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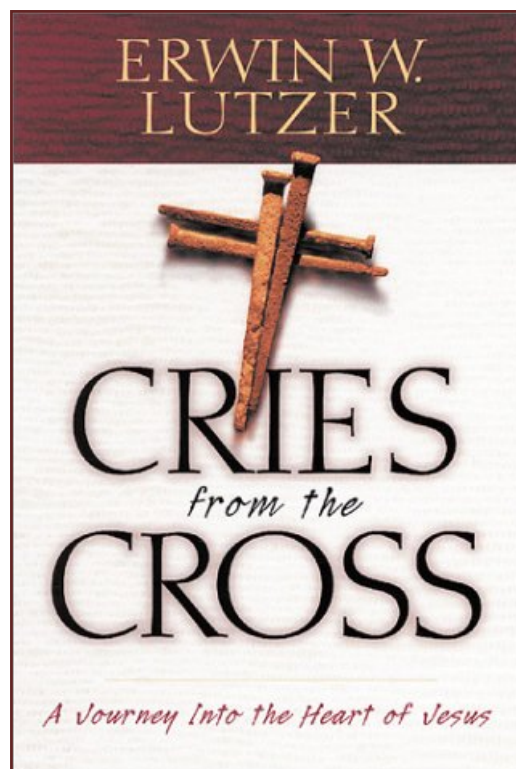


HE CRY
FOR PARDON
[LUKE 23:34]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

MARCH 1, 2009

LESSON #1 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:





THE CRY FOR PARDON

[LUKE 23:34]

There is a story about a pilgrim making his way to the Promised Land. He was carrying his master's cross, a burden he cheerfully accepted. However, he soon noticed that the farther he walked, the heavier it became. As the pilgrim became weary, he sat down to rest and noticed a woodsman nearby. "Good Friend," the pilgrim called, "could I use your axe to shorten my cross?" The woodsman complied. The pilgrim traveled on, making much progress. His cross was shorter, his burden lighter. Soon the Promised Land was in sight. Drawing near, however, he noticed that a deep gulf separated him from the glories beyond. He could use the cross to span the chasm. Though he struggled mightily to lay the cross across the deep rift, it fell short by the very amount he had cut off. Just then the pilgrim awoke; it was a dream. And now, with tears streaming down his face, he clutched his cross to his breast and pressed on. The cross was just as heavy, but now he bore it with more joy. He would endure, all the way to the Promised Land.

Of course, we do not enter heaven because we carry a heavy cross but by trusting Christ alone for our salvation. But that said, we as the redeemed are called to carry our own cross if we are to have an abundant entrance into the Heavenly Realms. Blessed are those who carry its full weight. Today, we begin a short, four-week study by **Dr. Erwin Lutzer**, pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, from his book called **Cries From the Cross—a Journey into the Heart of Jesus**. This study is a look at the last seven words of Jesus from the cross and is written by Dr. Lutzer to help us grasp what the cross **MEANT TO CHRIST**. My hope and prayer for you in this study is that you will learn that for Christ the cross meant something quite different from the sentimental notions that often accompany an icon worn around our necks.

Have you ever thought about how you would you like to **DIE**? Although we can't choose the manner in which we'll die, we can choose to die with peace and dignity. The last words of a dying

man tell us a great deal about him. Before we look at the first of the last seven words by Jesus from the cross, how about a few famous last words in history? *Entrepreneur, P. T. Barnum, died 1891, "How were the receipts today at Madison Square Garden?" Before slipping into a coma and dying 9 days later, Winston Churchill, the statesman who is famous for his commencement address of "Never give up!" died January 24, 1965 with this last words. "I'm bored with it all." Sounds like he gave up to me! To his housekeeper, who urged him to tell her his last words so she could write them down for posterity; the revolutionary communist, Karl Marx, died in 1883, with these last words... "Go on, get out - last words are for fools who haven't said enough." Writer Oscar Wilde, died November 30, 1900 saying, "Either that wallpaper goes, or I do."*

As we begin this study, turn to **MATTHEW 27: 27-31 (NKJV)** and listen to these words: *²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. ²⁸And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. ³¹And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.*

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Ever wonder what Christ was thinking during all this? Did you know that crucifixion was common-place in those days and that the Romans crucified about 30,000 people each year for the most heinous crimes? It was gruesome, cruel, agonizing, humiliating—but necessary. We know the night in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest that He prayed and asked the Father, if it were possible, to let this cup pass from Him. He knew what lay ahead and the pending separation from and the abandonment by the Father. Whew!

