

Christ's Ministry of Prayer from the Cross

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- Psalter 42A:1,3
- Scripture: Luke 23:25-45
- Text: Luke 23:34
- Psalter 47:1-5
- Psalter 140:all
- Psalter 277:3, 5, 6, 8

Dear congregation, very often when a child of God faces death, then family members and other children of God desire to hear some testimony of the precious work of God in his soul. The Bible gives several accounts of dying saints. We can read the testimony of Joshua in Joshua 23:14, "And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth." Before Joshua departs, he leaves this testimony of the Lord, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." There is another testimony of a saint in the Scriptures, boys and girls, whom we know as Simeon. He held the Christ child in his arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." So overwhelming was the revelation of the Son of God and His love to him, that he concluded it was better to depart and be with the Lord. Again, we can read of Paul's parting words in 2 Timothy 4:6-8: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing."

It is evident in all these testimonies, that the focus has not been on self, but on the very faithfulness and love of God. These saints have gloried in the salvation of God provided through the Lord Jesus Christ, and applied to their souls by the Holy Spirit. Must we not say that these testimonies are a declaration that the Lord will remember His Church unto the end of time? Yet, we must also say that the greatest and richest dying testimony is that of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of all His

sufferings on Calvary's cross.

It is Jesus' testimony at death that we wish to meditate upon with you, from the text words found in Luke 23:34:

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

This text speaks to us of *Jesus' Ministry of Prayer from the Cross*. We will examine two thoughts. *First*, His Ascending Prayer to His Father, and *Secondly*, His Condescending Love for Transgressors.

Jesus' Ministry of Prayer from the Cross

1. Jesus' ascending prayer to His Father.

Congregation, if we look back in Luke 3:21, when the Lord Jesus began His public ministry, we read, "It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened."

What was one of the central, critical, and fundamental elements of the Lord Jesus Christ while on earth? What should also be the fundamental, essential element within every believer? What is it that keeps grace alive in the soul? What is it that maintains communion between the Lord and the soul? What is the avenue whereby His people draw down blessings from heaven? What is the activity that His church is called to persevere in on a daily basis? Could you easily answer that, children of God? Or is your mind racing to find an answer? Maybe the boys and girls could answer it. What is a critical thing in the life of a child of God? Prayer! Prayer is the very breath and life of the soul. Jesus reveals, church of God, that our lives must be flavored with prayer. We are commanded by the apostle Paul, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes, 5:17). We are to develop a habitual lifestyle of prayer. This is exactly the example the Lord Jesus sets before us at the beginning of His public ministry.

We also know, as the Lord Jesus traveled over the earth and went about performing good, that He often went apart into a mountain to pray. This clearly teaches us the paramount importance of prayer. By means of prayer the Lord is also pleased to bless the unconverted. "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezek. 36:37). Don't you

and I need temporal, but especially spiritual blessings?

The Lord Jesus now comes to the close of His ministry on earth, and we observe Him in the same frame of mind. He portrays the necessity of communion with His Father. Jesus needed His Father's presence and strength. Jesus prays for compassion and mercy to sinners, to enemies, to rejecters of the truth, and those who have shown an intense hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us turn our eyes to the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross. Jesus has been in the hall of judgment and has heard, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" He has heard their desire for Barabbas. "And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will" (Luke 23:25). Jesus had endured mocking in the hall of Caiaphas. He had been beaten on the head with a reed. He endured whipping on His back. Yet, on the cross, His prayer does not cease for enemies and Christ rejecters. His prayer does not cease for those who saw no beauty in Him. It does not cease for those of His own nation of whom it was said, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not* (John 1:11).

While Jesus was on earth, did He not perform many acts of mercy? Did not His mouth declare His fullness and sufficiency? Did He not say that He was "come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)? Had not the eyes of the Lord Jesus looked upon Jerusalem with compassion, seeing them perishing in the midst of all their sin? Yet, on the cross He prays for these His enemies. He prays for the same people among whom He had labored. He prays for those who saw His powerful acts, for those who heard of the greatness of His love. He prays for enemies! Oh, see the forgiving nature of Jesus' prayer! When His enemies spitefully use Him, He says, "Father, forgive them."

