



## Luke 23:32-34

Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2026  
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***Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.***

Humans have this remarkable ability to become desensitized to almost anything. In some cases, that's a very bad thing—like becoming desensitized to sin—in other cases, this adaptability can be helpful. Emergency room staff can be confronted with the most gruesome of injuries that would make most of us faint, and for them it's just routine. Firefighters can run into burning buildings, and it's just an ordinary shift. Forensic investigators can spend their days examining horrific murders and then go home and sit down for dinner with their families.

The Roman soldiers responsible for crucifixions in the early first century possessed that same quality. We shudder to imagine nails being pounded through hands and ankles; we cringe at the idea of watching a person slowly dying on a cross, their strength ebbing away until they die of suffocation; we wince at the idea of breaking legs to hasten that demise. But for the Romans soldiers involved in those activities, that was all just a normal Friday.

And so, you have to imagine just how off-putting this *particular* crucifixion was for them. They were used to brutalizing human flesh, accustomed the sight of blood, to hearing screams and cursing and anger and begging. None of that would have given them a second thought. That was just part of the job. But with *this* man, Jesus of Nazareth, what they heard was unlike anything they'd experienced before. As this routine crucifixion process was being carried out, He uttered a sentence that must have stopped them in their tracks: ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."***

It is true, they did *not* know what they were doing. This was a regular workday, they were assigned to the crucifixion detail, and they were crucifying three criminals as they had done countless times before. They did not realize that this one *particular* criminal whose hands they had attached to the cross had, with those same hands, formed them in their mothers' wombs. They did not realize that this one that they were discarding as so much trash was the one who had *not* discarded them on account of their sins. They did not realize this one whom they were putting to death was *allowing* them to do so in order to give them *life*. They did not realize *any* of this. They did not know what they were doing.

But hearing those words from His lips—no cursing, no hatred, no begging or pleading, but—***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"***—that must have made them start to think, "This is no ordinary man, and this is no routine crucifixion." In fact, by the end of the day, one soldier saw all these things and confessed, ***"Truly this man was the Son of God!"*** (Mark 15:39) But at *this* point in the day, they still did not know what they were doing.

Thankfully, for them, the one whom they were crucifying had the power, with His Word, to do exactly as He said. And His Word was this: ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*** Now, I'm going to be honest, those words have sometimes troubled me. They didn't know what they were doing, Jesus forgave them. But what about me? Am I forgiven *only* if I don't know what I'm doing? If

I'm doing it out of ignorance? Because I *often* know what I'm doing. And if I know that what I'm doing is wrong and I still do it, if I *know* the 10 Commandments by heart and I *still* break them—is there still forgiveness for *me*? Would Jesus still say the same about me, "**Father, forgive [him]**"? Or would He say, "Don't forgive *him*, Father, because he knows exactly what he's doing"?

We need to be clear here: Jesus is not dismissing their sin due to their ignorance. He's not saying, "Father, they don't really know that what they're doing is wrong, so You can't hold this against them." Ignorance does not excuse us from the consequences of sin. That's what the Apostle Paul writes about in his letter to the Romans, "**For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.**" (Romans 2:12) He was writing to a mixed group of Christians in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, and explaining that the Jews were no better off than the Gentiles just because they knew the 10 Commandments. The Jews knew them, and they *broke* them, and they would be judged. The Gentiles did *not* know them, but they *still* broke them, and they would be judged as well. No, ignorance does not excuse someone before God.

Besides that, the Bible is *filled* with stories of people like me, who knew that what they were doing. When David invited Bathsheba into his bedroom, do you think he knew what he was doing? When he covered it all up, told the generals to take a step back, "don't defend Uriah"—do you think he knew what he was doing? Or Peter—he denied the Lord three times! Do you think he knew what he was doing? Of course he did, after all, when Jesus announced that all His disciples would fall away, Peter declared, "**Even though they all fall away, I will not.**" (Mark 14:29) And then Jesus told him that not only would he fall away, he would deny knowing Jesus three times. *He knew* what he was doing.

And yet, both of them received that Word of forgiveness from their Lord. To David, it was announced, "**The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.**" (2 Samuel 12:13) And to Peter, in response to his three-fold denial, Jesus announced to him a three-fold restoration: "**Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.**" (cf. John 21:15-17) They *knew* what they were doing and yet were forgiven.

Now, I'm not trying to dismiss *willful* sinning as "not that big a deal." The point is, ignorant or *not-so-ignorant*, the result is the same. We are sinners. That makes *us* responsible. We nailed Christ to the cross *together* with those soldiers that day. It's true what the hymn writer says, "*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee. 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee; I crucified thee.*" (Ah, Holy Jesus, How hast Thou Offended v. 2)

Yes, we crucified Jesus. You and I were personally involved. We were there on that dark, skull-shaped hill some 2,000 years ago. We were *represented* there—by our sins. The very same sins that weighed our Savior down and caused Him so much agony, that was us—the things that *we've* done, the things we've left undone. It was us that made the Son of God to suffer.

But then, recognizing just how guilty we are for the events of Good Friday, not ignorantly but even *willfully* lifting the hammer together with those soldiers, it's time to hear our Savior's words once more: "**Father, forgive them.**" Who is the "them"? For whom is He praying, *exactly*? He is praying for the people that are killing Him, isn't He? For the people pounding those nails, for the people swinging those whips, for the people making Him suffer—for the *responsible* parties, His enemies—Jesus prays, "**Father forgive them.**" Which means, He's praying that prayer for *us*.

You see, Jesus is not saying, “They don’t know what they’re doing, so you can’t hold this against them.” He’s saying that *because* they don’t know what they are doing, they are walking into terrible and grievous sin—crucifying the Lord of Glory. And *because* of this sin, *because* they are sinners, they need forgiveness. And dear friends in Christ, because of *your* sin, *you* also need forgiveness. So, thanks be to God, Jesus’ prayer for you is the same. **“Father, forgive them.”**

And He didn’t just *pray* that the Father would forgive you—it wasn’t *just* words—with His innocent death, He *paid* for your forgiveness. Rather than stepping down from the cross as He could have done, Jesus stayed there and suffered until every last one of your sins was atoned for. Rather than calling down fire and brimstone from heaven to *destroy* His enemies, as well He *could* have done, He stayed there and endured—and He *prayed* for His enemies. **“Father, forgive them.”**

All the sins that we commit every day, the sins that plague our consciences, the sins we’re not aware of committing and even the sins we’re all *too* aware of committing—Jesus prayed for them on that cross. And Jesus paid for them on that cross. And Jesus forgave them on that cross. **“Father, forgive them.”**

And if you often *know* what you are doing, and if you are ashamed of what you are doing; if you’re worried that your addiction to sin is starting to desensitize you to what you are doing—then I pray the words of Jesus snap you out of that routine, just as they did for the soldiers. **“Father, forgive them.”**

This is the image of your Savior that I want you to bear in mind these 40 days of Lent. Jesus acting as your Intercessor, speaking up on your behalf, praying in your defense, pleading forgiveness for you. Because that’s exactly what your Savior *is doing* for you, as Paul writes, **“Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”** (Romans 8:34)

That means that in these 40 days of Lent, don’t you forget that *every one* of those 40 days, Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God the Father, pleading, **“Father, forgive them.”** So, spend this Lenten season on your knees in prayer, repenting of your sins, asking forgiveness for the sins you’ve done in ignorance *and* the sins you’ve done knowingly. But while you’re doing so, know this: Jesus Christ is, along with you, praying the same: **“Father, forgive them.”** And because of Jesus, the Father replies, **“Yes.”** Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.