

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

The 7

PART

1

TITLE

Forgiveness

SCRIPTURE

Luke 23:33-38



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It's great to see all of you, and if you're a guest with us, we're thrilled that you have joined us. If you have a... Well, we love the Bible here, so if you have one in your hand, if you want to look with me at Luke chapter 23. If you don't have one in your hand, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you, and if you don't have one at home, please take that home as a gift. We're going to start a series, it's called The 7, that leads up to Easter, which is seven weeks from today. Were we as a people to have a big board up here, and I would write out what you say are all the different needs in the human heart, and if we were to take those needs that we had written down, all of them, and condense them into the greatest of all, I believe that seven would remain.

And the amazing thing is that Jesus is not aloof to those needs in our life, for when He was in the midst of His greatest pain and suffering on the cross, Jesus, we are told in the four Gospels that He said seven different things. And in each one of His statements from the cross, we find that even though He was going through such pain and suffering and embarrassment and shame and loneliness, is that He was thinking about and addressing each one of our greatest needs.

And so, starting today and ending on Easter Sunday, we're going to take a Sunday to examine each one of these statements that were spoken by Jesus Christ. We begin this morning with the need of forgiveness. See, the Bible tells us in Romans 2 and in Romans 4 that God has written His law upon our hearts. Now, what that means is this, is the God who's the Creator of all things, He is the standard of beauty, He's the standard of justice, He's the standard of righteousness. And so, He wrote that standard upon our own heart so that when we break it, or when we see someone else breaking it, it's only instinctual for us to look and say, "That's beautiful," or "That's not beautiful," or "That is righteous," or "That's wrong."

We all become judges on the basis of a law that God has written on our heart, but the Bible tells us that we have all sinned against God, fallen short of His glory. And so, God, when He wrote His laws, He wrote it so deep upon our heart that when we sin, we not only sin against God, but we also cut our very heart.

And the blood that is spilled from a heart in the spiritual sense when we sin against it, we describe as guilt. We know what it feels like; it feels terrible. It feels like it's running from us, it feels like it needs to be contained, it feels like we don't want other people to see it, we want to clean it up quickly. And so what we do is we run after a number of things in order to deal with the guilt that's in our heart.

One of the first things we all do is we try to run from our guilt. We try running from it. We, at times, if our guilt actually took place in a certain relationship, or in a certain town, or even city, or sometimes even state, we'll move away. We'll break off fellowship from people simply because the nearness, the proximity of where it all began, it causes us to be so unsettled that we just run from it. And so, many of us right now, we're running from something in our past. And yet, what's true is this, is why this doesn't work, is because you simply cannot outrun what you carry. It's in you. It's springing from your heart and my heart.

So we say, "Well, that doesn't work, let's try something else," and so we say, "You know what we should do, is let's try numbing our guilt. Let's try out-shopping, let's try out-drinking our guilt, out-eating our guilt,

out-working our guilt.” And so we become alcoholics or workaholics or shopaholics in order to numb the guilt, but the problem is this, is we simply cannot deal with one storm in our life by creating another.

And so we say, “Well, that doesn’t work, let’s try something else,” and so we say, “You know what we should do? Let’s try cleansing our guilt. Let’s try to counteract the scale, let’s rebalance things. Let’s reform our life, let’s do good things, let’s come to church, let’s pray, let’s read the Bible, let’s serve, let’s give.” And yet what we find is this, is this doesn’t work because we cannot remove the salt in the ocean by adding single glasses of fresh water.

And so, many people, what we do is after we’ve tried everything that we know, what we do is we say, “Well, it must not be wrong,” so we try to redefine our guilt. So we create a different law, a law that’s created in our own image, that says, “Well, this is right, even though God says it isn’t right. This is right, even though within us, there’s tension from the law that’s written upon us.” And this doesn’t work, because we cannot erase the law that is sewn upon our heart by writing a new one.