His prayer reveals that He harbors no enmity, and holds no grudge. He reveals true humility and meekness in praying for those who torment Him. Observe His great love from the cross. This prayer shows that He longs for the true forgiveness of His enemies, rather than their just, self-made destruction.

Listen again! "Father, forgive them." The root meaning of the name *Father* is protector and upholder. Thus, as the Lord Jesus is hanging between heaven and hell — soon to be rejected by His Father, already rejected by mankind — He cries,

"Father!" Has His prayer ever come home to your heart of enmity and rejection? Have you, my friend, been convinced of your rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you been convicted of your enmity against the gospel? Have you seen the sin of unbelief in your life? Did not Jesus testify unto men, "Believe on me and thou shalt be saved"? What have you and I done, my friend? Isaiah wrote, "We have turned every one to his own way." He speaks to us of our spiritual blindness, yet we do not seek for healing from Him. Jesus spoke of His ability to save, but we are content with our lack of ability.

Congregation, to reject the Lord Jesus Christ has dreadful consequences. Yet, how amazing! He prays, "Father, forgive them." Why did He say "Father"? The Lord Jesus knew what He yet had to face. He would have to hear the two mocking malefactors in cruelty say, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us* (Luke 23:39). Oh, how He needed the upholding and protection of His Father, especially during the last hours of intense suffering, a suffering so intense, it is beyond our understanding! Child of God, you will never go through the depths of hell as Jesus did; you may have afflictions, and be overcome with all types of troubles. Satan may come with his fiery darts and try to pierce into your soul that you are the greatest hypocrite. Your own conscience may condemn you. Yet, God will justify you. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33). You may say, "My heart defiles me, and the grace of God wrought in my soul seems to be gone," yet listen to whom Jesus prays in His troubles. Jesus, in the midst of afflictions, as He is enduring the heaviest trials, and the swelling tide of God's wrath, breaks the silence with a tender, confident expression, "Father." He says as it were, "Father, remember Me. Father, uphold Me. Father, enable Me, to glorify Thy name, and to show forth that grace and that salvation that there is provided from our side to fallen sinners, Oh Father, uphold Me in this last hour."

Indeed we must say, since the Lord Jesus was the Son of God, it was His divine nature that upheld His human nature. It was His divine nature that kept the avenue of prayer open to His Father. Thus, He could still pray, "Father, forgive them."

Oh congregation, what a wonder are the words of our text, "Father, forgive them." Christ speaks these words when He is just about to face the desertion of His Father; when He cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet,

what does the Lord Jesus do? He shows self-sacrifice. He shows His intense love for His church. He says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet, here He prays for those who justly deserved to be forsaken. Here He prays for those to whom He could have said, "I will destroy thee with one word of my mouth." He prays for His enemies.

While experiencing His Father's divine wrath against sin, which He knew could not be satisfied in any other way than by death, Jesus still reveals the tenderness of His heart. The intimate communion between Father and Son is clearly visible, also on the cross.

People of God, how is that blessed relationship between God the Father and your soul? How is it between the Lord Jesus Christ and your soul? Has this word ever come home to your heart? Here in the midst of His suffering, He would pray for the forgiveness of our sins, church of God. The Lord Jesus is not praying for the forgiveness of all mankind, as we can see clearly revealed in John 17:9, "I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me." We can see the fulfillment of these words from Isaiah 53:12 where it says, "He was numbered with the transgressors; . . . and made intercession for transgressors." Thus we must say that the Lord Jesus does not pray for all sinners, but He is praying for His people. "Father, forgive them." Has not this prayer been answered over the ages? Was not this prayer also answered on the day of Pentecost? Why? This prayer is answered before the throne of His Father, through His own meritorious sacrifice. Therefore the sins of His people *will* be forgiven. Here is the assurance of the forgiveness of sins: "Father, forgive them." Why may we say the assurance of forgiveness? Because the Lord Jesus said, regarding His prayers, "My Father heareth me always."

