**Father, Forgive Them**

Luke 23:26-43

Key Verse 34

 “Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”

**Introduction**



 Compared with other gospels, Luke jumped to the point where Jesus was led away to be crucified. But there were more conditions weakening His physical body. During the 12 hours between Thursday, 9 p.m. until Friday, 9 a.m., Jesus suffered in many ways. For instance, Jesus suffered great emotional stress in the Garden of Gethsemane. He suffered emotionally from being abandoned by His disciples. He suffered being severely beaten at the home of the high priest. Jesus suffered a sleepless night. Jesus suffered, being forced to walk more than two and a half miles, for Pilate and Herod tossed him back and force. Before Jesus took the cross, He was whipped - scourged - as Pilate had earlier promised (23:16, Mt 27:26, Mk 15:15). Scourging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers (except in cases of desertion) were exempt. The goal of the scourging was to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse and death. As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim with full force, the leather thongs, metal balls, and sheep bones would cut deeply into the skin. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying tissues. The severe scourging, with its intense pain and blood loss, most probably left Jesus in a pre-shock state. The physical and mental abuse by the Jews and the Romans, as well as the lack of food, water, and sleep, also contributed to his generally weakened state. Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus’ physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical.

1. Read verses 26-31. Who was forced to carry Jesus' cross? (26) Who followed Jesus? (27) What did Jesus say to the wailing women and what did He mean? (28-31)

1-1, Read verses 26-31.

 As the soldiers 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 childless 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!”’ 31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

 1-2, Who was forced to carry Jesus' cross? (26)



 **As the soldiers 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.**

* The weakened condition of Jesus required this. The man’s name was Simon, and he was from Cyrene in North Africa (modern day Libya).
* No doubt, Simon was visiting Jerusalem as a Passover pilgrim from his native land (about 800 miles away).
* He knew little if anything about this Jesus and had no desire to be associated with this Man who was condemned to die as a criminal.
* Yet, the Romans were the law, and Simon was not given a choice - they laid hold of him, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it.
* Perhaps he was chosen because he was an obvious foreigner and more conspicuous in the crowd.
* Later Simon came to know what it really means to take up ones cross and follow Jesus.
* There is some evidence to suggest his sons became leaders among the early Christians ([Mark 15:21](https://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Mark+15:21&t1=en_nas) and [Romans 16:13](https://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Romans+16:13&t1=en_nas)).

1-3, Who followed Jesus? (27)

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

* It was customary for a great multitude to follow a condemned criminal on his way to crucifixion. It was intended to be a public event.
* A Roman guard must have led with a sign that carried the man’s name and crime, calling out the name and the crime along the way to the place of crucifixion.
* They usually didn’t take the shortest way so as many people as possible could see how the Roman Empire treated its enemies.

1-4, What did Jesus say to the wailing women and what did He mean? (28-31)

 **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 childless 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!”’ 31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”**

* Women mourned and lamented when they saw Jesus being treated badly.
* The idea is If this is the fate of the innocent (Jesus referring to Himself), what will happen to the guilty?
* Jesus quoted Hosea 10:8 that they would want mountains to fall on them and hills to cover them.
* This happened in the year 70 A.D. when the Roman commander Titus destroyed the city and slaughtered the people.
* Jesus did not weep for himself. Jesus wept for his people and for the disaster coming upon them.
* Jesus wept for the stubbornness of men's hearts, for the judgment of God would fall upon them.
* We need not weep over the crucifixion, but weep over our transgression, for our sins that nailed the Redeemer to the tree.

2. Read verses 32-34. Why did Jesus suffer and die with criminals? (32-33, Isa 53:12) Describe Jesus’ prayer. (34) What can we learn from Jesus’ prayer?

2-1, Read verses 32-34.

