

Napoleon said as he was dying, *"I am dying before my time and my body is going to return to the earth. This is the fate of the man we called Napoleon the Great."*

Voltaire, the French writer, reportedly said to his doctor: *"I have been abandoned by God and by men! I'll give you half my fortune if you extend my life by six months. Then I will go to hell and you will go with me, Oh Christ, oh Jesus Christ."*

One man who had opened up a chain of restaurants whispered to his gathered family moments before he died, *"Slice the ham thin."*

The final words of the preacher/evangelist D.L. Moody?: *"I see earth receding and heaven is opening. God is calling me."*

Final words are important and none more so than those of Jesus, Who, as He hung upon the cross, spoke seven times

Especially recalling that each time a crucified victim spoke, he had to push up with His nailed feet and pull up with his nailed wrists, sparking fiery waves of pain and nausea

Crucified victims gasped small gulps of air, pushing and pulling up in order to exhale

Seven times Jesus spoke from the cross, each time briefly, able to be said in one breath

And each statement a sermon, exploding with power and hope, and the first one with mercy

Not long before she died in 1988, one of the best known atheist writers, said on television, *"What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me."*

Nowhere do we see the merciful heart of God more clearly than when Jesus, from the cross, prayed, ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*** Luke 23:34

**PP 1-In this prayer we see the heart of God**

Do you doubt God's love and mercy?

Do you wonder if you are beyond His mercy, if you have sinned too badly for Him to forgive?

The very first statement of Jesus on the cross shows the merciful, loving heart of God

Suffering squeezes our hearts like a vise, and what was in there comes exploding out

The common scene in crucifixion was for the victims to be hurling threats and curses

Yet Jesus, suffering on that wretched cross, prays, not for vengeance, but for forgiveness

In fact, the Greek text implies that He kept repeating the words, ***"Father, forgive them..."***

The Son bled mercy and He went to the Father to ask for it

His prayer went up, but His concern went down, to the ones responsible for His suffering

He was up on that cross while below Him people were doing all they could to make Him suffer

And immediately, He began to pray a general prayer to His Father, for ***'them'***

And who is included in the word ***'them'***?

In one sense, they are the four groups of people gathered down below Him

Certainly the soldiers who have wielded the hammer and dropped that cross into the ground

Who attached that little angled seat for Christ, not to make Him comfortable, but to prolong His suffering lest He die too quickly

The Romans always stripped their victims naked to utterly humiliate in crucifixion

The 4 soldiers were throwing dice into a helmet to win the seamless tunic of Jesus

Illus Corrie Ten Boom in her book The Hiding Place, wrote that Fridays in the Nazi concentration camp were for the weekly medical inspection. All the women has to stand straight, hands by their sides and march slowly past the unit of grinning guards. She couldn't understand what satisfaction those men could get looking at stick-thin, swollen bellied women, who had not on a stitch of clothes. But suddenly, as she stood behind her sister Betsie, the memory of her Lord, hung up naked, leapt into her memory. She wrote, "I leaned toward Betsie, ahead of me in line. Her shoulder blades stood out sharp and thin beneath her blue-mottled skin. *'Betsie, they took His clothes too.'* Ahead of me I heard a little gasp. *'Oh. Corrie. And I never thanked Him.'*"

There's also the religious rulers arrogantly sneering up at Him  
They had broken their own laws to falsely accuse Him and they are continuing to do this  
They weren't at Golgotha to talk with Jesus, they never spoke to Him, but rather to the crowd  
whipping them into a frenzy of hatred

Then there is that crowd, passing by like He was an exhibit in a museum  
The same ones who many of them just days before, were shouting out that He was the King  
Now they were caught up in the shouts to crucify Him  
Mark said they were hurling their abuses at Jesus and wagging their heads at Him

And there are the two prisoners, both of whom, according to Matthew, were cursing at Him  
I mean, they aren't cursing the Roman soldiers, they're cursing a fellow crucified victim  
Jesus prays for the soldiers, Jewish rulers, the crowd and the prisoners

And He said that all of these groups ***'know not what they do.'***  
They knew they were killing this man Who claimed to be the Son of God  
But they didn't know *the extent* of what they were doing

**PP** ***"None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 1 Corinthians 2:8***

None of us ever fully realize the extent, the horror of our sins  
Each time we sin it is as if we spit in the glorious loving face of God, hammer the nails into His wrists with our own hands and furiously lay His back open with that sharp, bloody whip

And that leads us to another group with the 'them' that Jesus prays for...us  
Every single one of our sins made His crucifixion necessary...we too put Him on that cross!  
The evening before, He had prayed for His 11 disciples, ***"but also for those who will believe in me through their word."*** **John 17:20**

He prayed for all who would believe in Him both from the Upper Room and from the cross  
Friends, every person who has or will turn to Christ and received forgiveness was prayed for on that cross, nobody was beyond His loving mercy!

