

**Joke:** A teacher was testing the children in her Sunday School class to see if they understood the concept of getting to heaven. She asked them, “if I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven.”

No! The children answered.

“If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?”

Again, the answer was, No!

Now she was smiling. Hey, they’re getting it, she thought! “Well then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my husband, would that get me into heaven?” She asked.

And again the answer was, No!

She was just bursting with pride for them. “Well,” she continued, “then how can I get into heaven?”

A five year old boy shouted out, “You gotta be dead.”

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Thanks for joining us, today is a special day we are beginning a new Easter series over the next 7 weeks we will be looking at the last Words of Christ. 8 messages total 7 weeks because it includes Good Friday. Today we start week one with the first word from the cross and looking through the eyes of the paralytic whom Jesus healed.

### **The First Word from the Cross: The Paralytic**

Imagine what it must have been like to be part of the crowd that was present on the day Jesus spoke the words and healed that paralyzed man on the mat. The friends of the paralyzed man loved him enough to do whatever it took to get him before Jesus. The words Jesus spoke and what

happened as a result made a life-changing impact on all the people present that day. It was especially a significant moment for the man who was brought to Jesus while he was still on his bed. Jesus told him to get up and walk home; he also told him that his sins were forgiven. Those words surely would linger in his heart and mind.

The scene is recorded in Matthew 9:1-8 as Jesus has been followed by crowds of people. The crowds were growing because of His authoritative teaching and word of His powerful miracles He was performing that was spreading among the masses. Jesus found himself down by the water's edge of the Sea of Galilee. Let's take a look in Matthew and see what we might learn from this paralytic man.

Matthew 9:1–8 (NIV): Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. 2 Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." 3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? 5 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 6 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." 7 Then the man got up and went home. 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.

The man on the mat never forgot what happened to him that day. Who could? He got up and went on his way because Jesus spoke healing words over his paralyzed condition. Jesus had authority and power in His words which changed that man's life. And how could he ever forget the other words Jesus spoke to him? The words weren't just your healed, but they were far more important, far more amazing, those words, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now let's fast forward from this miraculous moment of healing to a final scene in Jesus' life before He died on the cross.

It was a Friday morning outside the city gates of Jerusalem during the approaching festival of Passover. Passover was a Jewish holiday that every Jewish person was expected to attend in their life. Passover commemorates Israel's exodus from Egypt and celebrates their freedom. Even the man who was paralyzed on the mat that Jesus healed could now travel to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. For He was free.

Imagine what he might have been thinking if he happened to be passing by Jesus and the other two men being crucified as the scene from Luke 23 was unfolding.

Luke 23:32–38 (NIV): 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the

Chosen One.” 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

Imagine what it might have been like if the man Jesus healed was one of the people who stood by watching this unfold? What must he have been thinking about if he heard Jesus say those words recorded in verse 34?

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Jesus had said words dealing with forgiveness when the man who once dealt with paralysis was healed in days gone by with life-altering impact.

**Show video. . .The paralytic** (video can be found at [www.skitguys.com](http://www.skitguys.com)).

Imagine how those words of Jesus on the cross must have echoed in this man's heart and mind if he just happened to

be present to hear them again but in a much different situation to be sure.

These words concerning forgiveness would be the first of seven last words Jesus spoke from the cross that the gospel writers recorded. What was the full extent of this first words dealing with forgiveness?

Let's take a closer look at this first of Jesus' last seven words from the cross.

The gospel writers record seven final words or phrases that Jesus said as He was dying on the cross.

The last words someone speaks are usually something of significance.

The last words may be the literal, final words from a person's life, or they might just be the last thing someone says to you before you depart from one another.

Maybe the last words you hear from some people are:

I love you. When I was a child my parents told me to always say, "Yes, ma'am and No ma'am...please and thank you." May be someone says something as simple as call me or be safe and use good judgment.

The first of the seven last words Jesus cries out from the cross is a powerful one.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

As we begin to listen to and think about what Jesus is saying in this first word He speaks, it's worth noticing with whom Jesus is speaking. Jesus is speaking to God and not to the people at the cross on that day.

Part of the nature and character of God is that He is relational.