And so, the reality this morning is we all have a sin history, and with that sin history, there’s the residue of guilt that we all know. Every one of us wishes that we could take back a particular comment, a particular action, a particular day, a particular week or month or year or season of our life. We wish we had a mulligan, that we could do that over, but we can’t. This sin, this guilt, it needs to be erased, and the good news of the Bible, it says that there is a way, but there’s only a way, it’s the way, and it’s the way of forgiveness.

So, let me pray for us as we get started. Father in heaven, we come to you. We come to you needy, because we are, as your Word tells us, we acknowledge that it’s true, is that we have sinned against you. We have cut our own heart, and we feel guilty. We are guilty. I pray for those in the room right now who still look back to a particular time or particular event, and that event colors every single part of their life, every relationship, every fear, every insecurity, their very identity. They look back on a particular thing that’s generated such guilt, and they simply cannot get away from it. So I pray today, Lord, that this would be the first day, maybe in a long time, maybe ever, that they feel the peace of your presence and the joy of your forgiveness.

I pray for those in the room right now who have never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, who’ve never seen just how consequential Jesus is, who’ve never seen His supremacy and His integrity and His trustworthiness. God, I pray that you would help them today, even in this hour, Lord, to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. And so, would you speak through weakness and glorify your Son, I pray, in His name, amen.

Well, in Luke chapter 23, what we find is that Jesus has already been arrested in the garden. He’s gone to the Jewish courts; they have found Him guilty of blasphemy, but they can’t kill Him by their own authority, and so they take Him to Pilate in the hope that Pilate will put Him to death. Three times in Luke chapter 23, Pilate comes back out to them and he says, “I find no reason, there’s no guilt in this man. I don’t know why you’re here.” And they continue to plead. Eventually, they ask for a known criminal, a terrorist to be released in

His place, and for Jesus to be crucified, and Pilate relents, and he condemns Jesus to be killed.

We get to the place where they take Jesus, and they force Him... I'm sorry. Even before they forced Him up the hill, then He went through a time that's called scourging or flogging, where He would be whipped with a whip that would be infused with rock and bone, that would literally lacerate everything that it hit upon His life. Many criminals, when they were flogged, they would actually die before they got to the cross, because their goal was to actually inflict so much pain they would bring them to the place of unconsciousness, and yet not die.

And so, Jesus has endured all of this, and then they say, "It's time to go." He's still alive. He makes the path, He drops the cross, and it says in verse 25 that they grab a man named Simon and says, "You need to carry his cross the rest of the way." They finally get Him all the way to the top, and this is what it says, starting in verse 32. "Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull," or Golgotha, "there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said," here it is, "'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments. 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.' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'"

What I want to show you... You know, every time that I start reading one of the Gospels and it gets to this moment in the story, I hope you know that we're coming upon... You hear in church "holy ground," and "holy" simply means it's set apart. When we're reading these parts of the Bible, these are special parts of the Bible. We're supposed to calm down and slow down, and think, and be absolutely awestruck at what Jesus did for us. What I want to do is I want to show you just a few truths and then a few applications before we take the Lord's Supper, that are all bound up in that one little prayer, when He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The first thing I want you to see is that Jesus prayed for forgiveness in the most unforgiving of moments. The content of His prayer was very simple. It was really one thing He asked for, and it was "forgive." Forgive. Context tells us some things about how remarkable this moment actually was. You see, Jesus, we're told, had just been laid down upon the cross. The hammers began to fly, and the nails were now piercing His hands and his feet; that's fresh. His breathing, when they lifted Him up, would be labored. His nerves would be burning. You have to understand that the exhaustion from an entire night of sleepless agony in Gethsemane, combined with a morning of being scourged and abused, was pressing upon His brow as heavily as the crown of thorns. Not in cold blood did Jesus cry. You see, as the echo of the hammer could still be heard, these precious lips and tongue of Jesus that had been silent before men, they opened up to God. And He simply said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Friends, if there was ever a time... If there was ever a time for a man to pray for himself, this was it. Absolutely alone. Oh, I know there were people on crosses to His right and left, and there were people down below, but there was only one Son of God who was carrying all the sins of all the world, of all the people who have ever lived, are living, and will live. There's only one. Exhausted, disgraced.

