

April 6, 2014
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Jesus Intercedes at the Cross

Straightforward way, write music that is so profound, so marvelous. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Open to Luke 23 with me, would you? Luke 23, just this one verse at verse 34.

"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'"

There he was hanging on the cross, bleeding, dying for those who beat him, reviled him, rejected him, and hung him there. And he cries out as their intercessor to the Father. Their substitutional sacrifice, their sin bearer, their only hope for forgiveness in eternal life. Now here's the question as he prays, "Father, forgive them, will they be forgiven? Or must they stand before him, he's the one that will judge all men, and answer for their horrific sin of killing the one who was sent to be their Savior?"

Now the answer is, that depends. That depends. First, all men can be forgiven for their sins. Even for any sin against the Son of Man. Let me read it with you at Luke chapter 12. The Lord Jesus said it here. Luke 12 at verse 10. Here's what he said,

What is the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

"And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him."

Now because the Lord made a point that the sin against the Holy Spirit in this sense is not forgivable, some have reasoned, "Well, then there is a sin that you can't be forgiven of." Well, if you understand it rightly, you would be correct because the Lord is teaching that. What the context is, and we see that in Matthew as well as here in Luke, is that those around Jesus were accusing him of healing and doing the things, the good deeds that he was doing in the person and power of Satan. In other words, they were attributing to Satan the power behind the works of the Lord Jesus. It was blasphemous to think that Satan should be glorified for what Jesus did. But you see, Jesus made the point, "You can be forgiven of that. But if you do that very same thing against the Holy Spirit, you can't be forgiven."

You say, "Well, why? The Holy Spirit is a person of the Godhead. Jesus is a person of the Godhead. Blaspheme one person of the Godhead and you can be forgiven. Blaspheme another person of the Godhead and you can't be forgiven." Well, you must understand the work of the Holy Spirit. If you don't understand the work of the Holy Spirit, you won't understand why Jesus says this. The Holy Spirit is, I call him the worker. He's the one that works in men's hearts. He convicts men of sin. You see, it's by his sharpening of their conscience that men answer to themselves in their spirit regarding their sinfulness.

Now, we are told in the Bible, you know, that man's heart, however, can become cold. And men can resist the Spirit of God over and over and over and over and over again until they're hardened. Romans even says they can sin and sin and get deeper and deeper in sin until their minds are reprobate and God gives them over to a reprobate mind. And you read that and you wonder, what does that mean? Have they come to the end of the road? Is there no hope for them? It seems that they can get to the place where God is saying, "Okay, your reprobate mind is so completely in control, there isn't any way for me to reach you." You see the stuff that they're doing as he talks of their sin there in Romans.

You see that they sink into the sins of, well, the low point, I might just jump to that, the low point is homosexuality. Women with women, men with men, God says it's most despicable, their minds get to the place where they actually think that that's normal, that's acceptable, and that there's nothing wrong with that at all. And God says that's a dangerous place to be because now you have so turned around the realities about sin that you're calling something that's despicable and contrary to the design of God. It's an abomination to him, it blasphemes against his very creative design, you're calling that good. Good is now evil and evil is now good. And the mind can get so turned around that it can't respond to what is good and what is evil in the right way anymore. It's flipped over, it's reversed, and God says it's reprobate.

Well, now, if the Holy Spirit should come to such a one and convict him of sin, that one would think that the work of the Holy Spirit is really from Satan. That's blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, accrediting to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit. So such a person would think, "This conviction about sin is wrong, evil. My right to do what I want, my right to live as I please, my right to express myself any way I choose, the right of others to just live the way that they choose without criticism, without condemnation, now that's what's right." How is the Holy Spirit going to help that person see that they're a sinner? The answer is there is no way left. The Holy Spirit is God's wonderful gift to the human race to know about sin. And when a person's mind gets to the place where they actually attribute to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit, it can't be forgiven because there is no way to respond to what is sin. Because when the Spirit brings conviction, the response is, "Oh, that's wrong. That message telling me that I'm a sinner, that's wrong because that thing that now is telling me is sin, that's really good. And this thing over here that is saying is good is really sin." Totally twisted, flipped over.

Therefore, there is no way for such a one to be saved when they get to the place, utterly get to the place where every message from the Holy Spirit is viewed as something from Satan. There is no way that God provides for them to know that they're a sinner or be saved. They are of a reprobate mind. They have given themselves over to evil. But if they say that about the Son, if they say, "Well, Jesus, He was of Satan," that can be forgiven them. Because it isn't the job of the Son to bring conviction about sin. It's the job of the Holy Spirit to do that. They may have opinions about all the work of the Son on the cross and all the works of the Son in His life. They may have opinions that twist everything that He does. And believe me, every false religion in the world that has a book that comments about Jesus will say that He was evil. Yeah, the Muslims

say, "Well, He's a prophet." Listen, they also say to you, "He was deluded because He said He was the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Him."

