgives us every time we ask for forgiveness so we need to forgive others every time they ask for our forgiveness.

Not only is it the will of Jesus that we are forgiven but it is also by the word of Jesus that we are forgiven. How many of us give our word to do something and later change it? Perhaps the # 1 reason we would change our word is because our circumstances change.

Paul Harvey tells the story of a man named Carl Coleman who was driving to work one morning when he bumped fenders with another motorist. Both cars stopped, and the woman driving the other car got out to survey the damage.

She was distraught. It was her fault, she admitted, and hers was a new car, less than two days from the showroom. She dreaded facing her husband. Coleman was sympathetic; but he had to pursue the exchange of license and registration data. She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve the documents in an envelope. On the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband's distinctive hand, was these words: "In case of accident, remember, honey, it's you I love, not the car."

Jesus never changes his word to forgive. No matter how bad the circumstances got he continued to pray, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". Today, 2000 years later, it is still his will and still his word to see us forgiven.

It is the will of Jesus that we are forgiven. And his will never changes. It is the word of Jesus that we are forgiven. And his word never changes. But more importantly it is because of the work of Jesus on the Cross we can experience forgiveness from God.

We have already proven that we all need forgiveness from God. We may be either among those who already know what we have done needs forgiveness or we may be among those who only now see that what they have done or are still doing needs forgiveness.

We have forgiveness because of the work of Christ on the cross. We are saved from the punishment our sins deserve because Jesus took our punishment on the cross. Listen to the words of Isaiah 53:4-6 - "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

We know what we have done, and what we continue to do. But thanks be to God we also know what He has done for us in Jesus. We are loved. We are forgiven. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.