I don't know what each of your lives have been like

You may be a drug user and dealer, you may be an adulterer, you may have had an abortion, or got in a fight and killed someone

But I know this, there's nothing more heinous than spitting on, mocking, and crucifying God!

If God offered forgiveness to ***'them'***, He offers it to you

***"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"***

This word '*forgive*' may be the most incredible word in the bible

**PP** It is the Greek word *aphiemi* (ah-FEE-ay-mee), which has a prefix *apo*, implying separation, and a root word *hiemi*, to put into motion

**PP** It means to put into motion and send away, to hurl away from yourself, in short, let go!

When we think of forgiveness we picture those feelings of animosity that we had, have been changed to renewed friendliness and affection

But this word means something different

This is the same word used when the disciples *let go* of their nets to follow Jesus

It was used by Greek teachers who wanted to leave the discussion and *go on* to a new topic

By bankers who *cancelled* a debt and when soldiers *released* a prisoner

In the Old Testament, when the scapegoat carrying the sins of Israel was set free and driven out

of the camp, never to be seen again, we see this concept of forgiveness that Jesus prayed for

Through the shedding of His own blood, Jesus Christ actually took the sins of the world upon

His own head, as it were, and carried them an infinite distance away from where they could never return.

When a sinner puts his trust in Jesus Christ, that payment is applied to him and his sin is put away from him never to be seen again or charged to him again

It means that the charges of wrong-doing have been let go of, dismissed, abandoned

Jesus is asking His Father, that when they come to Me in faith, carry away their charges, their sin, that which made them guilty

Hurl their sins away, drop the charges

But how can this happen?

God cannot just indiscriminately drop the charges that sin has incurred

He is holy, sin is heinous, it has ripped the fabric of His creation into a distortion of its former Beauty

God would not be just if He just threw sins away without a proper payment

Can you imagine a judge who wanted to get to his son's baseball game so dropped the charge of the one accused of murdering your loved one?

The law of the universe is this: There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood

Something innocent has to die in order to atone for the sins of the guilty

Millions of lambs, sheep, bulls, goats and birds had been killed, their blood shed, to atone for sin

But that only bring about a cease-fire, fragile peace between holy God and sin-enslaved people

If eternal life were to be provided, the sacrifice would have to be someone like us, only perfect

The sacrifice would have to be God Himself, Who came down and took on our humanity

As Abraham tied up his son Isaac and laid him that altar to be sacrificed, God offered up His Son Jesus to be the sacrifice in our place

Friends, who put Jesus on the cross?

In one sense, it was the rejecting Jewish people and the merciless hands of Rome, and the pervasively sinful lot of us humans, but in another, it was the Heavenly Father Himself

There is a reason that just when Jesus is lifted up on that cross, the first statement is a prayer asking His Father to forgive

This is the moment that all of God's heart yearned for, and they had waited for thousands of years since Adam and Eve disobeyed Him and ushered sin into creation

In fact, the Greek language has grammatical tenses, and the tense of the word '*forgive*' means something that must be put into effect at that moment

*Don't wait any longer Father, My atoning blood is flowing, redeem, and forgive!  
Drop their charges, throw their sin out of Your court, make room for Your kindness*

Friends, the mercy of God is like a race car waiting for the light to turn green!  
Like a track star waiting for the gun, a racehorse waiting for the gate to drop  
The moment the atoning blood of Jesus began to fall, God's mercy and forgiveness exploded

***“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do”*** is a general prayer that the world would

know that there is no sin against the Son of God that is so severe that it can't be forgiven  
Friends, if there is forgiveness for these people, there is forgiveness for anyone!