 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, 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.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

2-2, Why did Jesus suffer and die with criminals? (32-33, Isa 53:12)

  **Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.**



* Luke simply wrote that they crucified him there. But we know that nails were driven into Jesus' hands, probably through the wrist, in order to attach his body to the cross.
* It must have severed the large median nerve. This probably caused excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms. This condition would cause the victim a claw-like grip in the hands.
* **Crucifixion** was invented by the Persians in 300-400 BC and developed, during Roman times. It was the punishment reserved for the most serious of criminals. The upright wooden cross was the most common technique used, and the time victims took to die would depend on how they were crucified. Those accused of robbery were often tied to the crucifix and, because they could better support their weight with their arms, might survive for several days. One of the most severe methods of crucifixion put the arms straight above the victim. "That can kill in 10 minutes to half an hour - it's just impossible to breathe under those conditions," Ward says. Someone nailed to a crucifix with their arms stretched out on either side could expect to live for no more than 24 hours. Seven-inch nails would be driven through the wrists so that the bones there could support the body's weight. The nail would sever the median nerve, which not only caused immense pain but would have paralysed the victim's hands. The feet were nailed to the upright part of the crucifix, so that the knees were bent at around 45 degrees. To speed death, executioners would often break the legs of their victims to give no chance of using their thigh muscles as support. It was probably unnecessary, as their strength would not have lasted more than a few minutes even if they were unharmed. Once the legs gave out, the weight would be transferred to the arms, gradually dragging the shoulders from their sockets. The elbows and wrists would follow a few minutes later; by now, the arms would be six or seven inches longer. The victim would have no choice but to bear his weight on his chest. He would immediately have trouble breathing as the weight caused the rib cage to lift up and force him into an almost perpetual state of inhalation. Suffocation would usually follow, but the relief of death could also arrive in other ways. "The resultant lack of oxygen in the blood would cause damage to tissues and blood vessels, allowing fluid to diffuse out of the blood into tissues, including the lungs and the sac around the heart," says Ward. This would make the lungs stiffer and make breathing even more difficult, and the pressure around the heart would impair its pumping." - Alok Jha, The Guardian. c2004

 **Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)**

* In His death, Jesus identified with sinners. Isaiah points out that Jesus poured out His life unto death. Nobody coerced him in his decision to die.
* We believe that the most significant thing about Jesus suffering was that He was not, in any sense, the victim of circumstances. Rather He was in control.

John 10:17-18 reads,

 “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

* It is terrible to be forced to endure such torture, but to freely choose it out of love is remarkable.

2-3, Describe Jesus’ prayer. (34)

2-4, What can we learn from Jesus’ prayer?

 **Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.**

* Jesus prayed not for himself, but about others. Jesus' prayer was not one of revenge, but of forgiveness.
* He did not pray for their punishment. He did not wish God's wrath to fall on them. What is our natural response when someone hurts us? It is to hurt that person back.
* Jesus did not respond normally or naturally. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."
* The love of Jesus never fails. On the cross, He prayed even for His executioners, asking God the Father not to hold this sin against them.
* Jesus must have prayed in this manner because He had no quiet place to pray.
* Above all, Jesus practiced His own teaching.

Luke 6:27-36 reads,

 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

**32** “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.**33** And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.**34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Matthews 5:43-47 reads,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

 **For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)**

* In this Jesus fulfilled His own command to love your enemies.
* **“For they do not know what they do”** In this, Jesus recognized the blindness of His enemies in His prayer.
* We must pray with the same heart, after the same pattern.

**And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.**

* On the cross, Jesus retained no material possessions. Even the clothes on his back were taken and divided by the roll of the dice.
* This shows that Jesus came all the way down the ladder to accomplish our salvation.
* He let go of absolutely everything - even His clothes - becoming completely poor for us, so we could become completely rich in Him.

2 Corinthians 8:9 says,

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

3. Read verses 35-43. How did the people, the rulers, and the soldiers mock Jesus on the cross? (35-37) What was written on the notice that was placed above Jesus? (38) What did the two criminals say? (39-41) What assurance did Jesus give to the criminal who asked for Jesus mercy? (42, 43)

3-1, Read verses 35-43.

