

‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’

Luke 23:34

Bible Verse(s):

Luke 23:34 - Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

Reflection:

This is what Jesus said immediately after the two criminals and He were nailed to the Cross and left, quite literally, to die. This was before the unrepentant thief started on at Jesus to save all three of them from death.

European society has no idea about forgiveness. Think for a moment of the events of the last 40 years:

- **Bhopal India**, December 84, a massive chemical incident which eventually killed 16,000 and injured 558 on the day.
- **Chernobyl, USSR**, April 1989, a nuclear incident which eventually killed 4,000 and exposed 600,000 to (usually) potentially cancerous infections.
- **Giglio, Italy**, January 2012, a cruise liner which “ran aground”, killing 32.

Imagine that you had a relative involved in any of those incidents, and the quite human reaction wanting to know why, why, why? These events I have just highlighted had a cause: it used to be known as “human error” Would *you* have even thought of forgiving those responsible? Or would you have sought explanations, and the apportionment of blame.

Jesus took *no* such approach. He *knew* from His conversations with his Heavenly Father that this was what HAD to happen. He had asked for the cup to be taken away in the garden of Gethsemane, but acknowledged that His Father’s will had to prevail.

Jesus *knew* that the soldiers who had carried out the perverse sentence handed down by the Jewish hierarchy had no option but to obey. They would have been treated as traitors, and summarily killed too. He also knew that the Jewish leaders had not taken heed about what the Prophets had been saying to the People of Israel over thousands of years.

It has been a matter of discussion/dispute since the events at Calvary, as to who else Jesus was addressing when he said, “they”. Did he possibly include the whole human race since Eden?

Ah, but the text says that Jesus asked GOD to forgive them because true forgiveness can only come through and from God. So in asking God to forgive “them” he was asking for an enormous outpouring of Grace from heaven at a time when heaven was in turmoil – a storm was brewing and an earthquake about to happen in more ways than one.

Therefore, when we are in situations where we think we can neither forgive or forget, the pattern we have to follow is that illustrated by Jesus on the Cross.

“Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing”

In church, the 1950s Carnegie Hall recording of Paul Robeson singing “There is a balm in Gilead” would have followed:

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

1. Sometimes I feel discouraged
and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit
revives my soul again. *Chorus*

2 If you cannot preach like Peter,
if you cannot pray like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus
and say, "He died for all." *Chorus*