

Luke 23:32-43 "The Father's Forgiveness"**Introduction**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, why did Jesus have to die on the cross? And, why can't God forgive the sins of mankind without Jesus dying on the cross? Today, on this Good Friday, let's look again at the words of forgiveness that Jesus spoke from the cross.

Luke 23:32-43

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine

³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

From these verses, let's focus on Jesus' deeply moving words of forgiveness spoken from the cross.

Verse 34. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Verse 43. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The theme of the message for this Good Friday service is forgiveness. First, forgiveness involves suffering and sacrifice. That is why Jesus died on the cross. Secondly, let's focus on God's great love that is expressed in forgiveness. This is how we overcome sin and death and have the hope of life.

1. Forgiveness Involves Suffering and Sacrifice

Now, as Jesus suffered on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (verse 34). These are amazing words of forgiveness! Normally, we would return curses or give in to despair. The reason Jesus suffered and died on the cross was so that we could be forgiven. It is so that we can experience the forgiveness of God the Father and start a new life.

Let's think for a moment about forgiveness in a more general way. Let's say there's a bad person who inflicts pain on you. He hurts you by being violent or by spreading rumors about you. You have three choices. The first is to be angry and hateful and take revenge; the second is to keep your anger inside and endure it with silence (or try to ignore it). And the third choice is to forgive.

If you take revenge out of anger and hatred, even if your anger is righteous, it doesn't mean that the other person will limit his anger and revenge towards you. What starts from there is a chain of revenge. It is a never-ending battle, a hellish world that unfolds on a daily basis.

The second way of dealing with hurt is to keep the anger bottled up inside. This can lead to depression, or to verbal abuse and hostile attitudes toward third parties. Stored-up anger can easily lead to unhealthy mental states and distorted relationships with oneself and others.

The truth is that you ARE capable of real forgiveness. But, you will likely experience a huge struggle in doing so. It is not an easy or comfortable thing to extend forgiveness. You will have to be patient and take on pain and suffering. When we forgive, there is always sacrifice and pain. This is not unlike Jesus on the cross who was insulted, mocked, and persecuted.

If sacrificial forgiveness is true and genuine, the forgiven person's heart will be changed. They will certainly be grateful. They will apologize for their bad behavior and repent of sin and evil. Furthermore, they will rejoice that they have been forgiven and will begin a new walk and relationship.

Zacchaeus, the leader of the tax collectors in the city of Jericho, had been making money by deceiving people. He caused great suffering to all the people in the city of Jericho. But his life was changed 180 degrees when he was touched by the great love with which Jesus accepted him and became his friend. This was at the cost of Jesus' own reputation (the people of Jericho criticized Jesus, saying, "That man has become a friend of sinners"). Sacrificial forgiveness changes our hearts!

There is a comical fantasy movie called "Paco and the Magical Book. It's a story about how love and humor can change lives and communities. In a hospital full of eccentrics, there is a rich man named Onuki, who is the most hated and eccentric person in the hospital. They call him "old bastard." One day, he meets a girl named Paco. Onuki, who is also mean to her, thinks that Paco stole the pure gold lighter that he lost, and slaps her on the cheek, making her cry.

The next day, Onuki meets Paco again, but Paco does not remember Onuki. And, she doesn't remember Onuki slapping her. You see, Paco lost her parents in an accident, and she was the only one who miraculously survived. However, due to the aftereffects of the accident, she suffers from a memory disorder that allows her to remember only one day. Everything that happens today will be forgotten tomorrow. That day, Paco approached Onuki as if nothing had happened. To his surprise, he felt Onuki's gentle touch on his cheek. From that day on, Onuki's relationships and way of life were changed.

I felt like I was being taught the reality of Jesus' forgiveness through this movie: "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the left also." Sacrificial forgiveness can change a person's life.

God brought forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross in order to break the vicious cycle of vengeance and our inability to forgive! What about your heart? Is it corrupted by anger, envy, resentment, deceit, hatred, hostility, lies, vengeance, or indifference? You are free to have this kind of heart. However, you will suffer and those around you will be negatively impacted.

