

FORGIVENESS - Day 5. READ LUKE 23: 32-43

³² Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. ³³ When they came to a place called The Skull, ^[a] they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."^[b] And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.^[c]

³⁵ The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. ³⁷ They called out to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ A sign was fastened above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

⁴³ And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The first disciples were called "followers" of the Way. However, they soon became known as "Christians." The name remains. This world has been distorted, perverted for several centuries. The true meaning of this word is "one who has received grace from God and lives to serve and love Jesus." A Christian is not just someone who was born in a Christian country (and how can a country be Christian?). This is not just a person who goes to church, or prays, or believes that Jesus exists. This is not just an attempt to be good in life. A Christian at heart is one who has experienced the forgiveness and relationship with God that is possible through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It's simple enough: it's not about what you know, but who! It is not about what you have achieved, but what Jesus did for you.

One of the devil's tactics to impress you is to make you doubt your new relationship with Christ. "Are you really a child of God? How can you think of this if you are a Christian? Improve yourself first before you start praying," he whispers. "You know so little about the Bible. You understand so little. You don't seem to get any better." These are his arrows. How can I know that I am a child of God? I am forgiven and valuable!

Read Luke 23: 32-45 again. We are standing on holy ground, the ground of the cross. Take a few minutes to visualize the crucifixion scene. What did Jesus endure?

How did the people around the cross feel about Him?

Read verse 39. What did the thief want from Jesus?

Read verses 40-43. What did the other thief want?

What could the repentant thief offer Jesus from his past or future?

What could the thief do for himself or promise?

How much did he learn about Jesus in that short time that he was hanging on the cross?

Who does he recognize Jesus as?

What did he get from Jesus?

I think this is one of the most important pictures of salvation in the New Testament. The thief had a very bad life. A short future awaited him. He could not promise anything to Jesus.

He got what he deserved. He couldn't change anything. He didn't understand much. But He understood that Jesus was innocent and could save him, a dying man. That's all he needed. Like him, you are forgiven. Jesus has the power to undo the past and cleanse us as if we had never sinned. Imagine Jesus at his weakest and most vulnerable moment, but easily accept Him as the King of the universe. What a Savior we have!

What is a Christian? A Christian is someone whose sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did.