

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM”

Luke 23:26-56

Key Verse: 23:34

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

Hello, my name is Steve Stasinios. How many of you are UIC students or alumni? I attended UIC from 1995, commuting from the west suburbs, eating at Carm’s, Fontano’s and Thai Bowl, enduring the weed-out classes, until I graduated UIC in 2000 with a BS degree in EE. I came to college with little or no idea that the gospel was for me and would change my life. We gathered here in the Illinois room to contemplate the question, “Is the gospel for me?” I want to present to you this morning one of the core contents of the gospel: Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

We want to look at this as recorded in Luke’s gospel. Luke was a non-Jewish historian and physician who lived in the first century. After being presented the gospel, he interviewed many people, including all the first eyewitnesses of these events as they were still alive. He investigated the facts. He compiled his research and wrote this gospel (Lk 1:1-4).

However, this story is more than just dusty history. At the age of eighteen, I was just coming aware of who I am and began to honestly question life. I found so many questions had no answers, until I heard the message of the gospel. This story had a profound effect on me in my college years. I pray that as you listen and consider what you hear, these words may help you as well to fill in some of the mysteries of life, such as why are we the way we are, and what are we going to do about it?

I. “Weep for yourselves and for your children” (26-31)

Look at verse 26. *“As they 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.”* Jesus had just been sentenced to death by crucifixion, and then he had been brutally beaten by the guards. Now, they led him away to the place of execution, outside the city. As he traveled the long way to the place of execution his body was too weak to carry his cross, so Simon was forced to carry the cross behind him.

“Large numbers of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him (27).” These women wept for Jesus. To them, it was a tragedy of the depravity of the world, that a good man should be brutally killed at a young age for no reason. When we look at the world and see the result of man’s depravity, we want to weep with these women. For eight years I worked in Lake Zurich, about an hour and a half away from here. I would often listen to the news in the car. What I heard was dreadful. The violence of robberies and murders; the terrors of war, the deceit of scandals – all these things exist in our world. It breaks our hearts, to see what man does to man. But Jesus says to these women: *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’”* Although what was happening to Jesus was terrible, Jesus says, “Weep for yourselves, and for your children.” Jesus wept for their sins, and the result on their children. Worse than all the things we hear on the news is the result of sin in our own lives. In High School, I was into the rock n roll lifestyle. I mistreated girl friends and got involved in drugs. But that is what my peers did, so what was the big deal? It wasn’t until I reached college that I realized the big deal. I decided to leave that life style and study, but I couldn’t concentrate. I couldn’t stop doing drugs and sleeping around. I realized my own depravity, and felt the results of my sins in my life.

Jesus went on, *“Then ‘they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’” For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry? (30-31)”* Beyond the results of our sins to ourselves Jesus mentions another event that is coming. This was a quotation from Hosea 10:9, referring to the judgment. Sometimes things happen that are unjust. We wonder is there any justice? The Bible teaches that there will come a time of judgment on all the sins of men. In that day, people will clamber about for some place to hide, even under mountains and hills, but there will be no escape. When I considered how I will be held responsible for the girls I took advantage of, the drugs I sold to people, the laws I broke and the people I hurt, guilt came over me. We carry this baggage with us everywhere. But Jesus’ words to the women were not intimidating. Rather, they are words of weeping. Jesus was not concerned about himself. He was weeping for the impending condemnation of sinners. Jesus didn’t protest his cross. Jesus carried it willingly, because he wanted to save us from that condemnation.

II. “Father, forgive them” (32-34)

“Two other men, both criminals were led out with him to be executed (32).” This implied guilt by association. Jesus was led through the streets with these criminals. I can’t help but think Jesus didn’t mind. It comforts me that Jesus was associated with sinners. *“When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left (33).”* What an understatement, “there they crucified him.” In modern times, we value life, even that of criminals. Capital punishment is made as humane as possible. The Romans had a different take. They devised Crucifixion to be the most shameful, painful and drawn out way to die. To appreciate what this was like, let’s see this selection from the movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” (Play clip of Jesus’ hand being nailed to the cross, followed by Jesus’ cross placed into the socket.)

Jesus, the Son of God, was treated this way. In the Bible, this was how the Christ was prophesied to die. Psalm 22:16 reads, *“Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.”* Zechariah 12:10b reads, *“They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”* This is the shocking truth of the gospel. Jesus was brutally crucified according to God’s purpose and plan, foretold centuries before he was born. *WHY?* Why should he be treated this way? And what does this gruesome event have to do with my guilt, shame, depravity and addictions? Isaiah 53:5-6 read, *“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.”* If God is God, he is holy, and absolutely just. The price for transgressions must be paid. The distasteful iniquities of our depraved nature must be blotted out. Some have said, “If God is God, why doesn’t he just make sin go away, or pardon it like the governor does?” But think about the victims. Would that be justice for them? When I wounded my parents’ hearts through my rebellion, and it was just ignored, would that be justice? Those girls in high school that I took advantage of for my own pleasure, breaking their hearts; is that justice for them? Think about the rape victim, and the torment she endures every day. What about our selfishness, ignoring the suffering and needy around us? Remember our national cry for justice after thousands died on 9/11. Jesus body was

pierced and crushed. The punishment I deserved for my sinful behavior and lifestyle was placed upon Jesus. All the wounds inflicted by every sin in the world were atoned for in Jesus' body. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed. Jesus paid it all.