Listen again to the voice of Jesus. "Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do." God could have judged and condemned us for our sin. Instead, he provided a way out by forgiving us. Judgment does not avoid the cycle of vengeance. It is only through forgiveness that evil can be defeated.

2. Forgiving Love

Now let's focus on the dialogue between Jesus and the criminals on the cross. It is a very interesting story. One of the criminals is in despair and curses Jesus with hostility. The other one accepts Jesus and has hope. The two men seem to be looking at Jesus from completely

different angles. The criminal who is hostile to Jesus, in keeping with the prevailing values of the time, sees the crucified Christ as a loser and as the scum of the earth who has been abandoned by God. But the other man is different.

23:40-42. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Perhaps these criminals are ones who heard Jesus' first words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But, only one of them truly reflected on Jesus' words and actions of forgiveness. Of all the criminals ever crucified, no one but Jesus had ever said such amazing things. First, this criminal turned his eyes to God. Then, he considered himself and pondered who Jesus was.

Beloved, the real life change for us comes when we accept the forgiveness that Jesus offers. There are three steps to this:

1. Turn to God. Even though we live in a world without him, we must turn our hearts to him and be guided by what the Bible says.
2. We need to reflect on who we are and repent of our sins.
3. Trust in Jesus who offers us forgiveness because of the cross.

In this way, we can have hope backed up by forgiveness.

However, when we are faced with an out-of-control problem like the Corona virus, or a major natural disaster like 3.11, it is easy to doubt God's love and justice, and to become skeptical of God's forgiveness and love.

Photographer Shinya Fujiwara wrote the following after the Great East Japan Earthquake in the magazine AERA (11.4.2011, No.16). "... This time, God killed a man. . . . I now doubt the existence of God as built into the history of man. It's not like the fool who was "punished" for believing that miracles could happen, but that God was just a sham, and that there was no God there to begin with." Fujiwara is questioning the nature of God and God's very existence.

But, what is it that we see from the cross of Jesus? It is the image of a suffering God. It is God suffering the same suffering that we are experiencing. However, the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross is not only about taking on our pain. It is also about us *receiving* comfort and encouragement in the face of suffering and trials.

This is because normally, if we are going to accept and love someone, we have to accept their faults and bad points. If you become friends with someone who has a bad reputation, you will soon be called names. There are risks involved in loving, befriending, and saving.

Anpanman, a popular character among children, is a self-sacrificing hero who gives his head to help those who are weak. He gives what is most precious to him, suffering without reward. He makes himself weak, helpless, and unable to stand up. He gets beaten up. But, he helps those who are hurting by giving himself and receiving nothing in return.

What kind of person can really do this?—Taking sacrifices and risks, and giving their best for others. Brothers and sisters, let's be thankful! On the cross, Jesus tells a criminal, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Consider carefully what Jesus meant when he said, "Today . . ." The criminal had said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And, Jesus replies by saying,

“Today . . . “ From that moment on, he began a new life with Jesus, walking in the reign of God.

He was still a criminal. He was accepted into Paradise, or the Kingdom of God, in the same condition in which he was nailed to the cross. He did not do anything good. He did not need to accomplish anything to receive forgiveness and enter Paradise. Jesus loved him unilaterally. This is grace! You do nothing, but God loves and forgives you because of the cross of Jesus! We can only accept this with gratitude. Beloved, today, you can start your paradise life with Jesus.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise your name. We thank You from the bottom of our hearts for sending Your only Son, Jesus, to us and giving us eternal forgiveness through His death on the cross. We also do not know what we are doing. We have rejected you, the One who is God and King of the world, and we have sinned and made a mess of everything. I ponder deeply on your words of forgiveness. Please teach me by the Holy Spirit who Jesus is. Pour out the love of Christ on us. Let the cross of Jesus be engraved on our hearts. In the midst of the Corona virus suffering, may the cross of Jesus be a comfort to us and may we rejoice in your forgiveness. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.