

Seven Last Words of Jesus:1

Two thousand years ago, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, dying for our sins, the first words that we have recorded are these. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Never has so much been said in so few words. In the middle of his awful suffering and pain, Jesus turned the focus to others rather than himself.

He was actually asking God’s forgiveness on those who were doing an illegal, inhumane thing. The implications are many.

First, the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross. They were just following orders, we might say. Sure they were, and many of them were just as cruel and self-centered as they could be. This was how they were trained. Death was nothing to them, whether it was their own or someone else’s.

The soldiers who gambled for his clothes are like you and I who gamble with our own lives by waiting until what we consider the perfect time and place to commit ourselves to faith. We gamble with our children’s salvation as we delay attention to their spiritual welfare. We play, we work, we put off the decision, and it may be too late for us when we finally get around to it. Jesus says, “Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing.”

The Roman centurion who presided over the crucifixion watched it all. When the earthquake happened, and Jesus died, the centurion and those who were with him (presumably other soldiers) greatly feared, and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Then there was Pilate, the man who found Jesus not guilty of any crime, washed his hands of the matter, and then sentenced him to death. He ordered that the letters INRI be placed above Jesus’ head on the cross. Translation, in Latin. “King of the Jews”. Pilate served as governor of Judea from 26-36 A.D. He died in the year 36. Some think he was executed or forced to commit suicide by the Emperor Caligula. Others believe he became a Christian.

Perhaps today’s governments do not take responsibility for the evil things that happen during their time of power. They get comfortable with status quo, attempt to appease the minority, and sink deeper into chaos.

When I read of the death and destruction that happens in the world, and in this country, is it not ultimately the responsibility of those in power? If they wash their hands, or do not admit blame, that is their right. But it does not make the guilt which Jesus forgives any less real. Jesus forgives them, and wants to see

them stop pretending that earthly power is preeminent, and discover that Godly things are more important.

Then he was forgiving the Jewish ruling council who insisted that he be crucified and the angry mob who shouted, “His blood be upon us and our children.”

This is a big one. We have no less responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus than this unruly group of people spurred on by a brutal crowd mentality. Jesus died for our sins, our shortcomings, our misconceptions, and our mistakes. When he hangs there on the cross, dying for all of those qualities in us, his blood covers all our sins, and makes us ready for a life of love.

And finally, Jesus was offering forgiveness for all of us who would give up their sin and believe in him.

The authorities, the soldiers, the Jewish rulers, they all believed they were in charge that day. They thought that they had finally gotten rid of Jesus.

But the miracle of the crucifixion, with the Son of God himself on that cross, is that they were not in charge. Jesus was. He willingly gave up his life so that we could find forgiveness, and the eternal life which is the result.

No other person than Jesus could accomplish this. Many have tried. They have taught and loved, they have helped and led. But no one could do this but Jesus.

The Jesus came out of heaven to reconcile us to God and to one another, and that is exactly what he did. His entire life on earth was scripted toward that end. And in today’s world, he is working for the exact same thing.

Jesus said to love our enemies. He proved it on the cross by the simple word “forgive”. Above all, if we cannot forgive the person who wronged us, knowingly or unknowingly, we cannot begin to be people of the cross.

Jesus is full of compassion. He is full of love. He forgives us today of our mad rush to achieve success or to satisfy our desires with earthly things. We do indeed not know what we are doing.

We must place ourselves in the hands of God the Father who indeed knows all things. He doesn’t just know them. He has the power to accomplish divine things even in a world which fails to understand, as in the moments of the cross

So forgive, as Jesus said, up to seventy times seven. Give thanks for Jesus’ forgiveness at Calvary. He knows what he is talking about.