You notice that we read it says that they cast lots for His garments. You know what that means? It means He wasn't wearing them. I know that the pictures that you see, if you type in "crucifixion of Jesus," they always put a little white cloth that's kind of stained around Himself, but that was not the Roman way. The Roman way was not only to hurt Him, it was to humiliate Him.

So imagine that's you, bleeding and naked before everybody: men, women, your mother. Suffering and suffocating, and mocked. You know, when I am mocked, I instinctually do one of two things: I revile in return or I run. And He closed His mouth, and He was nailed to a tree. If there was ever a time that a man should be praying for himself, this was it, and yet His prayer is altogether for others. He says, "Forgive them. That one over there, and... Can't you see him, Father? That one over there, right there. You see that one right there? Forgive that one right there."

It is absolutely stunning that He would pray this. And then, the content of the prayer is just "forgive." Forgive. "God, Father, forgive." Did you know that there is not another place in the Gospels where Jesus asks His Father to forgive people? You see, as the Son of God, He had authority, and so everywhere He went when He was doing His earthly ministry, He just forgave people. For example, in Matthew chapter 9, verse 2, there's a man who's paralyzed, his friends bring them, and He says, "Take heart, my son." He says, "Your sins are forgiven." And all the people around Him who didn't believe in Him, they get so uptight and they say, "Who does this guy think he is, God? Only God can forgive."

And yet here on the cross, Jesus exercised no divine prerogatives, no divine rights. Instead, what we find is that Jesus humbled Himself so fully in that moment that He simply left Himself to make an appeal to the Father. And so, with a sign, a sign marking His very authority over His head, and with rulers and soldiers mocking His authority beneath Him, Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe who created all things by His spoken word and who sustains all things, Colossians says, by the word of His power, Jesus prayed. He prayed for forgiveness in the midst of the most unforgiving of moments.

The second thing I want you to see is that Jesus prayed for sinners in the most sinful of moments. Friends, there has never been a greater crime committed on the earth as when perfection was nailed to a tree. You think about the history of humanity since the fall of man, and how all of our sin is against God, but in this moment on the cross, all of the sin against God was literally condensed upon the body, a single body of perfection: perfection of righteousness, perfection of love, perfection of integrity, perfection of truth.

There has never been a more unjust event in the history of the world. And Jesus' prayer not only was "forgive them," but "they know not what they do." But they did know. Judas knew that he was betraying, and Peter knew that he was denying. Pilate knew that he was condemning. The rulers knew that they were offering false allegations. And the soldiers knew that they were swinging a hammer and piercing real hands and feet. They knew.

So when Jesus says that they don't know what they do, what He means is this: They don't know the enormity of their sin, and who it is that they are afflicting. The New Testament continues to talk about this. There's a man, his name is Paul, and he writes a letter to a church in Corinth, and in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 8, this is what it says. It says, "None of the rulers of this age understood this." They didn't understand who it was. They did not understand the enormity of the injustice; they did not understand the enormity of how wrong it was to humiliate and mock this person. "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

But you need to know this was not an accident. It wasn't because their ignorance then all of a sudden produced this accident. No, this was always God's plan. It was God's plan to actually leverage the greatest sin in the world in order to save sinners out of the world. This is what He does. You see, this Jesus, we're told, was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." And this was no surprise to Jesus either, for when He was on the earth, in Luke chapter 10, He says, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

But, friends, we shouldn't just look at this moment and see the crowds that were there, and see the people that were there. You see, we're not mere spectators in this event. Part of us was there. The Bible says that while He was there on that cross, He took sin upon Himself, and He died for it. What that means is it was our sin. And you all know this; so do I. We know. We know when we're sinning. When we're caught in a lie, we know it, don't we? If you're committing adultery, you know it. You're not in the middle of adultery saying, "You know, is this what it is?" Yes, we all know, this is adultery. We know what we are doing.