Now, there He was wrong. He was either deluded or He was a liar or whatever, but He was wrong. Can't have it both ways. Can't say He's a good man, but He lies. He's a good man, but He was deluded. He was a good man, but you don't believe Him. He's rejected, but that can be forgiven. That can be forgiven. There are those that have gone through their lives rejecting the Lord Jesus, hating everything about His work and ministry because maybe someone in their life talked with them about Him, or maybe they went off into life on their own early and rejected all the convictions that came to them. But whatever it was that worked in their hearts, there are people that have lived long years rejecting the Lord Jesus. And then by the grace of God have come to see that they're hopeless and helpless without Him. They need Him. They need His forgiveness. They need His mercy. They cry out to Him and He says, "They can be forgiven."

Jesus Prayer Effective He can save

So I say it depends. All men can be forgiven for that sin against the Son of Man, but they must, here's the other side of this, will that prayer of Jesus be effectual? If they receive Him, they will be forgiven. As their intercessor, He has prayed and the Father is willing to forgive, but they must receive Him. You know John chapter 1 verse 12? "But as many as received Him, to them He gave," what? "the right to become children of God." To those who believe in His name, that's the ones that now can be called children of God. Those are the ones that can have the forgiveness of God if they will receive, if they will receive the Son. So Christ's intercession on the cross for those who crucified Him is valid. It's valid, but the eternal destiny of each one of those people is up to them. His intercession is perfect, valid, but will that mean they'll be in heaven or not? It's up to them. Either they admit their sinfulness and ask Him to forgive them.

Let me give you a definition of what I mean by that. If they admit their sinfulness and ask Him to forgive them, do you know that that equals what we read in scripture called putting their faith in Christ? What's it mean to put your faith in Christ? Admit your sin and ask Him for forgiveness. That is putting your faith in Christ. Or they die in their sin and they have to face Him as their judge in eternity.

Let me give you a little story, a little example, kind of from our day. There were two young men at a red light, one on the inside lane or the speed lane, the one on the left anyway. He revved his engine three times and he looked over at the other one. It's kind of a signal. Do you want to race? And the one on the right, he raised his thumb and he said, yeah, let's do it. And so they looked at that light and then it snapped green and off they went with a roar of powerful engines, squealing of tires. A couple blocks down the way, there was a little girl, just five or six years old. She was standing

there looking across the street at the streetlight. She'd been told, now when the light is green, when you're looking at it, you know, you don't, you can go then across the street because that means that the cross traffic right in front of you, there you have to stop. But if you look across there and it's red, you dare not go across. Red means stop. You stop because the cross traffic is going. That's bad. So she looked across. It was red. And so she stood there waiting for it to turn green. And then it turned green and she stepped off the curb and started across the street. And the two racing cars were tearing down the street. Those speed-crazed young men saw that light turn red, but they were very close, they thought, and they could get through it before the cross traffic could come. And so they sped ahead. There was a thump, splattered blood, and the limp body of a little girl was thrown to the curb.

Days later, the one young man, the one on the right that hit the little girl, stood before a judge. He begged for mercy. He begged for mercy. He knew he was wrong. He was so ashamed. He wept and begged for mercy. The judge looked at the name of the dead girl on the sheet that told him what case he was hearing, and he gasped. Could he be fair? Could he be impartial? Could he be just? Or should he turn this case over to another judge, to judge this killer of his own little girl? That may not to you sound like reality, but believe me, it is reality. This has happened.

You see, with men, it's not possible for there to be perfect love and perfect justice together, because men aren't perfect. And that's why we make accommodation for this kind of situation, and we remove the person that's involved personally, because they cannot project perfect justice and perfect love at the same time. Man can't do that. But with God, it's different. With God, there is a way for there to be love and justice, demands of perfect righteousness. It can all be together, because God is perfect. And that's why the Savior could say what he said on the cross. You see, with God, there is this truth, a Savior came in love. A Savior has taken on man's sins. A Savior has willingly died at man's hands. And there is a Savior that intercedes for all who will call on his name, trust in him, believe in him, and ask him for mercy and forgiveness. He will give it.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Ro. 10:13

That means delivered. It's not just for some, it's for whoever, because God is perfect. He is perfect in love, but he's also perfect in righteousness. Man can't be, but God is. And that is a proper statement from the cross. Only Jesus could make that kind of statement. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing." Thoughts of God are not our thoughts.¹ The ways of man are not the ways of God. Man can't understand the mind and heart of God. Man is so caught up in his own thinking.

Visit The Lord's Tomb

There's another scene I want you to see with me from John 20. And it's at the tomb after the resurrection. John 20. It's when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. I'd

¹ Isa. 55:8, 9

like to read with you from John 20 and verse 11. "But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping."

