

Prayer Store

Praying from the depths



Jim Smith

You bear the burden
of your world

and I see how much it hurts you.

I want to help, by bearing it
that your hurt might cease,
but I cannot.

Why will you not let me
end your pain?

“Crucifixion never ends
for those who truly love.”

Introduction

Calvary was the most public of intercessory moments.

This is the sequence in which He said to them:

1) Luke 23:34

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

2) John 19:26-27

Woman, behold thy son; Behold, thy mother.

3) Luke 23:43

Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

4) Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

5) John 19:28

I thirst.

6) John 19:30

It is finished!

7) Luke 23:46

Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit.

The words from the cross

1. “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.”

Theology

We use the word “forgive” endlessly, and it’s good that we do. But what does it mean?

* Hebrew words for “forgiveness.”

In the Old Testament, there are two Hebrew words which translate as “pardon”, “pardoned” “forgive”, “forgiveness”, “forgiven” or “forgiving”.

These are “nasa” and “salah”.

Taking away sin, is one of God’s desires :- (Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18, Micah 7:18).

Sin can be forgiven and forgotten, because it is taken up and carried away

* Greek words for forgiveness or pardon

There are four main words used in the Greek New Testament in for forgiveness or pardon. These are the verb “aphiemi”, its nouns “aphesis”, “charizomai” and “apoluo”.

The word “aphiemi” means “to send forth, send away, to remit or forgive debts and sins”. See it like this:-

* It signifies the remission of the punishment due to sinful conduct, the deliverance of the sinner from the penalty divinely, and righteously, imposed

* It involves the complete removal of the cause of the offence. Such remission is based on the sacrifice of Christ. The word “remission” means “a cancelling or a release from something.”

There are many verses in the New Testament which use the word “aphiemi”.

* “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven...” (Romans 4:7:)

* “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

* “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” (1 John 2:12) (“Forgiven” is a perfect tense.)

* “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.” (Ephesians 1:7-8)

This forgiveness of sin is totally by *undeserved unmerited grace* through the purchase price of Jesus’ physical death: “***In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...***”

* “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:18)

Receiving this forgiveness of sin with having a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Aphiemi”, “aphesis” and “apoluo” all mean “to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing.

Most of our theological understanding about forgiveness requires atonement. In Judaism we look toward the sacrifices. In Christian thinking, we look toward the crucifixion.

Intercession

The intercessor has to know that he or she is forgiven. We cannot pray at this deep level without that knowledge. If we do not know our own forgiveness, the enemy will find a hole in our armour, and bring us down. He will have grounds for accusation against us.

It follows that we have to have a very deep grasp of the power of blood of Jesus. We not only have to know that his blood is the better blood:-

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 10:22-24)

It follows again that we have to allow the Holy Spirit to examine our lives, to root out any lack of forgiveness, or more to the point, any areas where we are unclear or uncertain. Does that mean that if we have areas of unforgiveness we are barred from this calling?

Not at all.

But it means that we have to ensure that

- * We understand the biblical teaching on forgiveness**
- * We know how to plead the blood into our own lives.**
- * We know our areas of vulnerability, and ensure that they are covered with the blood of Jesus.**

2. “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Theology

This verse from the cross has given us a lot to think about:-

*** Today.**

Here's a nice piece of summary: - “In the case of the thief on the cross, Jesus recognized the man's repentant attitude and his firm conviction that Jesus, although dying on the cross, was the prophesied Messiah. He heard the man's request for remembrance at the time when he, even as a companion in death, would return in power and glory as a King. He told the man that his request was *as good as done.*”

So we can only assume that:-

1. The thief recognised the divinity of Jesus, and his saving work.
2. Responded to it.
3. His genuine repentance was met with forgiveness and the guarantee of salvation.

In his case, the “eternal” side of salvation was imminent.

*** Paradise.**

This is a Persian loanword for “an area enclosed by a wall” or “garden.” Its three uses in the Hebrew Bible (Neh 2:8 ; Eccl 2:5 ; Sol 4:13) retain this meaning. The Septuagint uses the Greek “paradeisos” for the Garden of Eden in Genesis (called the “garden of God” in Isa 51:3 ; and Ezek 28:13).