But what we don't know is the enormity of it, and we do not understand the One that we afflict. We do not see the disrespect and dishonor that we throw at His holiness, and that we throw at His integrity, and His trustworthiness, and His love, and His mercy, and His perfect justice. We don't know. We don't know, as it says in Ezra chapter 9, verse 6, that's depicted here on the screen, that "our guilt has mounted up to the heavens" in the light of His presence. We don't see how our guilt produces an insecurity that impairs every part of our life, every sense of our identity, every sense, every relationship that we have. We don't see all of that. And so, friends, you need to see that when Jesus prayed for those who don't know what they do, He was praying for us. He was praying for me, and for you. In the worst of times, He was praying for forgiveness, and He was praying for sinners that were afflicting Him.

There's one other truth I want you to see, and that is that Jesus died on that cross so His prayer could be answered. You see, if Jesus did not die on that cross, had He called the angels, had He used His authority, His divine prerogative to come off of that cross, then there would be absolutely no basis for forgiveness. The Old Testament said, the New Testament said, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. So when we talk about the word "forgiveness," and that's the greatest need that we have, you need to understand what that word means. "Forgive" literally means to send away. We have it, we're clutching it, we're holding it, and suddenly when we forgive, we send it away. This is what God does. He's holding it, there's a record of wrong that we have against Him and against His Son, and when He forgives us, He sends it away.

And I've tried many, many times to improve upon an illustration that I have given over and over and over, and I simply cannot improve upon it, because it's actually God's. There was a day in the Old Testament, it was called the Day of Atonement. And on the Day of Atonement, the whole country would gather together in order to deal with their sin problem, one day a year. They would all come together, and the high priest would take two goats. The first goat, he'd come over, and the high priest would place his hands upon the head of the goat, symbolically placing all of the sin of all of the people upon that goat, and then that goat would be killed and sacrificed for the sin. And then the high priest would take a second goat, and the high priest would again place his hands upon the head of the goat, symbolically placing the sin upon this goat, and then that goat would be sent so far into the wilderness, it would be sent away so far into the wilderness that it could not find its way back.

And this is precisely what Jesus did for us. You see, all of this was a temporary fix. It was all temporary. The word "atonement" that you read in the Old Testament, it simply meant covering. It didn't remove anything, it simply covered it. It simply covered it. So this was a temporary fix, sort of like tarping a roof. There's a storm, a tree falls, there's an enormous gaping hole. We need a new roof, but it's not quite time, and so what do we do in the meantime? We put a covering over the roof. Well, these two goats, they covered the hole until Christ came to fix the roof. You see, on that cross, Jesus Christ, He, like the first goat, He died as a payment for the sin. But then also, like the second goat, He died in order to take our sin so far away that it could not find its way back to us.

1 John chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, it says, "If anyone sins..." Have you ever sinned? You ever sinned? That means this is for you. Ready? "If anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation..." Big word, it means substitute. He died in my place. The Father allowed all of His wrath to be absorbed in Jesus instead of me. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not only our sins but also for the sins of the whole world."

And friends, three days later, you know what happened. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He rose from the dead, and all of a sudden, eyewitnesses see Him, and they believe. And once they believed, Jesus' prayer was answered, and they began going to tell other people who they have seen, that Jesus rose from the dead. One of them was a man named Peter. Acts chapter 3, he comes to them, and he begins his sermon, and he quotes

Jesus. He says, "I know that you acted in ignorance." You see it? He's talking to the very people, some of them who were at the foot of the cross, and even the priests. He says, "And also your rulers." Jesus Christ, from the cross, He says, "You don't know what you're doing." And Peter says, "You know what? That was so true. I denied Him, and I did not see the enormity of my sin, and I did not see the One, the worth of the One that I was sinning against. I acted in ignorance, and you acted in ignorance."

