

**Lenten Series:** “Live Like Jesus Is Dying.” “Jesus’ Sayings from the Cross”

**Sermon #1:** “Father, Forgive Them....”

**Scriptures:** Luke 23:26, 33-34

**Source:** Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/series/The-Final-Words-From-the-Cross/>

## Opening Video Clip

**PP#1:** Luke 23:26, 33-34

26 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.

33 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. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up His clothes by casting lots.

**Reader:** Luke 23:26, 33-34

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**PP#2:** *Image of Simon from Cyrene/Jewish man watching Jesus stumble with the cross.*

Every Jewish man, at some time in his life, must celebrate the Passover in the holy city. This was my year! It was a four week journey by ship from the northern coast of Africa. My home town was Cyrene, in what you know today as Lybia. I made the trip with my boys, Alexander and Rufas, a trip of a lifetime...a spiritual high to be able for us as men to experience the feast of the Passover in Jerusalem. When we arrived we traveled by foot for a couple more days until finally we came to the city. We stayed a bit outside of Jerusalem, as the inns were completely filled in the city. Busy place! And then the day came. We headed towards the city in the morning. As we neared, we could see lots of commotion, and feel the excitement in the air. Near the city gates we met what appeared to be a parade coming out of the city. Alexander said to me, “Daddy, Daddy can we watch?”

And I said, “Of course we can watch, we love parades.”

The side of the road was crowded, and we squeezed in. Soon came the procession, and very quickly I could tell this was no parade. I could see the Roman soldiers on their horses, and I begin to make out the Pharisees and the priests in their holy garb. There were also the money changers from the Temple, and there appeared to be some women marching with them. But it was the people who were leading the procession that made it clear to me this was no parade. I could see over their shoulders the heavy beam that was part of the Roman cross. This was a crucifixion. I tried to turn around, but I was trapped. The people were pressing in, and my two boys and I were shoved forward. The procession came closer. And as the three men who were being crucified came near, the crowd again heaved, and I found myself at the front, just feet from the men walking by. One of them, I watched, stumbled, struggling under the weight of the cross. I could tell that he had been beaten and tortured. He fell to the ground.

He tried to stand, but couldn't. There was no way He was going to carry that beam any further. Than one of the Roman soldiers looked at me look at me and said, "You there, carry the cross for this man."

I panicked! "What? Me? I froze."

He shouted, "Pick it up! You! Let's go!" and pointed right at me.

**PP#3:** *Image of Simon carrying Jesus' cross beam (note: NOT the full cross, just the beam)*

I was terrified, I thought about my boys. Time stood still. Then I shivered, and stepped out. I had no idea how heavy it was I picked it up and put it over my shoulder. I then looked at the man who was carrying it, and I saw the crown of thorns around His brow. I realize this man was no common thief. This had to be Jesus of Nazareth I'd been hearing about at the inn. Some thought He might be the messiah. I knew what the Romans did to would-be messiahs. They humiliated them and they tortured them and then they kill them on crosses like criminals. I put my hand out to help Him up. He took it. I can still feel it! I can't forget that touch. Then I looked into his eyes, but there was no fear there. I saw sorrow, and then gratitude.

He nodded as if to say "Thank you." He stood up, regained His strength, and began walking again. I followed Him carrying the beam, and my sons kept up with me along the edge. It wasn't long, just a few blocks, to the place called "The Skull." This was where they crucified their victims. It was just outside the city gate and was intended to be a place where everyone could as they came in, and remember to behave.

I dropped the heavy beam on the ground in front of the executioners. The soldiers put the Messiah in the middle, and put the two thieves, one on each side. I looked over at the Messiah, and He was just staring at the beam. He wasn't anxious, or crying, or emotional. He just stood there, fixated at it.

They grabbed Him, ripped off His robe, and roughly threw Him down. They laid Him flat, and stretched His arms out across the beam. I turned, and grabbed my sons. They were watching it all with wide eyes. I pulled them into me, burying their faces in my robe, just as I heard the hammer hit the spike, and the man scream out in pain. Twice more, it went so fast! I just stood there with my eyes clenched shut. My boys pulled at my hand, but I pressed them in tighter. I knew there were two more to be crucified.

**PP#4:** *Image of Jesus on the cross, with Simon nearby, and others mocking Jesus.*

I didn't allow my sons to see, but I looked up as they hoisted His cross into the air. I had only seen this before from a distance. But here I was, right next to it. I was as far away as I am from you right now.

