

## At Calvary - Luke 23:33-38

**Introduction:** Have you heard about the young preacher who was performing his first wedding ceremony? Fresh out of seminary, he was more nervous than the groom. In the middle of the wedding he completely forgot what he was supposed to say next. In that moment of panic he remembered the advice of one of his seminary professors who told the class, *“If you ever lose your train of thought and forget what to say—don’t panic—just quote the first scripture that comes to your mind.”* So, he looked at the bride and groom he said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

That verse is part of our text today. Jesus has been arrested and tried. Pilate tried to release Him, but the mob cried out for Him to be crucified. Let’s read **Luke 23:33-38**

In this message on the cross of Jesus, we’ll examine three aspects of the crucifixion. First, let’s notice:

### 1. The Torture Before Calvary

Before Jesus was ever nailed to the cross He endured a great deal of agony and pain. Before *“The Passion of the Christ”* was released, the closest any of us had come to actually seeing the realism of the crucifixion was in *“Jesus of Nazareth”* or perhaps a Passion Play where a staged crucifixion was carried out. But even with the graphics depicted in *“The Passion of the Christ,”* it still doesn’t bring to life the depth of cruelty involved in crucifixion.

Execution by crucifixion was originated by the Carthaginians about 400 B.C. because other means of execution were too quick. Death by crucifixion was designed to prolong the pain and suffering. Sometimes the torture leading up the cross killed the prisoner before he could even be hung on the cross.

Notice what happened to Jesus on the way to the cross:

**1. He Was Beaten.** Sometimes people say Jesus received 39 lashes. That probably comes from a Jewish law which prohibited a man from being beaten more than forty times, so the Jews would stop at 39 just in case they miscounted.

But, Jesus was not beaten by Jews. He was beaten by Roman Soldiers—and they had no limit. A few years ago, a group of Christian physicians published an article about the physical aspects of Jesus’ beating in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Here is what the article said:

*“Flogging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution. The usual instrument was short whip with several single or braided leather thongs in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals. For scourging, the prisoner was stripped of his clothing, and his hands were tied to an upright post.*

*The back, buttocks, and legs were flogged either by two soldiers or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death. As the soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues... Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock."*

We read in the Bible that Pilate had Jesus "*scourged*." We really don't understand that word until we read or hear what really went on in a scourging.

Now, don't forget—at any moment during His torture Jesus could have escaped. He could have said, "*Father, these people aren't worth this kind of pain and suffering.*" He told Peter He could have called 12 legions of angels to rescue Him. But He didn't— because He loves us.

**2. He Was Mocked.** In addition to the physical pain of the crucifixion, there was also the public shame involved. Jesus was the object of ridicule from both the Roman soldiers and the Jewish leaders. After His beating, Jesus stood naked before the Roman soldiers. They decided if He was a king, so they made sport of Him by pressing a crown made of 3-inch thorns on His head, and they gave Him a stick for a scepter. Then they blindfolded Him and spun Him around, and clubbed Him in the face and head, and asked Him to identify the one who was hitting Him. They laughed at Him and said, "*Hail, King of the Jews!*" They spit upon his face and plucked out His beard. In all of this, Jesus never responded in anger or hatred. The Jews ridiculed Him saying if He was really a king He ought to show His power by saving Himself.

We often say, "*Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me.*" But we know that words can hurt. Imagine the pain Jesus felt because of the hatred and ridicule of the very people He had come to save.

He was beaten, He was mocked, but also:

**3. He Carried His Own Cross.** A major part of the crucifixion process was the humiliation of the prisoner being forced to carry his own cross in a procession through the streets. The prisoner would be surrounded by soldiers, one of which would wear a sign around his neck announcing the crime. Jesus tried to carry His cross, but He was so weak from the previous torture He fell under the weight. Simon, a man from Cyrene, was forced to carry the cross for Jesus.

It's no surprise Jesus was unable to carry the cross. Dr. Edwards and the other physicians who studied the crucifixion wrote: "*The severe scourging, with its intense pain and blood loss, most probably left Jesus in a*

*pre-shock state. The physical and mental abused meted out by the Jews and the Romans, as well as the lack of food, water, and sleep, also contributed to his generally weakened state. Even before the crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was...serious and possibly critical."*

All this went on before Jesus even made it to Calvary. Now let's notice:

## **2. The Place of Calvary**

This processional led Jesus outside Jerusalem to a hill called Golgotha, the place of the skull. If you were to go there today, you could see that the face of this hill resembles a skull with two eye sockets and a nose socket. It probably looked more like a skull 2,000 years ago than it does today.