Therefore, if at this moment, some in our midst are bowed down under a load of sin, and must write death across all their works, and confess the Lord right and just in their condemnation, hear the voice of Jesus ascending to His Father, "Father, forgive them." It is possible that you see no fruit in your tree. Yet, you cannot leave off seeking the God of your existence, that God who is so good to you. Why? Because His love has been shed abroad in your heart. You are seeking Him who has sought you, though you never sought Him. Oh, here is the testimony from the

mouth of the Lord Jesus that forgiveness is for guilty sinners, forgiveness is for wretched sinners, forgiveness is for repenting sinners, forgiveness is for poor bankrupt sinners, forgiveness is for those who have learned that all their righteousness is as filthy rags. Do you know what we must also say? There could be many in our midst who are unconverted for whom the Lord Jesus has prayed this prayer. You would say, "How could that be?" Oh, because in God's sovereign decree He has determined a time when He will arrest a sinner; when He will awaken a sinner; how and in what way He will convict a sinner; how He will strip that sinner naked of everything of self, and how He will reveal that fullness of forgiveness in and through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Here, therefore, is a prayer that may be for you, young man, for you, old woman in our midst, must yet be fulfilled as this prayer was fulfilled fifty-three days later on Pentecost. Jesus prays for His enemies.

Christ prays in the last hours of His life for enemies. Now what a wonderful thing it is, congregation, that these words are written in the Scriptures, "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them." It reveals the dying love of the Lord Jesus. He did not forsake His mission in His intense sufferings towards the end of His life. No, He continues as that faithful intercessor before the throne of His Father. In the midst of His humiliation and suffering He yet delights to pray for sinners. Oh congregation, has that ever overwhelmed you that the Lord Jesus would pray for sinners? He could have justly said, "There is no need to pray for you." He could justly have said, "I will not make satisfaction for you." He could have justly said, "There is not sufficiency in Me for you." Oh, but what does He do? He prays for the forgiveness of sinners. Congregation, that's incomprehensible, but at the same time that's love. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ on the cross makes intercession for transgressors, Oh, see the gracious activity at the time of His crucifixion! He is yet intervening on behalf of sinners, sinners who have nothing but bad thoughts of Him; sinners who have murderous thoughts towards Him; sinners who are filled with unbelief; sinners who gnashed on Him with their teeth; sinners who have forsaken Him; sinners who have said, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways"; sinners who have said, "We will not have this man to rule over us." Yet Jesus prays for sinners. Oh, meditate upon this reality! While He endures the

intense wrath of His Father, while He drinks the bitter cup of sin and condemnation which His church deserved to drink, as the sun is scorching His body, as the nails tear His flesh, yet Ye prays for sinners! Oh, what an act of love! It was *love* that nailed Him to the cross. One of our Puritan forefathers said: "Christ in the very act of His sufferings, seeketh mercy for the instruments of His passion. Their rage had brought Him to the cross, and there Christ mediath to bring them to heaven." Oh congregation, who can fathom the depths of Jesus' love? Who can speak of the power of His intercessory prayers on the behalf of sinners?

But before we go further, let us sing together Psalter 140, all stanzas.

2. Jesus' condescending love for transgressors.

Congregation, think about it for a moment. While the blood of the Lord Jesus is dripping from the wounds in His hands, Jesus is testifying at the same time from the cross, that My blood cleanses from all sin. Oh, He is saying, "Father, forgive them." He is giving His church the very testimony that His blood is all-powerful. He is giving the testimony that His blood gives pardon and peace. He gives the testimony in this text, I do this for those who know not what they do. He is declaring that His blood is sufficient. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," reveals not only the present sufficiency of His blood, but also the future sufficiency of His blood. .

Dear congregation, if there is one thing you and I stand in need of today, it is the blood of Jesus Christ. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that you need, even if you know not what you do, even if you are ignorant of all your sins. This blood which drips from the cross not only preaches present forgiveness, future forgiveness, and past forgiveness for all His people; it also preaches loudly that there is blood yet for that sinner who is dead in trespasses and sins. Oh thus, what a powerful blood! "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Oh, the condescending love of the Lord Jesus Christ to sinners! His love is greater than you and I will ever be able to understand. On the other hand, the precious love of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross is something which serves to melt the heart of the Church of the living God. It is something that causes them to be humbled. It is something that causes them to confess their own unworthiness. It is something that causes them to glory in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as the Son of God who

became the Son of man for sinners who knew not what they did.