One of the crucified prisoners one moment was reviling and cursing Him, the next confessing  
that Jesus was God and repenting

Later that day when Jesus died, the Centurion and soldiers ***“were filled with awe and said,  
‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”*** **Matthew 27:54**

50 days later, Peter later preached the gospel to many who had ***“acted in ignorance”*** and 3,000  
got saved

After that, 5,000 more were saved, many of them priest and religious rulers

On and on it has gone to this day, and will go on into tomorrow

Forgiveness began rippling out from the cross like a seismic wave, decimating the charges of sin  
for all who would believe and removing guilt and bringing new life

All because the effective fervent prayer of the righteous Son of God up on that cross!

We shouldn't be surprised, for He had said: ***“I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all  
people to Myself.”*** **John 12:32**

The heart of God is a God Who forgives!

But how about you, and how about me?

## **PP 2-In this prayer we see the example we must follow**

Alistair Begg once said *The entire world tilts toward pain*

People hurt us and we hurt people!

And we all love forgiveness until we have to give it

But when people hurt us, Jesus provides a clear example of what God expects from us

We forgive as Christ forgave, it is, as John MacArthur said, *‘The most god-like act you can do’*

## ***PP Forgiveness sets both parties free***

**PP** It was December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1974 when Chris Carrier was abducted. He was 10 years old. His kidnapper, angry with the boy's father, burned him with cigarettes, stabbed him repeatedly with an ice pick, then shot him in the head and left him to die in the Everglades. Remarkably, the boy survived, though he lost sight in one eye. No one was ever arrested. Then David McAllister, a 77 year old ex-con, confessed to the crime. The statute of limitations on the crime had since passed. But Carrier, now a youth pastor, went to see him. He found McAllister, frail and blind, living in a North Miami Beach nursing home. Chris began to visit him reading from the Bible and praying with him. The love he showed persuaded McAllister to put his faith in Jesus Christ. Carrier said of this, "While many people can't understand how I could forgive David McAllister, from my point of view I couldn't not forgive him. If I'd chosen to hate him all these years, or spent my life looking for revenge, then I wouldn't be the man I am today, the man my wife and

children love, the man God has helped me to be."  
He learned that it's not our right or job to hold the charge against those who hurt us  
When we do, it eats away in us which is why unforgiveness has been called 'cancer of the soul'  
Forgiveness heals and brings peace, for both parties!

**PP *Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetfulness***

In fact, a misconception is that God forgives and forgets  
But that is never stated in Scripture  
It isn't that God forgets sin, it's that He doesn't mark the grave where He buries our sin  
He doesn't put a buoy where He drowns it and He doesn't go and retrieve what we have done  
wrong and re-charge us with wrongdoing  
To forgive is to refuse to pick up again the charges that we dropped for someone's offense to us  
When a memory of that charge comes into our mind, we will not allow bitterness and resentment  
to accompany it  
Sometimes we bury the head of the hatchet but leave the handle showing where we can find it  
Friends, sometimes we need to speak truthfully to each other and say, '*Your hatchet's showing*'

**PP *Forgiving someone doesn't always immediately heal the hurt and struggle***

Corrie later wrote of her struggle to forgive one who had wronged her, and she visited an older  
Lutheran pastor for help after two weeks of fitful sleep  
He said to her Corrie, up in that tower is our bell with a rope dangling below  
When the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps swinging until it finally slows to a stop  
When we've tugging at our grievances for a long time, don't be surprised if the old angry  
thoughts keep coming for awhile  
They're just the ding dongs of the old bell slowing down

**PP *A forgiving spirit doesn't wait for the offender to apologize or admit wrong***

Our example is Jesus Who prayed for His Father to forgive before anyone ever asked  
The Christian must have a forgiving spirit that prays for and is ready to set into motion the  
separation from the charge of wrong doing  
This doesn't mean we make ourselves vulnerable to an unrepentant abuser, but it does mean that  
mercy is agitated within us waiting for the opportunity to extend to that person  
A forgiving spirit refuses to hold on to bitterness, and is ever ready to forgive, no matter who

Illus One day when Stan Mooneyham was walking along a trail in East Africa with some  
friends, he became aware of a delightful odor that filled the air. He looked up in the trees and  
around at the bushes in an effort to discover where it was coming from. Then his friends told him  
to look down at the small blue flower growing along the path. Each time they crushed the tiny  
blossoms under their feet, more of its sweet perfume was released into the air. Then his friends  
said, "We call it the forgiveness flower." This forgiveness flower does not wait until we ask  
forgiveness for crushing it. It does not release its fragrance in measured doses or hold us to a  
reciprocal arrangement. It does not ask for an apology; it merely lives up to its name and  
forgives-freely, fully, richly.

Pray