Think of that judge, that father, standing at the coffin of his little girl. What would he be doing? I think he'd be weeping. Mary was at the tomb weeping. The tomb spoke of futility, it spoke of defeat, it spoke of separation from one that she loved, it spoke of hopelessness, death. "And as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they've laid him.' Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?'" The terrible tearing at death is the tearing of separation.

I don't know when the last time you went to a funeral was. Mine was just this week. Thank you for those of you that went to Ray Egly's funeral or went to the visitation to encourage the family. Maybe some of you went to Dale Muir's. But rest assured, a death is upon all of us, and all of us, all those around us, and ourselves included, are going to go through that door if Jesus doesn't come for us first. And a terrible thing about that is separation, the awfulness of forever losing fellowship with the one that you love. There's no comfort for it unless you look beyond the grave. There's no comfort for it in this life. That one is not coming back. The only comfort is for the Christian who knows that they will be reunited with that one after death for them in the presence of the Lord. If that one knows Christ and if they know that that one that's now dead knew Christ, there is hope. But there was separation.

She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've laid him, and I will take him away." Let me at least have his body, that I can take care of it. I can show my love to him. In the care for his body. Don't deny me that last bit of a way to show my love. Jesus said to her, "Mary." Everything turns, everything changes with him saying, "Mary." It means this one talking to her knew who she was, knew her at a personal level with her name. "Mary." More than that, remember this is the Son of God speaking to his own child.

And just as surely as Romans 8:16 tells you, that the Holy Spirit helps you know the Father and call him Abba,² Dada. In other words, we recognize God in us by the work of the Holy Spirit. This one, when she heard her name, by the working of the Spirit, helping her recognize her Lord, he was no longer a stranger. She turned and said to him, "Rabboni," which is to say, "Teacher." You can see the word "Rabbi," I think, in that if you look. "Rabboni." No doubt the word that she used when she spoke to the Lord Jesus in the flesh. Word of respect, but a personal one. It's kind of like for me when people call me "Pastor." It's an endearing way of talking with me. They don't have to do that. They could use my first name and I invite them to do that. But some

² Ro. 8:15, 16

just speak of their endearment and their love just by using that phrase. I know when we have communion up here,

I like to refer to the men that are with me as brothers. Brother Steve and Brother Chuck are up here. They are my brothers in Christ. Now, every time I see Steve and Chuck, I don't say, "Hello, brother," but sometimes I do. But I don't always say, "There's Brother Steve back there," always. I might, but it's an endearing way to remember that we're tied together. In many churches, the elders are called "Elder so-and-so." And I used to remember in the bookstore that when we had certain men come in with Bibles to be engraved, they would want on there, "Elder John so-and-so Smith," you know. And I think, "Well, okay. They want to have that Bible out there so everybody knows they're an elder." But maybe that was just an endearing way to remember them in their place of service and authority. That was okay.

But then sometimes I would get one that would come along, and he would be, "The Elder Right Reverend Bishop Jones," you know. And I think, "Wait a minute. This is a little bit of overkill here. Maybe this one is not looking so much for a statement of love, but of elevation."

But all she said was, "Teacher." Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren, brethren, my brethren, and say to them, 'I'm ascending to my Father and to your Father and to my God and your God.'" "I have work to finish," is what he's saying. Next time, of course, he's seen among his disciples that work is finished. She came and told the disciples that she'd seen the Lord. He'd spoken these things to her.

Now, I'm not saying that every time they heard a report about somebody seeing the Lord or what he said to them, I'm not saying that they were quick to receive it. These fellows were really skeptics, you know. Especially, we think of Thomas. "Don't give me that you saw the Lord. I won't believe it until I personally have the chance to put my finger in the wounds and thrust my hand in the side. Then I'll believe." We usually say, you know, "Thomas was from Missouri." You know, the show-me state, you know. But I love it when Jesus does appear and Thomas is there a week later, you know. He doesn't have to do that. Don't ever think that Thomas ever ran his finger into his hands, the wounds in his hands or his feet. And don't think that Thomas ever thrust his hand into the tear in his side from the spear. Don't think that, because he didn't. When he saw the Lord Jesus, and he knew it was the Lord, he fell at his feet. Out of love and respect and worship, he fell at his feet. He was alive. And what a powerful message that made it.

When the Christians of that day went out and spread the gospel, "We've seen the Lord. He's alive. He's not dead. He's had victory over death. Cry out to him. He'll forgive you of your sins. He'll have mercy on you. No matter what you did, even if you were one that helped hang him on the tree, he will forgive you and give you victory over death." What love. Man can never, never come close.

Thank you so much, Lord Jesus, for such love that you would forgive even those who would kill you if they would cast themselves upon you. If they would cry out for mercy, you would give it. If they would ask for forgiveness, you would forgive them. Any of them. You've said they would be forgiven. Thank you for the love that you have for us and the bond that you have given us with yourself, that bond of love. And thank you that soon we'll see you and all those that put their trust in you. Thank you for the victory of resurrection. Thank you for the promise of our resurrection. In your precious name, Lord, amen.