But watch what it says: "But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled it. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out," that they may be sent away. And suddenly, many of these Jews, they believed, and when they believed, Jesus' prayer on that cross was answered. We get to Acts chapter 6, and it says that some of the priests in the city of Jerusalem, that would've been the people that said, "Give us Barabbas instead of Jesus," some of those priests that Jesus says, "They know not what they do," they trusted Christ, and His prayer was answered. They continued to preach to more people, and everybody who believed, Jesus' prayer was answered. Eventually, a man named Paul, he gets converted, he trusts Christ, and he begins going into other places that weren't Jewish cities, and telling other people, Gentiles, about Christ. And many of them believed, and Jesus' prayer was answered.

You see, His prayer was like a rock that's dropped into the water that creates ripples that eventually reach the end of the lake. The prayer of Jesus Christ from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," has literally traveled the ends of the earth, and friends, it has reached us. We've heard it. It's effectual for us. We can be forgiven of our sin.

So, let me give you a few applications, and then we're going to celebrate what He's done by doing precisely what He prescribed, and that is to hold the bread and the cup, symbols of His own body and blood. First, let me encourage you to trust Christ and be forgiven. This is specifically for people in the room who've never trusted Christ and have never seen the need to do so. You see, if I was blind to everything that I have read within the Scriptures, if I was blind to everything that I have known, that God has done, that I have seen His handiwork in my own life for 46 years, if the only thing I knew was Jesus' prayer, I must trust this man, for His one plea right here, "Father, forgive that man, for he knows not what he does," that was backed and endorsed by His own blood, proves that nobody has ever loved me like this man. Nobody has ever been sacrificial to me like this man. No one has ever been this trustworthy to me, and so I can trust this man.

And yet some of you in this room, you're not forgiven. You've never trusted Christ. You're running from your guilt, you're trying to reform your guilt, you're trying to numb your guilt, you're trying to redefine your guilt. And let me tell you something: Trust Christ, and He will remove your guilt. He'll remove it. He'll take it away, He'll send it away. It can happen today. Do you know how you trust Him? You know how you trust people. If your house is on fire and you're up on the roof, and you know you can't save yourself, and there's a really strong-looking fireman down there says, "Jump, I promise I'll catch you," you know you're trusting when you jump. You're throwing all of your weight upon his credibility, his promise, his ability to hold you up. You see, you don't do that if you think, "You know what, I think he's going to play a game. I think he's going to say



say jump, [inaudible 00:31:21] jump, and he's going to go back up, and..." No, that's not what he does.

So this is how we trust Him. You ready? You're up on the roof, you got a problem, and you see your problem, and you see you cannot be your savior anymore. You look, and so the first thing of how you trust Him is you admit. You admit, "God, I have a problem. My life is on fire, and not only that, I cannot save myself."

The second thing you have to do to trust Him is you have to listen to that fireman down there saying, "Jump, I'll catch you," and you have to believe him. You have to believe that He's trustworthy, you have to believe that His accomplishments on the cross and resurrection, that when you jump into His arms, that He's going to do what He's promised, and that is He's going to take away all your sin, and He's going to give you His righteousness so that you will be justified forever. You have to believe that.

And the other thing you have to do is you have to look at all the other things that are competing voices in your life that are saying, "Just trust me. Just trust me." All the competing lords, all the competing masters in life, and you have to say, "You know what? I'm going to let this One right here determine my fate." And the Bible says that if you will believe in Jesus Christ with your heart, that you will walk out of this room forgiven. Isn't that good news?

I can't go any further without giving people the opportunity to do that, so would you bow your heads with me? I know many of you in the room, you've already trusted Christ, and so I'd simply want to ask you to pray for people that are considering this very thing. But for those of you who are in the room right now, you've never trusted Christ, the Bible says we're supposed to confess. It says that we're simply supposed to call out upon the name of the Lord, and you will be saved, and so you can call out to Him a prayer something like this.