As we look and focus on the last words of Christ over these next four weeks, we need to put them in perspective. [BRING NECKLACE WITH CROSS FOR "SHOW AND TELL."] Take a look at this exquisite cross inlaid with small diamonds that I "borrowed" from Beverly this morning. What does this mean to the average person? The cross is widely misunderstood in our day. This can be proven by the fact that it is almost impossible to find anyone who will say anything bad about it. Crosses are worn as pendants by athletes, rock stars and New Agers. This instrument of indescribable cruelty and death is now a symbol of unity, tolerance and spirituality of every kind. The "offense of the cross" as Paul put it, has long since vanished as its message is interpreted to fit the modern mind. Many who wear the cross around their necks would be scandalized if they understood its meaning. [HANDOUT F.A.I.T.H BROCHURE COVER SHOWING PICTURE OF CROSS WITH MEN & WOMEN HOLDING MALLETS, NAILS, ETC.]

Take a look at this picture of the cross and tell me what this means to you PERSONALLY? Look at the people, the emotions expressed on their faces, the nail, hammers and mallets. Those of you that are in our F.A.I.T.H and GROW visitation program on Tuesday night recognize this picture and know the significance. We ask the same question on each visit we make and tell how we personally relate to the picture. We see ourselves lurking there in the background, maybe holding a mallet or hammer—maybe even having thrown it down around the cross when we realize what happened. You see it was my sins that nailed Jesus Christ to that cross two thousand years ago—not just the sins of men and women living then. As you see the modern-looking faces of those around the cross in the picture, is one of them you? It could just as easily have been you and me holding a hammer, mallet or nails. He died for what I did—my sins! I put Him there.

Let's look at an example of what I mean about the cross today not meaning the same thing as what it meant to Christ. In his book, Dr. Lutzer tells the story of a "thirty-something" year old woman on a plane en route to Cleveland. Dr. Lutzer and his wife were

sitting together when he noticed that the woman across the aisle from them was wearing a necklace with a cross. Hoping to stimulate a little discussion, he said to her, *"Thanks for wearing that cross ... we really do have a wonderful Savior, don't we?"* Surprised, the woman rolled her eyes upward and responded, *"Well, I don't think that I understand the cross like you do—look at this."* She held the small cross in her hand and showed him that beneath it was a Jewish Star of David and next to it was a trinket that symbolized the Hindu god Om. *"I'm in social work,"* she said. *"The people I work with find God in different ways. Christianity is just one of the paths to the divine."* Wow! What a conversation ensued between Dr. Lutzer and that woman for the next twenty minutes. **How do you view the cross today?**

The cross was, above all else, for God the Father. As we share in our F.A.I.T.H. visits, we know that God is a god of love (John 3:16, *"For God so **LOVED** the world..."*), but also He is a **JUST AND RIGHTEOUS** God for **JAMES 2:13** says in part, *"For His judgment is without mercy..."* That's talking about His judgment against our sin because we know from **ROMANS 6:23** that, *"the wages of sin is death."* As Dr. Lutzer wrote in his book, *"God took delight in the sacrifice of His Son."* Do you find those words hard to swallow? Yet, the obedience and willingness of Christ as the Lamb of God was precious to the Father and at the same time was a fragrant offering and a pleasing sacrifice to God.

Listen to these words of the prophet Isaiah from **ISAIAH 53:10-11 (NIV)** about this: *¹⁰Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. ¹¹After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities."*

As we talked a few minutes ago, last words can be important. But surely there can be no last words as significant as those of Jesus

on the cross. Here we see His heart, His love, for His people whom He was redeeming. In those cries from the cross, we see the humanity of Jesus. His wounds were not bandaged so that ours might be; His sorrows were great so that our sorrows might be taken away. Listen to one more passage by Isaiah, as we reflect on that day we call "Good Friday," from **ISAIAH 52:14 (NIV)**:
¹⁴Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—