 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

3-2, How did the people, the rulers, and the soldiers mock Jesus on the cross? (35-37)

 **The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”**

* Jesus was not honored or encouraged as He hung on the cross. Instead He was scorned and mocked.
* His religious enemies said, He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.
* Yet it was precisely because He did not save Himself that He could save others. It could be rightly said that love kept Jesus on the cross, not nails.
* Again we see Jesus following His own teaching. Praise Jesus!
* We can rest assured here that we follow Jesus and His words of promise no matter what!
* ***If we live to save ourselves, we cannot follow Jesus, and we cannot save anyone else. Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost (19:10, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”).***

Luke 9:23-25 reads,

 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. **24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25** What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

3-3, What was written on the notice that was placed above Jesus? (38)

 **There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.**



* The written charge was normally carried before a criminal on the way to execution, or hung around his neck, and would then be fixed to the cross, in order to deter others from committing the same crime.
* In [John 19:21](https://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=John+19:21&t1=en_nas), the religious leaders objected to this title. They felt it was false, for they did not believe that Jesus was the King of the Jews.
* They might have believed it displayed Roman power to humiliate and torture even the King of the Jews.
* Yet Pilate would not alter this, and when asked to take down the inscription he answered, What I have written, I have written ([John 19:22](https://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=John+19:22&t1=en_nas)).
* It was written in three languages so that all mankind would know this!
* This is very significant, for it could be called, **"the second purpose of the cross."**
* The first purpose was to offer forgiveness and salvation to mankind by Jesus’ saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”
* The written statement of the cross was a declaration by God of His authority and kingdom. While the first offers forgiveness; the second demands submission.
* The first deals with sin; the second with rebellion. Thus the inscription of the cross fulfills God’s word in Psalm 2.

 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? **2 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed,** saying, **3** “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.” **4** The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. **5** He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, **6** “**I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.**”

* The word "King" means the highest level of government authority.
* God is declaring that He will set up His kingdom. God's kind of authority is different altogether from worldly authority.
* **God's authority is or comes from loving, self sacrificing, serving others.** The world system of authority is based on politics, self interest, and manipulation.
* Through the cross, God has defined love as a higher value than power in determining who will receive governmental authority.
* God also gives power to those who submit to His authority. The cross was an ultimate test for Jesus to see if He would submit and obey.
* Through submission, He showed Himself worthy to have authority. It was a test of moral character to see if He would qualify as the ultimate Ruler. He passed!
* When we deny ourselves, take up our own cross, and follow Him, we are not only set free from our debt of sins but also become co-rulers with Jesus.
* It is our final destiny to rule and reign with Him.

John 18:37 reads,

 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that **I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.** Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

* Jesus Himself has a destiny, a calling, a purpose in life. That calling is to be King of the Jews.
* Because of this, we proclaim not only the gospel of salvation, but the gospel of the kingdom as well.

Matthew 24:14 reads,

 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Revelation 19:16-18 reads,

 “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: **king of kings and lord of lords.** **17** And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair,“Come, gather together for the great supper of God, **18** so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.”

3-4, What did the two criminals say? (39-41)

 **One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”**

* One of the criminals crucified with Jesus joined in the mockery and scorn. He reasoned that if Jesus were the Messiah, He should save those who are being crucified with Him (save Yourself and us).
* But the other, rebuked him: Both Matthew ([Matthew 27:44](https://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Matthew+27:44&t1=en_nas)) and Mark ([Mark 15:32](https://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Mark+15:32&t1=en_nas)) indicate that both criminals mocked Jesus at first. But in the hours spent on the cross, one of the criminals came to see things differently, and came to put his trust in Jesus.
* This second criminal respected God (Do you not even fear God).
* He knew his own sin (under the same condemnation . . . we are punished justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds).
* He knew Jesus (this Man has done nothing wrong).
* He called out to Jesus (he said to Jesus).
* He called out to Jesus as Lord (he said to Jesus, Lord . . .).
* He believed Jesus was who Jesus said He was (remember me when You come into Your kingdom).
* He believed the promise of everlasting life from Jesus.

3-5, What assurance did Jesus give to the criminal who asked for Jesus mercy? (42, 43)

 **Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

* He might have expected that Jesus would save him later.
* But Jesus promised that today, not tomorrow, he would be with Jesus in paradise.
* What a transaction! It was not easy for Jesus to utter such words when he was about to die due to asphyxia. Praise Jesus who loved a soul to the last moment of His death. Praise Jesus who is the very Word, for He followed His own teaching to the end. Amen.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the passage we see Jesus following His own teaching in every second of His suffering until He died. This is easier said than done. May the Lord help us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. May the Lord help us to put into practice God’s teachings as Jesus did. Amen.

**One word: The King of the Jews!**