

“FATHER, FORGIVE...”

If you had been hated, mocked, spat upon, beaten, lashed mercilessly with whips that tore flesh from your body, and then been nailed to a cross, what would be your first words from the cross? Totally unlike what the crowds usually would have heard in similar situations, they heard from the lips of Jesus Christ these words: “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). No doubt the Roman soldiers and other spectators were accustomed to hearing torrents of curses from the lips of those crucified. Strange indeed would be prayers that God would forgive those bringing such sufferings upon them. But this was what the cross of Christ was all about—forgiveness.

Was the prayer of Jesus answered? Were those who cried out, “Crucify Him!” granted forgiveness simply at the request of Jesus? Was Pilate to be held guiltless for his caving in to the demands of the people that the “King of the Jews” be put to death? Were the Roman soldiers who mocked Him, scourged Him mercilessly and nailed Him to the cross now guiltless? Few, if any, would make such a claim. However, it might be said that those who instigated and carried out such a crime were granted mercy, though not individuals’ absolute forgiveness. Otherwise, the wrath of God would surely have fallen upon all who participated. This would be in accord with Jesus’ prayer: “for they know not what they do.” They did it in ignorance, blinded to the truth of who Jesus was—the long-promised Messiah (Christ). Paul would later write, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery...which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). As a nation of people, the majority had said, in effect, “We will not have this man reign over us” (Luke 19:14), fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy: “He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa. 53:3), and John would write of Him: “He came unto his own, and his own (people) received him not” (John 1:11). It was only after the continued rejection of Jesus Christ that the Jewish nation and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70, almost 40 years after the crucifixion.

Was this prayer of Jesus answered in the full sense of forgiveness? For some, it was. The message of “remission of sins” was proclaimed by the apostle Peter in Acts 2 to many of the same crowd that had cried out, “Crucify Him!” To those who were convicted of sin and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” were told, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The blood of Christ shed at Calvary effectively cleansed even Jesus’ penitent tormentors of their sins when they, in faith, believing Him to be the Christ, yielded themselves to Christ in obedience. The message of the cross remains the same for all who would be saved. Paul wrote, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

--Ron