"Father in heaven, I confess to you that I'm a sinner. I confess to you that I know not what I have done. The enormity of my sin against you is something I did not see, but now I see, and I cannot save myself. But I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe He died, I believe He rose from the dead three days later, and I confess Him not only the Lord of life but of my life. I want to learn, and I want to grow. So, God, would you forgive me? Would you give me the righteousness of Jesus? Would you send away all my sin? I pray this in Christ's name, amen."

Friends, listen, if you just prayed to receive Christ, you have to understand that's the greatest decision you're ever going to make. And as a church family, we want to be able to celebrate with you, and the only way to do that is for us to know. So, you see there's little cards in the seat back in front of you. I would urge you to fill that out, and at the bottom, there's lots of boxes there, but there's not one of them there that says "I just trusted Christ." So, would you just put that, "I trusted Christ," and we'll let you know what to do with that at the end of our time.

On Palm Sunday and Easter, we're going to actually baptize people who trust Christ over the next five or six weeks. This is an opportunity for you. You see, the Bible says, Jesus says that the first act of obedience after trusting Christ is to tell other people through that symbol, that "I have put all of my faith in Him." And so, we would love to see you baptized on Palm Sunday or Easter.

The second thing is this, second application: Let's trust Christ and receive comfort. I'll be quick here, but you need to know that Jesus is still praying for you. Hebrews 7:25 says that "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." This means that no sin of ours can tie His tongue, that Jesus even still is praying, "Father, forgive them." From the cross, it's amazing that Jesus looked down to find something to plead in our favor, and He found absolutely nothing until His eye lit upon our own ignorance, and Jesus says, "I can work with that."

This is the hope in Jesus' praying, is that He is enduringly hopeful. He looks at our life, at the things that He's praying for, our relationships, our responsibilities, our burdens, and there He prays, and you need to know that He can find the light in your situation, and He can address it with His own mouth. That's what He does. But not only that, from the cross, Jesus prayed for our deepest solution. You see, our problem, He says, is that we don't know what we're doing. I probably would've said, "So, God, enlighten them. Show them." And He skipped "enlighten them" and "show them" in order to race right to our greatest need, which is "forgive them." Just forgive them. Forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing. And this is the good thing: In the things that He's praying for for you, He's not just looking for the easiest thing. In all of His infinite wisdom, He's praying for the most important thing. You can trust Him; you can find comfort in Him.

Third, let's trust Christ and forgive one another, because grace lives in streams and not in puddles. Jesus intends for any grace that you have received, for you to be able to give it to others, which is why He says, "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." You must forgive. Friends, you and I, we never imitate Jesus more vividly than when we forgive somebody who treats us poorly.

And fourth, let's trust Christ and confess our sins. When we do trust Jesus, we are no longer condemned, but our sin breaks fellowship, and so He tells us, "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." One of the tools that He gives us is the Lord's Supper, to do just that. So, for those of you who are going to be serving us, if you want to go ahead and stand up. As they go, and as they retrieve the elements and serve them to us, the elements, the bread and the cup, they're symbols of His body and His blood. The Bible tells us that to hold these in our hand is to confess to others that we love the realities behind them, which is why the New Testament says that if you've never trusted Christ, to let these things pass. I would invite you during that time simply to pray, "God, is this true? Is this true, what I hear?"

But for those of us in the room who have trusted Christ, I welcome you to the table, and I welcome you to do precisely what Jesus asked us to do, and that is that we would confess our sin to Him and be forgiven before we take it. So, let me pray for us. Father in heaven, we look to you in faith and ask God that you would address our hearts during this time. I pray, Father, as you do, that you would give us courage to be able to confess what you reveal. I pray, Father, that as we take this, that you would see to it that we can take it with a clear conscience. We thank you for the forgiveness that is in Jesus, and ask, God, that you would create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. We pray in Christ's name, amen.



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