The intertestamental literature completes the development of the word to a religious term. Human history will culminate in a divine paradise. Since Israel had no immediate access to the garden at history's origin or conclusion, paradise, sometimes called Abraham's Bosom, was associated with the realm of the righteous dead awaiting the resurrection of the body.

The New Testament understands paradise in terms of its Jewish heritage. In Luke 23:43 Jesus promises the penitent thief: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” **The intermediate state was transformed by Jesus' emphasis on being with him “today.”** No longer is paradise just an anticipatory condition awaiting the messianic presence at the end of the age. Those who die in faith will “be with Christ” (Phil.1:23). The dead in Christ will not experience life diminished, but life enhanced, as Jesus' words to Martha in John 11:23-26 imply.

Did Christ and the malefactor, then, go to Paradise on that day? This is a question to which we can give no definitive answer.

Intercession

We work away at our intercessions, and it is often hard and lonely work. There is often little apparent progress. *Yet the Kingdom of God is at hand!* That's what the thief found out. I suspect he didn't expect to find himself “in paradise” in just a few hours. He was surprised by the closeness of the spiritual world.

The Lord is at hand! The barrier between the visible and the invisible is wafer thin, and we must expect regularly to penetrate it. (Jacob's ladder Gen.28:12)

*We will feel his closeness,

*see angels,

*have visions,

* (Paul)be transported high up into the heavenly places

* hear the worship, smell the fragrance.

We must not have feet of clay. We must be like a feather, ready to be lifted up into the breeze of the spirit:- (Poem)

3. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”

Theology.

There are a number of principles here:-

1. The compassion of Jesus

William Barclay writes this:- “There is something infinitely moving in the fact that Jesus in the agony of the cross, in the moment when the salvation of the world hung in the balance, thought of the loneliness of His mother in the days when He was taken away.”

2. The end of a relationship.

These words mark the end of the physical relationship between Jesus and his mother. Another theologian writes this:-

“Now at last all that concerned the earthward aspect of His Mission—so far as it had to be done on the Cross—was ended. He had prayed for those who had nailed Him to it, in ignorance of what they did; He had given the comfort of assurance to the penitent, who had owned His Glory in His Humiliation; and He had made the last provision of love in regard to those nearest to Him. So to speak, the relations of His Humanity—that which touched His Human Nature in any direction—had been fully met. He had done with the Human aspect of His Work and with earth.” (Edersheim. “The life and times of Jesus the Messiah.”)

3. “Woman.”

This is not so abrupt in the Greek as it appears in the English. But why not “Mother?” Another theologian writes:-

"Mary must no longer think of him as being merely her son; for the more she conceives of him as her son, the more also will she suffer. Mary must begin to look upon Jesus as her Lord. Yes, even then she will suffer, but this suffering will be of a different nature, she will then know that though indescribably terrible, his agony is, nevertheless, glorious because of its purpose. She will then begin to concentrate on its redemptive meaning. Hence, not mother but woman. Mary's emotional suffering—as any mother would suffer for her son who was being crucified—must be replaced by something higher and nobler, that is, by adoration!" (William Hendrickson.)

"Christ wanted to show that He had completed the course of human life, He puts off the condition in which He had lived and enters into the heavenly kingdom where He will rule over angels and men. For we know that Christ's custom always was to recall believers from looking at the flesh. This was especially necessary at His death." (John Calvin)

Intercession

Intercession is a lonely walk. When we set off on this path, we have to accept the loneliness. (Me and the Iaocian way.) Personal relationships can be a huge problem to intercession. I think this was what Jesus was teaching us in Gethsemane.

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. **They did not know what to say to him.**" (Mark 14: 32-40)

We all need our personal relationships. Jesus had his twelve, his closer four and his very close one! As Intercessors, we also have other intercessors to encourage us. But our dependence has to be on Jesus alone as we walk this way. No one else can go with us. Gethsemane was a one man show, and so is intercession.

4. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

(Jesus' first three sayings on the cross relate to other people and Jesus' provision for them. The last four sayings are in a different direction. He cries out in anguish, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It had to do with His sufferings of enduring the wrath of God for our sins. Then there is the cry, "I am thirsty," then, "It is finished," and finally, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.")

Theology

Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?

These words have caused us a lot of struggle, because we do not really understand them. They have unsettled many people.

Some think that His words in Aramaic were a repetition of the same words, in Hebrew, of Psalms 22:1. Is that all that Jesus was doing? Or, did He mean exactly what He said? If He did mean it literally, how or why could God ever have forsaken Him?

There are some things that most people find simply too repugnant to look at, or to have anything to do with. The same is true of God. To God, the sight of sin is absolutely repulsive.

Of Himself, Jesus Christ never sinned. He was the most perfect human being that has ever existed, or will ever exist, and He was absolutely innocent in the eyes of God. But, we must remember that the purpose of Jesus' human life was to bear the sin, all of the sin that has ever been committed by the billions and billions of humans that have ever lived.

Why did Jesus cry out “Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?” as His mission reached its fulfilment and He was held personally responsible for all sin? Is it possible to think that with such an immense load of guilt, our guilt, upon Him, for just a very few seconds, God couldn't stand the sight of Him.

Hard isn't it?

Intercession

“Bearing the burden.” Me and feeling the heart of God “Stop” This burden bearing is the heart of intercession.

5. “I thirst.”

“I thirst” is not easy to grasp. It seems to serve no function in salvation history. But if we think like this, we are missing an essential part of our salvation history, which is that Jesus is fully human. “I thirst” is an assurance of understanding at the throne of God. At the heart of Faith is one who knows what it is like to be human and to suffer, to be alone, to hurt, to weep and to thirst.

There is always a danger that the most sacred things we know will become just matters of record. William Barclay recalls another preacher talking about 'running around the burning bush taking photographs from suitable angles instead of taking off our shoes from our feet because the place whereon we stand is holy ground. He speaks of theologians who put their pipes in their mouths and stick their feet up on the mantelpiece and talk about theories of the atonement instead of bowing down before the wounds of Christ.'

Intercession

The physical side - emotional draining, sickness etc

6. “It is finished!”

The word “finished” comes from the Greek word “Teleo” which means “to bring to an end, to close, to finish.” For the grammar students among us, in the original this is perfect passive. In other words - it is done. END!

The Gospel has done its work. Sin and guilt are broken, and the kingdom is here! But it’s not, because sin still seems to be very pervasive. We have to view this word in spiritual terms. In the heavenly places, all is done. But here on earth, inconvenienced as we are by time, we are living in the gap between the timeless proclamation of Jesus, and his second coming when the reality of his victory will be established in the earthly places as well.

Intercession

Why are our deep and heartrending intercessory prayers not apparently answered? For an answer to this, look to Calvary. It is finished, but not yet established in the earthly places. So to heart prayer we have to add the spiritual gift of waiting and believing.

7. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Some very nice theology here.

* Father.

However we interpret the “eloī” saying, at the end, all is well. The relationship between Jesus and his Father is as complete as ever.

* I commit my spirit.

Jesus is Lord, and if his spirit is to leave his body, he will issue the command:-

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 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. (John 10:17-18)

Intercession

Pray in confidence.

On the hill

They tore me to pieced

My beauty was exposed

Humiliated, violated,

My spirit seared, scarred, savaged.

And they laughed and left me

My God my God –

Who can bear this pain?

Who can ever hope to heal?

Only one who has carried a similar pain

and more.

Is there such a One?

only at Calvary

Michael

(Gentle Claire)

When I look at the cross
all is loss and I am afraid.

Must I go that way to?

“Yes.”

Find another way
to help the broken world!
Power. Wealth. Strength.

“No”

I have shown you the way.

Walk in it.

It is so costly

“Yes.”