You may wonder where we get the word "Calvary" since it doesn't appear in the Bible. There are three words used in different translations to describe this place. "Golgotha" is the Aramaic word for skull. The Greek word is *kranion*, from which we get our word "cranium." The Latin word for skull is *calvaria*. That's why we talk about Calvary.

Today the place of the Skull is a hill rising next to an Arab bus station. But whenever I think about what Jesus did there, I'm amazed at His love for me. As the song says, "*Amazing Love, how can it be that You my King would die for me?*"

It really makes the hymn we sing mean so much more: "*Years I spent in vanity and pride; caring not my Lord was crucified; knowing not it was for me He died; on Calvary. Mercy there was great; and grace was free; pardon there was multiplied to me. There my burdened soul found liberty; at Calvary.*"

I read about when the great pastor Dr. R.G. Lee visited Jerusalem for the first time. When they entered the area leading up to Calvary, Dr. Lee left the group and ran ahead. When the group arrived, Dr. Lee was on His knees weeping. The guide said, "*Dr. Lee have you ever been here before?*" Dr. Lee replied, "*Yes, I was here 2,000 years ago. I was here in the heart and mind of Jesus when He died for me.*"

You've been there too. You were there in the mind and heart of Jesus the day He arrived at the place of the Skull.

There was the torture before Calvary, and there was the place of Calvary, but I want to close with:

## **3. The Forgiveness at Calvary.**

As Jesus hung on the cross, He made seven statements. The first of these seven statements is in our text. After the initial spasm of pain passed, Jesus offered a prayer of forgiveness from the cross. In vs. 34, it says, "*Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.'*" The word, "said" in that verse in

the perfect tense in Greek, and it means Jesus *“kept on saying.”* As they beat Him, He was saying, *“Father forgive them.”* As they mocked Him, He was saying, *“Father forgive them.”* As He was carrying His cross, He was saying, *“Father forgive them.”* As the soldiers drove in the nails, He was saying, *“Father forgive them.”* As the people laughed at Him and ridiculed Him, He was saying, *“Father, forgive them.”*

There are a couple of things about forgiveness that I want to point out: First, forgiveness is the greatest need you have in your life. I know a lot of people could use a little more money. Some could use a few more minutes of sleep. Others would need a nicer car, or a bigger house or a better job. Some would even need to be in better shape. But not everyone needs those things.

However, there’s one need that everyone has. The Bible teaches we are all sinners. And because we’re all sinners, we all need God’s forgiveness. A thousand years from now money, cars, and popularity will be useless, but God’s forgiveness will be the most valuable treasure you’ll still have.

I read once that early in his ministry Billy Graham was going into a certain city for an evangelistic crusade. He wrote to the mayor of the city, who was on the steering committee, asking him to send him the names of some of the residents of the city who had spiritual problems and were in need of forgiveness. Dr. Graham planned to pray for these individuals and then to contact them during the crusade. He was surprised when the mayor sent him the telephone directory for the entire city. Yes! We ALL need God’s forgiveness!

Second, the only place in the Universe to receive forgiveness is from Jesus. Once Jesus was confronted with a paralyzed man and He said, *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”* The Jewish leaders were upset. They challenged Jesus by thinking, *“That’s blasphemy! Who can forgive sins except God?”* But Jesus read their thoughts and replied, *“So that you will know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, friend, take up your bed and walk.”* There were two miracles there that day. The miracle of healing and the miracle of forgiveness. Jesus showed that forgiveness is the greater of the two.

The Bible says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Rom. 6:23) Jesus prayed this prayer: *“Father forgive them.”* When He did, He included us in that prayer. Did God answer that prayer? Well, it’s really up to you. Jesus offers you forgiveness today—salvation is a free gift, but it won’t be yours until you accept it. If we were to pass out free gold coins here today, you wouldn’t have one unless you received one—forgiveness is the same way. God offers it, but you must receive it by faith.

It’s free, but it was paid for at an enormous price. Jesus took our sins in His body, so we could be forgiven.

He took our dirt and filth of sin upon Himself so we could stand clean before God.

**Conclusion:** There is a church in Norway called "*The Church of the Lamb.*" On the steeple of this old church is a statue of a lamb. It's there because when the church was being built, a workman was finishing the steeple when he lost his balance and fell. He would have been killed when he hit the stone pavement below, but at the moment he fell, a shepherd was leading his flock of sheep through the narrow streets. The workman fell on one of the lambs and it broke his fall just enough that he survived. But the lamb was crushed to death. He understood the parallel truth between that Lamb and Jesus Christ, so he had the statue of the Lamb placed on the steeple.

The Bible says Jesus is the Lamb of God, and when He was on the cross, God laid upon Him the iniquities of us all—and when we fell on Him, He was crushed to death—but we can live.