

Luke 23:32 ff

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.

27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.

29 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!'

30 Then ""they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" '{30 Hosea 10:8}

31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

33 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.

34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." {34 Some early manuscripts do not have this sentence.} And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

INTRO - A couple of years ago I came across two young men who were having what you might call a 'physical disagreement.' It was not a big thing, as disagreements go. They had been playing and rolling around. One got a little rough. The other took offence and responded as he thought he had been treated. Before you know it, the play had become a fight, and feelings were hurt. After talking with them and finding out what had happened I told them I wanted them to shake hands and say, 'I'm sorry.' Now, that was not what they wanted to do. I'm not sure their heart was in it when they did shake hands. You see, sometimes God calls us to act in ways we don't want to act. But, because we are Christians, because we are forgiven and saved children of God, when He calls, we have the responsibility to respond.

These situations that we find difficult we can call our crosses. Jesus tells us, "**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**"

I. One of the crosses we are called to bear is the cross these young men were called to, and not the cross of confession, but the cross of forgiveness.

A. You know the words of the Lord's prayer, **Forgive us our trespasses** (or sins) **AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.**

1. God says this again and again. In Ephesians 4:32 we are told by God, ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, FORGIVING EACH OTHER, JUST AS IN CHRIST GOD FORGAVE YOU.***

2. Christians are called to live as Christ lived.

3. One of the crosses we have to bear is that of forgiveness.

B. It is one thing to love those who love us.

1. But, when we are called to forgive someone, we are called to be loving toward someone who has hurt us, perhaps someone who has been unloving, or even is still an enemy.

2. The natural inclination of humans is to want to repay a wrong, not forgive.

3. In fact, in all honesty when someone hurts us, we don't just want to do to another what they have done to us.

A. There is something inside us that wants to hurt them worse than they hurt us, so they'll never hurt us again.

B. Some Bible scholars think that is why in the Old Testament the people are called to the standard of 'an eye for an eye' so they don't do MORE than was done to them.

4. So, when our natural inclination is to repay even more than others have done to us, and we are then called instead to be kind, compassionate, forgiving to those who have harmed us, well that becomes a cross.

II. I want you to come with me then to THE cross.

A. The cross of Jesus is that center of God's plan for salvation, the center of the Christian life.

1. The cross is not only where Jesus the man died, it is where Almighty God most loudly declared His love for the world by allowing His perfect, beloved Son to die.

2. Romans 5:8 says, ***God demonstrates his own love for us in this: WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, Christ died for us.***

3. When we deserved God's punishment and damnation, God instead works forgiveness and eternal life for us on the cross.

B. Now, please remember the circumstances behind Jesus' death.

1. He had done nothing wrong. He lived loving others and preaching the word of God. That word pointed to sin, and called people to repentance.

Some did not like their sin pointed out. Those in authority did something about it, and they put the loving and innocent Jesus on the cross.

2. The death on a cross was cruel. It was intended to inflict pain, and long suffering.

3. Death on the cross was torture, it caused people ultimately to suffocate.

4. Jesus knew he was innocent, and was being tortured and killed unjustly.

5. Jesus was a man whose human impulse would have been to strike back at those hurting Him, especially those who knowingly hurt Him unjustly.

6. As they lifted Jesus to the cross, the first thing Jesus said from the cross was, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**"

C. Now, before you marvel at how Jesus treated those crucifying him, please realize that WE HELPED NAIL HIM TO THE CROSS.

1. Jesus was dying for the sins of all people, including you and me.

2. Our pettiness, our pride, our anger, our greed, sent Jesus to the cross.

3. He died for the sins of the world, that includes us.

4. Jesus not only went to the cross praying for the forgiveness of those who actually nailed him there, Jesus went to the cross, knowing he was dying for you and me, and our sins that put him there.

III. I like the story of Clara Barton. It is told of this pioneer nurse that she was once with a group of people when someone pointed out another lady who had wronged her. The lady pointing to the offender reminded Clara Barton of the wrong done her and asked, 'You remember that, don't you?' Clara Barton is reported to have replied, 'No, I don't remember that offence. I specifically remember forgetting that incident.' In other words, Barton was choosing to love her enemy, to treat with compassion and love and forgiveness the person who had hurt her.

A. There is a reason Christians can forgive, and treat others with love and compassion.

1. Sure, we can remember the wrongs done us.

2. But, we can also remember how Jesus treated us as WE put him on the cross.

3. Jesus was speaking of us, as well as the soldiers, and the Jews, and the others at the foot of the cross when he said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**"

4. When we deserved punishment, BUT God gave love and sacrifice.

B. Who has wronged you?

1. How would you treat that person if you did to them what they have already done to you?

2. Now think of the love of Jesus.

3. How would you treat that person if you treated them as Jesus has treated you.

CONCLUSION - Now, come with me again to the cross. It is because of that cross that tonight you received ashes as the altar, that you received forgiveness of God.

Knowing that cross Jesus says to us, "**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** And what did Jesus do on the cross? His first words were, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**"