I couldn't take my eyes off His face. He was looking at the people who had Him crucified, trying to understand the hatred that filled their hearts: the money changers from the temple were there. They hurled insults and spit upon Him. The Roman soldiers had already gathered His clothes together, and they were gambling to see who would get the best piece. It was a game for them. And then the Pharisees and the religious leaders they stood there with their arms crossed, smirking. They were satisfied that the one who had accused them of hypocrisy was getting what was due Him. And Jesus looked at each one of them.

And as He looked at them, He began to try to raise himself up on the cross. You see, at that point, you can't speak unless you take a deep breath, and to do that you had to push up from your

ankles and pull from your wrists. He did. He wanted to say something important. And this is what He said. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Those words have haunted me ever since. And it was that day that I become a follower of the crucified Messiah.

**PP#5:** “Live Like Jesus Is Dying.” “Jesus’ Sayings from the Cross”

“Father, Forgive Them!”

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” -Luke 23:34

“Live Like Jesus Is Dying.” “Jesus’ Sayings from the Cross” Luke 23:34 “Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”

When someone was crucified, death was not from blood loss. Romans tried to keep you alive as long as possible, to maximize the humiliation. They wanted everyone to see it, and be so horrified, that they would resolve to never do whatever landed him on the cross.

**PP#6:** *Image of Jesus on the cross, but not so gory or vivid, perhaps more shadowy?*

Dying took a long time, sometimes days!

You finally died from asphyxiation, when you were finally too exhausted to raise yourself up to breathe. So, as you can imagine, it was hard to talk while hanging on a cross.

Jesus spoke seven times. Think about that. These must have been very intentional words. Three times it was to pray. He could have prayed in silence. But He pushed Himself to pray out loud. He wanted to be heard. He was saying something important for those around to hear.

Each Sunday, until Easter, we’re going to look closely at what Jesus said from the cross. We know that the early Christians purposefully meditated on these. There’s something important here. They’re worth reflecting on. We don’t want to miss it.

We’re going to be asking, “What do they tell us about what’s going on?” “What do they tell us about this Jesus?” and “What do they tell us about ourselves?”

**PP#7:** “Father, forgive them . . .”

Today, we listen to the first words Jesus spoke from the cross. Mark says that Simon from Cyrene came with his two sons, Rufas and Alexander. Paul, in his letter to Rome, specifically says to greet Rufas. Church tradition says this is the same Rufas, and so, it seems, this experience of carrying Jesus’ cross had a lasting impact on them!

They got to hear what Jesus spoke, just after He was crucified. It’s the first thing Jesus says. It’s a prayer. The first thing Jesus does from the cross is pray.

He chose to pray out loud. He wanted those nearby to hear. Why? What is this all about?

**PP#8:** “Father, forgive them . . .”

1. Who is the “them”?

First point. Who is the “them” when Jesus says, “Father forgive them”?

Well, there were the Roman soldiers gambling for His clothes. He probably meant them. Then there were the merchants and money changers. Jesus probably meant them, too. And the Pharisees and Jewish leaders. If He is referring to those who crucified Him, He also had to mean the Roman leaders. Pilate, probably.

But if Jesus meant all those who had crucified, then that also includes us! We had a part in that. It was our sin that crucified Him. We didn't know what we were doing, right? The Church has always said that when Jesus prayed this, He was praying for us!

When Jesus prayed this prayer from the cross, Jesus just didn't pray for those there that day. He was also praying for you, to forgive you. This prayer is for you. We are the "them."

**PP#9:** "Father, forgive them . . ."

1. Who is the "them"?
2. People need forgiveness.

If this is the case, then this means that people needed forgiveness. This has to do with what is going on on the cross. We really can't understand it well, but what was going on on the cross, has to do with gaining forgiveness for people who need it.

Humans, down to our core, have a heart problem. Sin, the Greek word, literally means to stray or miss the mark. God lays out the best way of life. If people would walk in it, there would be no inflicted pain, no intentionally hurting each other, no abuse, no getting trapped in our own messes. Imagine a world with no human-caused bad headlines! If only we would all walk in this way.

But we don't, do we. From our earliest memories, we are selfish and straying from God's mark. We call that original sin, our instinctual bent to selfishness. As a young boy, I stole from my father's wallet! I took money to support my Nestle \$100,000 bar habit. Mom, I don't think you ever knew about this. I knew it was wrong, but I did it anyway. We are bent!

Now, the Gospel is not about how bad you are, but the grace that God offers. But you can't understand, can't receive it, unless you take an honest view of your sinfulness. This is what Lent is all about. We don't get mad at doctors who diagnose a malignant tumor on the bladder. They tell us we need to get help, and then tell us about the procedure to have it removed. That's not being mean. That's being honest to bring healing. When the diagnosis is sin, the treatment is grace, and the result is healing.

