***1: “Father, Forgive Them”

7LW-001.1***

The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge your thoughts and intentions of the heart (Ephesians 4:12). For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). For the wrath of God as revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; men who suppressed the truth in righteousness (Romans 1:18). But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things that you have learned, and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them. And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that lead to the salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:13-15).

I direct your attention to the fact that Christ lives, which is a wonderful message. If you ever have occasion to visit the garden tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, one of the first things you will see is a marble slab on which is carved in black letters the Scripture relative to the women when they came to the tomb and the angel said, "He is not here. He is risen." And it's just very exciting just to read that in that context and then walk up to that tomb and actually be able to enter it and to look down there and see that slab with a little curve of stone at the end for the head, and then to be able to sit down on the bench that they placed in there and realize that you are there where it all happened. It was from that spot that He actually rose; walked through that very same door; and, out to the proclamation of the victory that He had accomplished over Satan, and the salvation that He had insured for us all.

And indeed that is the way that we should view Him. When I was in Dallas Seminary, I preached in a little country church in the Garland area. When I came, it was a schoolhouse, and on the pulpit at the front was a picture of Christ hanging on the cross. That was the first thing that got changed. That was a little too Catholic for me to see Christ always portrayed as one who is dead and incapacitated, instead of as the slab in the garden tomb says. "He is not here. He is risen."

But before He came to that point, there was a lot of suffering. There was a lot of final doctrinal information given to all the world even as he hung on the cross. We refer to those pieces of truth as the Seven Last Words of Christ. The New Testament records for us that seven times He spoke while on that cross. The significance of this historic event can be seen by what He said on those seven declarations from the cross. The final words of anyone who knows that he is dying generally reflect that person's character; that person's concern; and, that person's value in a very specific kind of way. Jesus recorded for us seven declarations, and through these seven statements, the full purpose of His life; His suffering; His character; His death; and, His victory have been revealed to us.

So they took him up to the hill called Golgotha (Calvary) and nailed him to it. In Luke 23:33, we read, "And when they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left." So all of human history came to that focal point when the soldiers, having nailed Him to the cross, then heaved to and raised that cross and let it thump with an agonizing tearing of the flesh into the hole that had been dug to hold it upright. So the countdown to His death and to our salvation began.

I would like to begin (and that's all I can do in this first session, is to begin) to lead you through these seven dramatic statements because they are so fraught with significance and meaning, that it will take us more than one session to do.

**Father, Forgive Them**

The first word is in Luke 23:34: "But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'" Here is an absolutely sinless man who prays for divine forgiveness for those who are in the process of brutally putting Him to death. Death by crucifixion was an enormously painful brutal process. It was so terrible that no Roman citizen could be executed in this manner. It was saved for criminals to maximize their punishment and their suffering. But the approach to the crucifixion part was even more horrendous perhaps than the ultimate erecting of the individual on the cross. The Lord Jesus was slapped; He was beaten; He was spit upon; He was lied about; He was ridiculed; He was mocked; and, He was treated with the utmost contempt. Those who brutally put him to death did not realize what they were doing.

Jesus knew that, and so his request is surprising: "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." John 15:25: "But they have done this in order that the Word may be fulfilled that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'" What a poignant statement that is. "They hated me without any reason for doing so."

1 Peter 4:12-13: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeals among you which come upon you for your testing as though some strange thing were happening to you. But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exaltation." What Peter is pointing out here is that there was a great deal of suffering on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ all his life as he ministered, and certainly from Herod to the ultimate crucifixion. There was a great deal of suffering, for what reason? It was not because of something He had done. It was not because of who He was, but simply because he was bringing the truth of eternal life. In that sense, the suffering of Christ is not complete. Christian missionaries all over the world have suffered tremendously as did Jesus, not for atonement, but to bring the truth of eternal life to people.

And so too, you and I, Peter says, should be prepared. If you are going to tell people the truth, you will suffer for it. You'll be hated; you will be abused; and, you will be held in contempt. Most of the world--the religious world--most of the religious world which celebrate the Easter event every year are going to end up in the lake of fire because they have a self-made works salvation. They have a totally disoriented non-grace way of approach to eternal life. When you go to them and say, "That's not going to work," you will discover that they will hold you in contempt. The very power of their numbers make them sure that they are right, and you could not possibly be correct. The truth of the matter is that most people try to get into heaven in a way that God totally condemns--by the works system.

So it is not surprising that the believer would expect to suffer as did the Lord. John 15:18-19 adds this: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

So here is the picture that we have of this unbelievable situation. We have a man whom no one could ever accuse of any wrong. That is not possible unless he were a special man: a man without a sin nature; a man who is more than a man; and, He was a God man, but He was a real man. He walked among men, and they respected Him when they hated Him. One thing about the Lord Jesus Christ is not properly conveyed in pictures that artists imagine about Him. He was not some little twit. He was a man who, as we know from the pictures in the catacombs of people who had messages and communications about the appearance of Jesus, He wasn't there with long girlie hair. He was not a long-haired dude. He had close-cropped hair in a manly style which was the style of the Roman society.

