

Luke 23:34 Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Just before 9 am, the Lord Jesus was taken from His prison cell and made to walk in disgrace along the narrow streets of Jerusalem, beyond the city wall, to Calvary where He was condemned to be crucified on a cross. On each side of Him, two thieves were also crucified. At the cross of Jesus crowds hurled insults and abuse at Him. All attention was on that middle cross ... on the One Who did not deserve to be there for He had done nothing to warrant any punishment. And as we look at the crucifixion of our Saviour, His death was as much a miracle as His birth and His resurrection, for He really died. His death was as *natural* as any death for He died the death that is appointed unto every man and woman to die.

Yet even though death is natural, in the case of the Lord Jesus it was *unnatural* for He should not have died. Death is the wages of sin, but He had never sinned. He Who knew no sin, - was perfect and holy, - was made sin for us ... and because He was made sin for us, the unnatural happened ... the sinless Saviour paid the penalty for sin, and He *died* the sinner's death.

At the same time His death was also *supernatural* because *He* laid down His life, - it wasn't taken from Him. The custom of the soldiers was to check the criminals had died before sunset. If they had not died, - if there was still some life in them, - the soldiers would break their legs, and speed up their death, **Jn. 19:32** Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. **33** But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.

Before He died, the body of Jesus was marred more than any other. In a voice trembling with the most unimaginable pain, He personally pleaded with His Father, **Lk. 23:34** Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. This was the darkest moment in the world's history. For the salvation of His people, in accordance with the eternal decree, Jesus remained on the cross in obedience to His Father's will. ... His Father would not take down from that tree His perfect, sinless Son Whom He loved, for upon Him all our sins were laid.

Could the Father have taken His Son down from that cross? Yes, He could have ... When He was arrested in Gethsemane, Peter drew his sword, but Jesus told him, **Mt. 26:52** Put up again thy sword into his place ... **53** Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? ... When Daniel was in the den of lions ... and when the three men were in the fiery furnace ... the Lord saved them out of their trials ... but the Saviour remained on the cross for it was only by dying there His people would be saved!

I'm sure it broke the Father's heart. I'm sure the angels in Heaven wept! ... I'm sure they would have longed to free the Saviour. But Jesus had to die to fulfil the plan of redemption for His people. ... That is why the cross is precious to all who know the Lord Jesus as their Redeemer. ... The cross is empty for the Saviour is no longer there. ... He is risen, and He is alive!

At the cross upon which Jesus was nailed there was a small group whose hearts were breaking. However, among the majority of the people, there was an atmosphere of *absolute hatred* for Jesus, more than words can describe. The crowds had no pity for Him as He suffered such agony and *utter* rejection. ... As He hung on the cross, and as His eyes were hardly able to stay open, as He looked at those people He came to save ... A few days earlier He *wept* over the city, longing for them to be saved, but they would not. Now He is hanging on the cross in torment of mind as they refused to accept Him as their Messiah and Saviour. When He was born in Bethlehem, that is why He was given the name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21). ... In every way, He came unto his own, and his own received him not (Jn. 1:11). Yet, on the cross He pleaded for them, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Lk. 23:34).

Jesus had been praying for them throughout His ministry. Many of them He had helped and healed but at the cross they turned against Him for he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Is. 53:3). But also, at the cross the Saviour was praying for them because not even the worst of sinners is beyond His power to save. ... You may say, "His prayers weren't answered, He was only showing us by example what we should do in the face of persecution". No, His prayer was not a mere gesture, for if the prayers of Jesus cannot be answered, how could we ever be confident God would answer *our* prayers! Indeed, His prayers *were* answered for on the evening of the Day of Pentecost Peter told another congregation in Jerusalem, [Acts 3:17](#) And now, brethren, I *know* that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. ... That was the day over three thousand Jews believed in Jesus as Saviour and were saved, and on another day *five thousand* were saved!

It was not because of the preaching of Peter, but it was in response to the Saviour's prayer on the cross ... and in Gethsemane, where He also prayed, [Jn. 17:20](#) Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also *which shall believe* on me through their word.

WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US ABOUT GOD.

Nothing ought to be further from the holiness of God as the cross of Calvary and what it stood for. ... The cross stood for sin and the sinner ... It stood for law-breaking. It was for the criminal. Calvary was where the holy God ought *not* to have been! It was a vile and horrible place. ... Indeed, this world with all its sin is a place God ought not to have been ... But **what the cross teaches us about God** is that if it were not

for what happened on the cross God would be a Stranger, not a Saviour. If He had not come to us, we would not have gone to Him.

The cross demonstrates how the Son of God, - *God*, - made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And ... as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:7,8). Jesus solemnly and willingly emptied Himself of *the power* of His 'Godness', - not of His Godliness, His Divine essence and Personhood, His deity, - but *the power* of His 'Godness', - to be nailed on the tree. He did not become a lesser God. The cross was no place for Jesus, but there He took the place of the sinner. He did not stop being God, but He died on the cross in obedience to His Father, for the transgression of *His* people was he stricken (Is. 53:8). ... The God Whose word created the heavens and the earth did not utter a word to save Himself for it was the Father's will for Him to be on the cross, it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief (Is. 53:10).