Did you hear that? He could not be recognized as being the person He was? He was the victim of false accusations and violence. His antagonists urged the Romans to get rid of Him. And now His enemies felt vindicated when they saw the nails, smelled the blood and heard the groans., Imagine Him stripped and bound by the wrists to a column in Pilate's court, then scourged with thongs containing balls of lead or bone chips. As they pound against His body, beads of blood form that with repeated blows break open into wounds. Then the crown of thorns is pressed into His head and blood mingles with His matted hair. His tries to carry His cross, but when he staggers, Simon of Cyrene is pressed to help Him. At Calvary He is stripped of his clothes and *"excruciating pain, like millions of hot needles, shock the nervous system."* Then He is hoisted onto the cross itself as the executioners pound long square nails into His palms. By having the great nerve centers wounded, He experiences the *"most unbearable pain a man can experience....Each movement of the body revives this horrible pain."*

On Day One, Dr. Lutzer discussed the central message of the gospel. **How would you describe the central message of the gospel?** [THE CROSS] Think with me about that final day of Jesus' life. What we know as Good Friday was not a good day for Jesus, but a bad one. It was a day of betrayal, beatings, violence, rejection, pain, and loneliness. It was a bad day. Each of us experience bad days and times of trouble at some point in life,

especially those who are called to follow Christ. Let's look now at His cries from the cross as they reveal the deepest longings of His heart. Here we see His final act of selfless suffering. Let's look at these last words and see not only what He had to say but how we can apply it in our lives today.

Turn to **LUKE 23:33-34 (NIV)** and let's look at the first phrase. *³³When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.* Here, even in death, we see Jesus interceding for sinners. So, the first phrase is what? *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Jesus is a **MAN OF FORGIVENESS**. **How do we respond to that instruction in our generation? How should we respond?**

[DOWNLOAD MOVIE CLIP OF "END OF THE SPEAR" FROM WING CLIPS.COM]
http://www.wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16607&substring=forgive

I want you to watch a clip from the movie *"End of the Spear"* on this very subject—forgiveness. If you have not ever seen the movie, may I encourage you to run, don't walk, to get your hands on it. It's based on a true story of a group of Christian missionaries in Ecuador who set out to reach the Waodani, a violent Ecuadorian tribe defined by revenge killing. Even when Mincayani and his tribe spear the 5 men from this group to death, the wives and children of those men moved into the Waodani tribe to teach them about God. In this clip I'm going to show you, years after Mincayani killed Steve's missionary father, they end up together at the scene of the massacre, and Steve is given the chance to take revenge himself. [SHOW CLIP—2:56 MINUTES]

How's that for forgiveness? Thinking about Christ's words, **do you think all those at Calvary really didn't know what there were doing?** What did Jesus mean? (THEY WERE IGNORANT OF THE ENORMITY OF THE CRIME. HE WAS **PRAYING** HERE THAT **WHEN** THOSE WHO REALIZED THE

ENORMITY OF THEIR SIN REPENTED AND SOUGHT FORGIVENESS, GOD WOULD NOT HOLD HIS MURDER AGAINST THEM. THOSE WHO REFUSED TO SEEK FORGIVENESS WOULD NOT RECEIVE IT.]

We always hear people saying that we should *“practice what we preach.”* Do we do that, because Jesus was the same in life and in death. Turn back to **LUKE 6:27-29 (NASB)** and follow along with me. ²⁷*“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ “Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.”* He lived in forgiveness and he died in forgiveness.

But how does one do that—not take the revenge that is so desperately sought and demanded? We know **WHAT** we are to do—model the behavior of Christ as seen on the cross—forgive! And forgiveness sounds like a marvelous idea **until you** are the one who has to do it. How can you forgive someone who has wronged you, or broken a promise, or cheated on you? **When you experience pain, what do you normally think about? What did Jesus think about?** [WE NORMALLY THINK OF OURSELVES-OUR PAIN, OUR HURT. IT SPEAKS VOLUMES ABOUT **JESUS—THAT EVEN ON THE CROSS HE WAS THINKING OF OTHERS.**]

What does Jesus’ example teach us about forgiving others?