Jesus didn't even wear earrings. We have a lot of boy-girls today. I noticed that they used to wear one earring. I go down to the music store where all the artists are, and the fellows who play in the bands. I used to go in there and they usually have long hair, and I was reluctant to put on a wig, but I would get one of my wife's clip-on earrings and I would walk in there real cool-like. They were real nice to me. They would take care of all of my needs. Now I have to put an earring on both ears to be where it's at now. And I shake my head.

Who is our role model? The Lord Jesus Christ. And I wonder about girls who associate themselves with these boy-girls who wear the earrings. Instead of being revolted by it, and saying, "Oh, wait a minute. There is something wrong on the inside. You aren't ticking right. You've lost orientation to your manhood." Jesus Christ never did that. He never did that because He would be wrong. He was absolutely right. He was the finest and the greatest man that ever lived. What did they do with him? They beat him up. People who are now in the holding pen of Hades waiting to be transferred to the lake of fire spat upon Him and treated Him with contempt, and He was infinitely superior to them in every way.

They did this because of one simple reason. That was the result of being ignorant of doctrine. They were being ignorant either by never having been taught it, or by being ignorant because you refused to believe it when you have been taught it. Many a young person grows up with a great deal of doctrinal instruction so they're not ignorant on that account. But they go out into life, and they get out in the world, and where Jesus condemned the world and where He stood up even and said, "Some of you on the inside stink like a sepulcher full of dead men's bones and bodies, and you know not the God you pretend to worship." Instead of being revolted against this expression of our society, young people are drawn to the world system. They want to be like it. They want to be accepted.

What would have happened to us if the Lord Jesus, this great Man, had wanted to be accepted? What if, in order to be part of their society, He had wanted to be invited to their special events and to be recognized publicly as a great and wonderful religious leader? What if He had compromised on the truth? All of heaven would have wept with grief for there would have been no salvation then for any of us. In John 11:25, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies." John 8:12: "Again therefore, Jesus spoke to them saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Now what on earth must possess the minds of people who think that if they follow the opinion makers of our society, the people who are in positions of power, that they will be following enlightenment? Jesus said that He is the light of the world, and that means His doctrinal principles are the guiding light, and those who follow Him and practice His ways will not be in darkness. The people who are going to be in darkness and be made fools by Satan and by the grief and the injury that is brought into their lives are those who think that there is enlightenment in the world system, and that there is enlightenment in the people that you associate with, even if they are sophisticated and personable. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Paul says, "Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."

Why would any young man want to walk around looking like a girl with long hair and with the little earrings and with all the other accoutrements that they keep increasing on when they could walk in the manliness of Jesus Christ? Why would they want to imitate Satan's way instead of God's way? That is the difference. If you want to bring a lot of grief into your life, just pay attention to the world. Just excuse these compromises of womanhood and manhood that are so prominent in our society.

**Ignorance**

These people were pretty good Bible students who were crucifying Jesus Christ, but they were ignorant of the significance of the very Word of God they had learned. Does ignorance constitute extenuating circumstances, and make you less blameworthy? Not for one moment. Ignorance of one's evil does not lessen the punishment for the act. That comes as a surprise to a lot of Christians. It's bad enough that you should do something in ignorance, but if you do it, after you have been taught the Word of God, boy, have you got a very grim future, even as a Christian, ahead of you. Luke 12:47-48 points that out to us. Jesus said, "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready to act in accord with his will shall receive many lashes. But the one who did not know it and committed deeds worthy of a flogging will receive but few. From everyone who has given much shall much be required, and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

I have observed this biblical principle, "From him who has much will be taken even that which he has, and given to the one who has little." I have observed the principle that the people who have had great spiritual instruction and enlightenment to know what the world is and what Christ is and the contrast between them, and they go with the world, that when they crash, the crash is infinitely greater and more horrendous than some poor stumbling character who never had any biblical instruction, and just went along with the world because he thought that's the way it should be done. We cannot forget what kind of a person this was who was put upon that cross, and looked down at that crowd, and said, "Father, they are so ignorant. Please forgive them for what they're doing."

Ignorance does not excuse moral guilt. In our parable, the servant who is ignorant was punished according to what he knew. The fact that Jesus prayed for forgiveness for his murderers showed that they were guilty of a very great crime. So Jesus quite properly prayed that God should forgive them because of what they were doing. They were guilty of a great moral evil. Now how could God do that? How could God forgive these peoples for what they were doing to His Son? Jesus had taught the doctrinal principle of compassion for those who are guilty of evil. That was something that was characteristic of Him.