All of us stray from that path. Lent is a time when we follow Jesus closely enough to realize that we need what is happening on the cross. We have a heart condition, and we need treatment.

**PP#10:** "Father, forgive them . . ."

1. Who is the "them"?
2. People need forgiveness.
3. All you need to do is accept it.

You know, what captured my attention is that Jesus prayed this prayer while they were still tormenting Him. They were gambling for His clothes, they were gathered around mocking Him, hurling insults on Him, spitting on Him. Right then He prayed this prayer. He didn't wait until later, when they were repentant or even absent. Isn't that amazing?

He prayed for their forgiveness while they were still sinning! Before they ever asked for it. He prayed for our forgiveness before we ever existed. Think about that. Before you were born, God forgave you! God knew all you were going to do, all those sins that you don't tell anyone else about, and God forgave them before you committed them. This is what was going on on the cross. Jesus, dying on the cross, saves you from your sin.

I want to show you a painting I got from my mother. It was painted the year I was born, but before I was born. My mother invited a guest artist to teach painting lessons to the ladies at the

church. And, in order to teach them materials, techniques, styles, she painted a picture as demonstration. Afterwards she was going to throw it away, and my mother asked for it.

*[Show painting]*

Growing up, I fell in love with it, not because of its beauty, but because of its deep message. She was trying to paint creation. And so you have all the swirls of chaos, with the colors of creation, the blues for water, brown for soil, green for vegetation. Then, in the middle of this creation, she placed a man, whom God made. But notice, also in this creation scene, she painted a cross. That captured the realization that God knew, before He made everything, that the people He was going to create would turn away. His best creation, God knew, would sin. God knew, at creation that He would have to send Jesus to bear their sin and earn forgiveness. And the artist puts a cross right here at creation because when God created, God also chose to go ahead and create humans, whom He would have to send Jesus to die for.

God knew what we would do, all back at creation, and God still created us! He knew you, and all your sin, and God still made you anyway! Before creation, God decided you were worth it!

**PP#11:** Romans 5:6-8

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly....But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

John Wesley called this “prevenient grace,” the grace that God extends to us before we are even aware of it.

Paul puts it this way: Romans 5:6-8 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God knew all you were going to do, and God forgave you. It’s already forgiven!

All that is left is for you to receive it, to claim it, to open it up. It’s a present that God already put your name on. The question we encounter, when we look at the cross, is, “Are you going to open it?”

We are the “them” that Jesus forgives. We have a condition that needs healing. And God has already given us the cure. To be made well, we just need to receive it.

**PP#12:** “Father, forgive them . . .”

1. Who is the “them”?
2. People need forgiveness.
3. All you need to do is accept it.
4. Jesus models what we, too, must do.

One last point. When we hear Jesus pray this forgiveness from the cross, we see Jesus modeling for us what it means to be human. We see Him doing what all humans, what we, need to do. It means to forgive. Over and over again Jesus said to love those who wrong you, to pray for those who persecute you, to forgive 70-times-7 times.

Do people mock you? Humiliate you? Hurt you? Treat you out of their own selfishness? Only give you their leftovers? Jesus demonstrates what we are to do: forgive them even as they are abusing us, using us, hurting us. Forgive, not get even.

Jesus taught His followers to pray, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” We are forgiven, and forgiving!

Normally, we want justice for them, and mercy for us. But from the cross we see that to be truly human means giving away mercy for them, and receiving mercy for us.

Forgive while they are still sinning against you. Not that there aren’t consequences for abuse, and we shouldn’t just take whatever others want to give. But we must always forgive.

Yes, I know that some people are just so hard to forgive. If Jesus only knew how hard it was for me to deal with that person... What? You mean Jesus, the guy hanging on a cross? You want to talk to Him about how hard you have it?

When we hear Jesus pray this during His extreme agony, then we know that we need to learn to pray it, too.

We’re going to end in a time of prayer. It’s going to have two parts. First of all, take your sackcloth and hold it. As you do, we’re going to have a time to pray Jesus’ prayer. First of all, ask Jesus to forgive you. Open your heart, be honest, and confess the stuff you never wanted to tell anyone, the sins in your life that are still unresolved. Spend a few moments, listening to Jesus on the cross, and asking God to forgive you. Let’s pray.

*[Time of prayer.]*

All these sins you have thought about, remember that God has already forgiven you.

So, second prayer. Ask Jesus to help you forgive those who have sinned against you. Those that you still harbor anger for, still grumble about, whose wounds that still ooze when pressed. Pray for Jesus to help you forgive those who still hurt you. Pray for the Father to forgive them, and for you to forgive them, too. Let’s pray.

*[Time of prayer.]*

*[Closing prayer.]*

Amen.