(Play clip of Jesus' prayer)

Look at verse 34. *“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”* This is Jesus' prayer from the cross to his Father, God. Jesus' heart is full of forgiveness. He is the one suffering for what we have done in our depraved character, and what we failed to do in our selfishness. Jesus bears no malice, contempt, or anger towards us. He is hanging on the cross, but in his prayer he asks God to forgive sinners. Jesus can pray this, because he is offering himself in our places. He wants us to be forgiven by God. Jesus prays that our relationship with God be restored through forgiveness. Jesus' forgiveness is Jesus' love. We long to have this kind of love that is unconditional; that understands instead of expecting, and forgives instead of holds a grudge. We hope a relationship with another person will give us this love. Instead we get wounded and hurt others too. We are so well connected by cell phones, Facebook and social groups, but so alone at the same time because no one understands or loves us in this way we so desperately need. This causes some to hide in fantasy worlds like video games and sports or pornography. Others become depressed and try to drown it out by drug use. Some blame God or others for their misery. As time goes by, many sins pile up. Jesus understands we don't know what we are doing. Typically people don't sin by thinking what they can do to hurt God. They just sin out of selfish, sinful nature. Jesus understands. Jesus forgives. More than anything, we need this forgiveness from God for our sins. In our ignorance we make so many mistakes, hurting ourselves and others in the process. Jesus prays, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

In 1997, I tasted this grace of forgiveness. I met the God who was willing to accept Jesus' sacrifice for me through Bible study and seeking him. I went to him, and repented all my sins, one by one, in detail. It took more than two hours, but as I shared each thing that came to mind with this God who prayed for my forgiveness while he shed his blood, I was healed. Then I could call those I had wounded and apologize. I was able to forgive those who in their ignorance had wounded me. There was a real solution for the problem of my depravity, and I was healed. Just knowing that God

forgives sins in Jesus made all the difference. I'm a different man now, because of that event. I no longer have those addictions. I was able to study well, and live a happy and productive life. It was because of the forgiveness found only in Jesus.

III. "You will be with me in paradise" (35-43)

In this section we see responses to Jesus' prayer on the cross. First the religious leaders, who orchestrated his execution, come up and challenge him to save himself. Jesus does not answer them. The soldiers mock his kingship, as the charge he was crucified for was that he is "The King of the Jews," a Messianic title. Again Jesus does not answer.

Verse 39 reads, *"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'"* He knows he needs to be saved from immediate suffering on the cross. He tries to push Jesus to save him, out of desperation. But Jesus does not answer.

Look at verses 40-41. *"But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'" This criminal was likely the first man's partner in crime. At their trial, he likely had put up a strong defense, justifying himself, or blaming others. But he confesses clearly his guilt. What could have changed his attitude about himself and his condition? He sees Jesus. Jesus' innocence shines bright, as his own iniquities are so dark. But Jesus prayed for his forgiveness. The criminal accepted Jesus' prayer from the cross. "Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'" (42)* He asks Jesus, not to save him from the cross, but to remember him. He expresses faith in Jesus' kingdom.

Jesus had not answered anyone who antagonized him or questioned him on the cross. He remained silent. But *"Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (43)* Jesus welcomed this repentant criminal into paradise with him. We all long for paradise. A place where there is no more hatred or distrust. Where there is no more pain or death; a place where we can live together in peace and joy without fear. We imagine it, and long for it. People write songs, books and movies about. But in our day to day lives what we find is only an unsettling angst. Yet this criminal entered paradise that day, the garden of peace and delight; where

God *“will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4)”* When we call out to Jesus in faith and repentance, Jesus answers. Jesus will surely take those he has saved and redeemed to be with him forever in paradise.

IV. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (44-56)

“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’” (44-46) The darkness is the wrath of God Jesus bore for us (Amos 8:9), and the curtain was torn to open the way to God. When all this had been completed, Jesus entrusted his spirit to God. Jesus quotes Psalm, 31:5, which is a psalm of looking to God for redemption. In this way, Jesus reveals his hope in the resurrection to come.

“The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’” (47) The centurion had likely crucified many people. But Jesus was different. At the death of Jesus, heavenly light shone into this hardened man, and he praised God. Even this man who killed Jesus tasted forgiveness at the cross.

Joseph of Arimathea became bold after Jesus’ death, and went to Pilate for Jesus’ body, took it and buried it in his own tomb (50-53). Jesus burial is significant in two ways: firstly, it testifies that Jesus died and all the punishment for sin with him. Secondly, the location of Jesus’ burial was well known and established by the witnesses, especially several women. This is important evidence to support the resurrection.

Jesus was nailed to a cross. He suffered agonizing pain, shame, and mocking. While on the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” These are the facts of Jesus’ death for our sins; the first half of the gospel message.

I want to close with an appeal. Justifying ourselves, blaming others, or giving up in despair are really only band aid solutions to a universal problem that Jesus addresses on the cross. In his cross I have found forgiveness, daily opportunity to restore my relationship with God, and grace on which to build meaningful relationships with others. May God help each of us here to find the same in the cross of Jesus.