Matthew 5:44-45: "But I say to you, love your enemies ('agape' your enemies)." We are to have no mental attitude bitterness. "And pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." No one is perfect. Therefore, sympathy toward those who do evil is naturally the Christian way. It certainly was what was motivating Jesus Christ on the cross. He who was sinless understood that these people, blinded in their religious beliefs, needed maximum mercy extended to them. So the highest expression of concern and compassion is toward those who are really guilty. Jesus practice what he preached.

Stephen, our first Christian martyr, imitated the Lord when he was stoned unmercifully and without reason. He told people the truth about the Word of God. In Acts 7:60, he too says, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." So Jesus on the cross could no longer minister to people, but He could pray, as we can, and minister in that way. A great deal was accomplished by that prayer of Christ. The request of the Lord Jesus appealed to His Father to provide a basis for forgiveness for these murderers. That's what He was asking for. He was saying, "Father, provide a basis for these murderers to find forgiveness." The very death of Jesus Christ perpetrated by those that he was praying for provided the basis they needed to be forgiven their sin of murder.

Talk about the love of God! Jesus was, in effect, in His humanity, saying, "Father, carry me through. This is terrible. I've never had sin. Now it's all over Me. I'm soaked with it. Carry me through. This is going to be a horrendous three hours." This was about noontime when He said this. He had three hours to go. "Carry me through." He asked in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, is there any other way that sin can be covered? Is there any other way that the penalty of death for sin to satisfy that justice could be done? Let's do it that way. But, Father, Your will, not Mine." That's what He's still talking about. Now He's saying, "Father, I'm a man, and I'm on this cross"--not as God. God cannot die. "I'm on this cross bearing sin in my humanity. Carry me through. Don't let me break down. Don't let me fail." And the only way that could be done--the only way these murderers could be forgiven--was that Christ carried through to the end and bore the sin, and paid the ultimate penalty.

And indeed, He did. He died for the sins of the world so that the justice of God was satisfied, and forgiveness could be extended to his murderers; even to the murderers who wouldn't accept the forgiveness; and, even to the murderers who are now in Hades awaiting to be transferred into the lake of fire. 1 John 2:3: "And He Himself (the Lord Jesus) is the propitiation (the satisfaction) for our sins; and not for ours only (we believers), but also for those of the whole world of unbelievers." What an expression of the grace of God.

So, while the God the Father can now offer forgiveness to the murderers, they must accept it personally by believing the gospel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You will be forgiven. If the morally guilty refuse to accept the forgiveness offered, then that forgiveness is of no avail. It's there, but you have to accept it. You have to say, "Yes, I am guilty, and I receive it." Why? Because that's the way it is with doctrine. You have to say yes to it before it works. If you've grown up in the context of good doctrine, and all of a sudden you start practicing the ways of the world, and you're saying "no" to doctrine and "no" to God, and you're saying, "God, you haven't told me the truth. That's not the way it is. I've talked to my friends here in the world. They know what's cool, and what's up, and what's right, and where it's at. Who are you? Why can't you get it straight the way we did?"

That's what these people were doing at the cross. They were telling Jesus, "You're just a clown. You think you're the Messiah. Why don't you just pay attention to those of us who are older and wiser? All people on that day for whom Jesus prayed that the Father would forgive them, the Father provided the basis. However, most of them refused to accept it. Those people are all in Hades now. Those whom Jesus had in mind as acting in ignorance and killing Him included the whole Jewish nation. Israel was upon His heart at that time. They too were in His mind when he said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Father, don't destroy the nation for what they are doing to Me."

Acts 3:13-15: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified His Son Jesus, and the One whom you delivered up and disowned in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release Him." Peter, in his second sermon, is speaking here to the officials of the nation. "But you disowned the holy and righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted you, but put to death the Prince of Life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And in verse 17: "And now brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance just as your rulers did also."

So Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." He's praying for the whole nation of Israel. The rulers were leading them astray, and the people were not following the Scriptures. Rulers and religious leaders can always be dangerous if you do not confirm that they are on track with Scripture, and what they have to say. When you have a preacher who is sharing his personal opinions with you, you'd better be very much on guard. That isn't worth a Fig Newton. But when he tells you that this is what God has said, that means everything. Then you better be on guard in obeying that which he has brought. The leaders of people ignorantly taught that they were doing the will of God when indeed they were not.

So what's the significance of the first words spoken? The first word? It is that Jesus, on the cross, provided a basis for the forgiveness of the moral guilt of all mankind. The father can offer forgiveness to all, even to those who choose to refuse the offer of salvation. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And God the Father proceeded to make that possible. He carried the Son through until the debt of sin was paid. And now the Father can forgive the worst of sinners, but only on the basis of what Christ has done.

So everybody who substitutes some other religious leader or some other religious concept--other than the grace gift of God through Christ for salvation, that person is not going to go to heaven. That's why vast numbers of religious people, Jesus said, will never find the small gate, and will never find that narrow road that leads to eternal life.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1999

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