

Bible Studies for Life: March 24

The Death of Jesus • Luke 23:32-49

By Carl White



White

Wh
y
Di
d
Je
su
s
Ha
ve
to
Di
e?

This is what forgiveness required. For a bank to forgive you a debt, it does not mean the debt is not paid. The bank absorbs the debt, meaning it is paid for out of the bank's profits. Forgiveness always demands a cost. When a politician forgives a debt owed by another country it means we pay for it with our taxes.

Our sin makes us debtors. What kind of debt do we owe? God gave us life, a world in which to live, a heart with which to love others, and a mind with which to think. In return he asks us to believe in him, to take care of the world he gave us, to love others and treat them fairly, and to use our minds to accomplish good. In other words, obey the Ten Commandments.

When we don't, we are embezzling life from him. God cannot just wipe his hands and say, "never mind." A debt has been incurred and that debt must be paid. Forgiving a debt means

that the debt will be paid by someone else. Or to say it another way, when someone hurts you and you forgive them, you absorb the pain.

Jesus did that very thing on the cross. He paid our debt, absorbing in himself the pain. That is why he could pray, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* (vs. 34) That is why he could say to the repentant thief on the cross, *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."* (vs. 43) He could offer forgiveness because he paid the debt for our sin.

Forgiveness is Past, Present, and Future

When he took his last breath, he completed the transaction of paying our sin debt, and the result was immediate, retroactive, and continuing.

"Today," he told the repentant thief, "you will be with me in paradise." (vs. 43) Forgiveness for the thief was immediate. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," the Bible says. (Romans 10:13)

The forgiveness given to the thief happened before Jesus died, thus the effect of his forgiveness was retroactive. It counted not only for the thief, but also for all the saints of old who had faith in the Messiah's coming.

Forgiveness continues forward until he comes again. Anyone in the future who will ask for forgiveness will find forgiveness. His act of paying the debt for our sins is both completed and unending.

Thus, once saved, you do not incur additional sin debt. This doesn't mean we don't sin, but that our sins no longer condemn us. (Romans 8:1) Old sins cannot crawl up from the hole of the past and condemn us. Future sins cannot suddenly jump before our paths and condemn us. Nothing can condemn us because our forgiveness is complete and unending.

Jesus' death on the cross was the fulfillment of God's great plan of salvation. That is why in John's account of the crucifixion our Lord says, "It is finished." (John 19:30)

Forgiveness Changes Your Life

Believing in Jesus and in what he did also changes us. Perhaps the most important change is how we see death. We get a new perspective. Instead of fearing death, we can look at it as a restful sleep, knowing that we wake up in God's everlasting, loving arms. Perspective makes a real difference.

In these contentious times we need a new perspective. In Christ we can be bold without harshness, be humble without uncertainty, be approachable without compromise, and have integrity without rigidity. Remove the fear of death and we are made free to be the very best version of ourselves. A self-improvement plan will not get you there, but God's forgiveness can.

We do not gain the perspective of forgiveness because we've been good enough or sorry enough to deserve it. We gain the perspective of forgiveness only because of what Jesus did for us. He took our place, paid our debt, absorbed our pain. Since we cannot earn it, all we can do is receive it.

This is how it was for the early Christians. Their experience of God's love, his grace, and his mercy – his forgiveness – through faith in Jesus Christ gave them the courage to face all troubles. This way of seeing things can change our lives too, replacing fear and the need for revenge with bravery and peace.

White is a member of Pineview Church, Clinton.