You may be thinking God's prescription is difficult to follow. You sigh, "My spouse doesn't deserve forgiveness." God says forgive completely. You whine, "I'll forgive—after my spouse has suffered a bit." God says forgive quickly. You bemoan, "I'll forgive this time, but it had better not happen again." God says forgive repeatedly. You cry, "I want to make my spouse pay for hurting me." Remember what God says in **ROMANS 12:19 (KJV)**, *“Vengeance is mine.”* You scream, "I can't do this!" God says, "Correct." Forgiveness is not natural; it's supernatural. Do not seek to

accomplish by human effort what can only be brought about by divine intervention.

When I think about what we're supposed to do—even in the worst of situations—I am reminded of a story I read recently. *On February 24, 2005, just days after the head-on crash that killed their three sons, Nathan and Connie Backstrom did something most people would consider remarkable: They forgave the person responsible. Matthew, Jacob and Justin Backstrom died after a man, 22 at the time of the accident, swerved into their car on a dark two-lane road. The other driver apparently was using a cell phone and had been drinking that night. "This young man has consequences for his actions, and so I can forgive him because my God has forgiven me," Nathan Backstrom said days after the accident. "It is my duty as a Christian. I can't live the rest of my life carrying that anger."*

Notice who Jesus calls upon in the middle of all the pain and agony he's experiencing? [HIS FATHER] How difficult is it for a child to speak with his or her father? No, not at all. A child can ask his or her father anything. So, when you can say, "Father," you see how easy it is to pray. We see an intimate relationship in the picture as Jesus calls out first to His Father, Abba, Daddy. We are to do the same thing—but we must have an intimate relationship with God as Father because of what He allowed to happen to His Son for **OUR BENEFIT, OUR SIN**. Recall the words from **ROMANS 5:8 (NIV)**, ***8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Wow! Can you believe it—even before we repented or confessed or were made pure, Christ died for you and me.

As Christ lay on the cross in incomprehensible pain and agony, look at what was on his mind—others. Not Himself. Not His pain. Not His personal problems. Us! You and Me. What a perfect picture of how we are to respond. *"Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do."* Is that a picture of you today? Are there people that you need to forgive as it says in our memory

verse today from Luke 23:34? A former memory verse may also refresh what you are to do. Listen to these words from Peterson's paraphrase of **EPHESIANS 4:31-32 (MSG)**: ³¹⁻³²*Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*

As we close, I want to share one of the most incredible stories of forgiveness I've ever heard. It came out of Tulsa, OK, a couple of years ago. Tom McGee was a young man who went out for a night of partying & revelry. He got drunk and ran head-on into a car driven by a young man by the name of Ted Morris. He killed Ted Morris instantly while driving under the influence of alcohol. This wasn't the first time he had been arrested for drunk driving, so Tom McGee was put on trial for manslaughter, found guilty and sentenced to a term of several years in prison. But the prison was over-crowded, and prisoners were being given early paroles, so Tom McGee actually spent only a few months in prison before being released on parole.

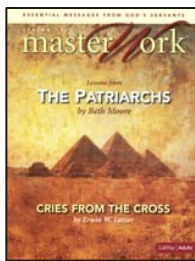
But he evidently hadn't learned his lesson, for it wasn't long until he was arrested again for drunk driving. So his parole was revoked, and he was sent back to complete his prison sentence. Jack Morris, his victim's father, visited Tom McGee in prison. After visiting several times, he started taking cookies that his wife, Elizabeth, had baked for him. And they became friends. Finally Tom McGee was released from prison, but he had no place to go. So Jack and Elizabeth Morris invited him into their home, and gave him a place to stay. They provided the means by which he could receive an education, and helped him find a job.

They were members of a Church of Christ in Tulsa, so they took him to church with them. Soon Tom McGee accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and was baptized for the remission of his sins. Just recently, the news has come out that Jack and Elizabeth Morris have formally adopted Tom McGee and made him their son. When Jack and Elizabeth Morris die, Tom McGee

will inherit whatever they have accumulated in this life. Now that's forgiveness –an incredible story of forgiveness.

And that's what Jesus Christ did for you and me on the cross over 2,000 years ago. While we were still sinners, God demonstrated His love for us by allowing Christ to die on the cross. Now that's the heart of Jesus and what each of us should also model to the world. How are you doing?

Let's Pray.



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A Step of Faith