He prayed, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. Why did He Himself not forgive them? ... Previously, He had said to the man sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee (Mk. 9:5), ...and to the woman who washed His feet with her tears, [Lk 7:48](#) Thy sins are forgiven. ... Why did Jesus not forgive their sin? Had He lost His Godhood? No, He continued to be God. The cross did not change His Divine essence. ... Jesus was God, but on the cross He offered Himself to His Father as our sacrifice for sin, and the cloud gathering over Him caused Him to cry out to His Father to carry out the work of forgiveness upon those who had condemned Him to die. ... On the cross He was the sinner's perfect Substitute, appealing to His Father, - in accordance with the Divine eternal decree, - to forgive those who had put them there. **What the cross teaches us about God.**

WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US ABOUT SIN. The cross teaches that *all* sin needs to be dealt with for *all* sin is offensive to God, and *all* have sinned. Whether it is the sin of a baby or the sin of a murderer ... the cross teaches us sin can never go unpunished for it sets us in opposition to God. Sin is unacceptable to Him and Jesus Christ alone cleanses from all sin.

Even as He was hanging on the cross, you see the blindness of their hearts, as they despised Him. They would not believe! They had no excuse for the Old Testament Scriptures promised He was coming. They had previously been amazed in His presence, and were astounded by His miracles, *but they did not want Him as their Saviour!* ... That is the effect sin has, - it shuts God out ... and it rejects the Lord Jesus. "Sin will take you farther that you ever thought you'd go; it will keep you there longer than you ever intended to stay, and it will cost you more than you ever expected to pay". ... That is how **the cross teaches us**

about sin and the cost of sin. “Jesus paid it all, and all to Him I owe; Sin had left its crimson stain, He washed it white as snow”.

WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US ABOUT THE SAVIOUR. I remember in a Bible Study someone arguing with me that we should forgive everyone who has wronged us. I was contending, - and I still strongly contend, - forgiveness can only be received by those who ask for it. I would have no hesitation forgiving anyone who has wronged me and asks for forgiveness and shows true signs of repentance. However, if that same person sees no need to ask me to forgive them ... I cannot forgive him. *Forgiveness is given only to those who seek it!* That’s Scriptural! Christ died for those who seek His forgiveness, who recognise their sin and repent. ... I mustn’t harbour ill feelings against anyone who has wronged me ... but no matter how much you offer forgiveness, forgiveness cannot be received until you ask for it.

So, does that mean God does not forgive where there is no repentance? That is exactly what it means ... for it is only when **I Jn. 1:9** we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And such is the power of His prayers that even great multitudes from the religious crowds in Jerusalem were brought to repentance ... because for them He had prayed, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Lk. 23:34).

WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US ABOUT SALVATION ... is that there is salvation in none other except through the Lord Jesus Christ, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The cross brings the Saviour to the sinner. It was the reason Jesus came to earth. ... He raised from the dead the son of the widow ... and He gave the eyesight back to Bartimaeus ... and He raised to life the daughter of Jairus ... and He fed the multitudes on the hills of Galilee ... *but that was incidental, - that was not why He came.* ... Jesus came to die on the cross, - *the cross brings the Saviour to the sinner*; but not only does *the cross bring the Saviour to the sinner* *the cross brings the sinner to the Saviour*, - that is where we meet with God!

Jesus defeated my sin on the cross of Calvary, there dealing with it eternally. For me to be acceptable in Heaven His precious blood was shed and, - by faith through His sovereign and free grace, - He washed away my sins. *He* took my judgment. *He* suffered the agony that was mine. The grounds upon which my sin was forgiven was through the death of God’s Son ... and all the punishment due for my disobedience were placed upon Him, “My sin – not in part – but the whole is nailed to His cross; and I bear it no more; praise the Lord”. ... Apart from the work of Jesus Christ on the cross there is no salvation ... and finally ...

WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US ABOUT OUR SECURITY.

In the preceding verse, **Lk. 23:33** And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. ... When man had done His worst, and the hammer had driven the nails into the Saviour's hands and feet, **34** *Then* said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. He could have condemned, but He prayed, Father, forgive them.

The forgiveness of sins Jesus made effective by His death on the cross was completed to such a degree we are in Him **eternally secure**. When Jesus truly saves you, your salvation is complete, and what He achieved on the cross needs never to be repeated. ... Your Salvation is *fall* of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). ... When He saves you, it's forever for He has completed the work of salvation perfectly. ... I simply come as a sinner must to receive from Him the forgiveness He offers me. He bore *all* my sins on the cross, - my past sins, my present sins, and my future sins. I confess them before Him, He washes them away ... "Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that love to know ... [*and*] His forever, only His, who the Lord and me shall part?" ... That is **what the cross teaches me about my security in Him**.

CONCLUSION. What the cross teaches us about God is that if it were not for what He did at Calvary, He would be a Stranger to us. **What the cross teaches us about sin** is that it nailed Jesus to the cross. **What the Cross teaches us about the Saviour** is that He loves you, and He has always loved you, and believer, because He first loved you, you love Him now. ... **What the Cross teaches us about Salvation** ... is that there is no salvation apart from Jesus, - "all other ground is sinking sand". ... **What the Cross teaches us about our Security** ... is once in Him, in Him forever.

Do you know the Saviour? Is He your Saviour? Do you belong to Him? Have you asked Him to forgive you for offending Him? Have you believed in Him to take away your sin? Have you received Him as your Saviour and Lord?

A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord,
 A wonderful Saviour to me ...
 Do you know my Jesus? Do you know my Friend?
 Have you heard He loves you,
 And that He will abide till the end?