Now congregation, do not think that those who crucified the Lord Jesus were temporarily insane, as many plead today, there was no temporary insanity among these murderers. They knew they were crucifying a man. When the Lord Jesus said, "They know not what they do," He showed the ignorance of the enormity or greatness of their crime. They knew not that they had taken the very Son of God, and had cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him, his blood be upon us and our children." They were ignorant of His true identity. And yet there was every reason that they should have been fully conscious and aware that He was the Son of God. The Jews who held to the Old Testament laws, and held to the prophecies of the Messiah, should have known that this was the Messiah. My dear friend, you may be most ignorant of the truth, yet, you need forgiveness, and you are also without excuse. You are without excuse! If this blood is not found upon your heart on the great Day of Judgment, you will not be able to say, "The Lord did not save me."

The precious blood of Christ has been preached unto you, the sufficiency in this blood, but also His willingness to seek and save that which is lost. You have heard that He is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto God by Him. It is preached unto you, "Oh Israel (oh sinner), thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." It is preached unto you that there is help laid upon One that is mighty. It is preached unto you that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by His mercy He saved us.

Therefore, dear congregation, if the world would end today, this sermon would be enough to leave you without excuse. Ignorance is no excuse. Under Levitical law, if a person committed the sin of ignorance, we read, "If a soul commit a trespass and sin through ignorance in the holy things of the LORD; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering and he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 5:15-16).

Thus we see, on the one side, the sin of ignorance, and that presents hope in

Jesus' prayer, "...for they know not what they do.". It reveals that there is forgiveness with the Lord that He may be feared, as it says in Psalm 130. But at the same time it reveals that we have no excuse if we go lost. How do we know that? Paul, in Romans 2:1, says to the Jews, "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art. Thou art inexcusable! That's not your neighbor — that's you. That's not the person sitting next to you - that's you. This blood has a sufficiency in it, and this prayer has a power in it. This prayer will surely be answered for all those who are under the seal of election. This prayer will surely be wrought in the soul. The testimony of the Father and the Son, and the witness of the Holy Spirit, shall witness with our spirit that our sins are indeed forgiven. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They were ignorant, yet without excuse. You are without excuse if you are still unconverted.

Congregation, there is one little word that yet needs our attention and it is the word in the Lord Jesus' prayer: "forgive." That word confronts us with our guilt. That word, congregation, confronts us with our condemnation. If there is the need for the prayer of the Lord Jesus for forgiveness, then it reveals that there is an offense. It reveals that there is a transgression. It reveals we have broken God's law. It reveals that, if we are not forgiven, we shall be forever, eternally and justly condemned.

Oh dear flock, forgiveness is something yet available this day. Forgiveness, as the Lord Jesus says, also reveals unto us from whom that forgiveness comes. Forgiveness also involves the application of the Holy Spirit, and when applied will show itself by fruits of holiness. We see sin put away by the Father, through the sacrifice of the Son. Congregation, this prayer is for transgressors. This prayer reveals Jesus' love for enemies and persecutors. This prayer shall not fail until the last one of His lost sheep is gathered in. This prayer will endure in its power. This prayer will endure in its sufficiency. This prayer will also show forth the love of a Triune God in the redemption of sinners.

I hope that as a flock we are all included in this prayer, because I cannot bear to see one on the last day who has heard this sermon, who has heard that there is blood enough and to spare, and then to stand there on the left side trying to make excuse. It shall be said unto you, as it was said unto Job, "You will not have one

answer for a thousand questions." Oh, you will not have one answer for the King of kings and Lord of lords. He yet comes with a treaty signed with His own blood, and presents it to you as sufficient. You will not be able to resist the command of Christ when He must say, "Bind this sinner hand and foot and cast him out, because he would not have me to rule over him." My dear friends, see the great danger of delaying your salvation! See the tragedy of rejecting the motive in the Father's heart from eternity, not because of anything in you and me, but because He was moved from within Himself to rescue lost sinners.

Oh congregation, He also declares that He is more desirous to save than to destroy. He says, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon: (Isa. 55:6-7). Do you think that His Word will fail? This Word, my friend, is sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and it cannot fail with regard to its results. In this Word is the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself, that His blood cleanseth from all sin; even though Satan may say you have sinned too much, you are the vilest of all sinners, or you are worse than a Jerusalem sinner. This day you hear that Jesus' ministry from the cross establishes the words of Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Why can God say, "Come now"? Because the Father's Son has purchased forgiveness; the Father's Son has paid the debt for a guilty and hell-deserving sinner. Therefore, sinner, there is yet room! AMEN.