John 1:1 (NIV): In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And then continues in verse 14

John 1:14 (NIV): The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

I love that. . .”the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

These verses state that Jesus is the Word made flesh.

When it says the Word "...was with God...", that phrase in the original language is "pros ton theon."

The word picture being described in this phrase is of two personal beings facing one another and engaging in relational, intelligent discourse.

Think of two people not just talking on the phone but using FACETIME or SKYPE to talk to one another in a Face to Face kind of way with facial recognition and facial expressions rather than only words being heard by one

another.

Why is all that important to consider? It is important because the first word from the cross is a prayer from the Son of God to God the Father as they have some FACETIME with one another. Jesus leans into His relationship with the Father during His darkest hour.

Through those seasons when it feels like our life is being whipped, battered, bruised and hung up by three nails, it serves us well to remember the first two syllables that came forth from Jesus' lips when He was in the same situation. "FATHER." ABBA. DADDY.

We too can do the same. We can go boldly to the throne of grace in our darkest of days, cry ABBA Father and He will hear us.

As we try to imagine ourselves standing at the foot of the cross and listening to the first word of the seven words Jesus spoke, we get to eavesdrop on a deep, heart conversation between God the Father and God the Son;

and what we see is that their conversation does relate to us in some respects!

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they doing."

Forgive them. Why should they be forgiven? They should be forgiven because they don't even know what they are doing. That's profound. . .Let's look closer at this truth.

Have you ever stopped to consider that much of our lives are spent trying to figure out what we are going to do?

- What am I going to wear today?
- Where am I going to eat after church today?
- What am I going to major in at college?
- I'm ai even going to go to college?
- How much insurance should I buy?
- What do we need to invest in so we don't have to work until we are 100?
- What are we supposed to be doing in our marriage?
- What are we doing as parents?
- What are we doing in algebra or with our kid's algebra

homework? I for one didn't know algebra then; and I sure don't know it now!

So much of life is trying to figure out what we are doing. So much of our lives can be summed up in three words: I DON'T KNOW. And I for one am not ashamed to admit that there are some things I just don't know.

If you are like me, there are lots of times in life when you don't know what you are doing as a husband...or as a father...or as a son...or as a student...or as a leader...or as neighbor...or as a pastor.

And you do things or say things or react to situations in ways that seem to scream out:

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING HERE BEYOND MAKING A MESS!

Nobody gives you an instruction manual on how to handle every situation and relationship in life.

However, what we do get is found in that first magnificent word from the cross.

"Father, forgive them..."

We get forgiveness. Why do we get this incredible gift of forgiveness from Jesus? Because Jesus knows us, and He knows we don't know what we are doing half the time. On the cross, Jesus' words remind us of that.

Romans 5:6–8 (NIV): 6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It continues in verse 10

Romans 5:10 (NIV): For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be

saved through his life!

Let me read this from The Passion Translation

Romans 5:6–8 (TPT): For when the time was right, the Anointed One came and died to demonstrate his love for sinners who were entirely helpless, weak, and powerless to save themselves. 7 Now, who of us would dare to die for the sake of a wicked person? We can all understand if someone was willing to die for a truly noble person. 8 But Christ proved God's passionate love for us by dying in our place while we were still lost and ungodly!

Romans 5:10 (TPT): So if while we were still enemies, God fully reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son, then something greater than friendship is ours. Now that we are at peace with God, and because we share in his resurrection life, how much more we will be rescued from sin's dominion!

Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 25 about how we really have no idea about what we are doing at times in our life?

It is known as the parable of the sheep and the goats.

Let's look at it. . .

Matthew 25:31–46 (NIV): “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or

needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

What does the parable have to do with us not knowing what we are doing as Jesus said on the cross?

First, notice the response the sheep and the response the

goats had.

Look again in verses 37-39.

Matthew 25:37-39 - 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

Now compare that to how the goats respond in verse 44.

Matthew 25:44 - 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'"

Both had the same response.

Both the sheep and the goats essentially are confessing: "God, we didn't know what we were doing."

I love that we were cluelessness and that is what leads to God taking the initiative regarding forgiveness. God knows we cannot be good enough because we do not know what we are doing when we are being good and doing right or being bad and doing wrong. Much of the time we do not know what we are doing.

And because God knows exactly what He is doing, He sends His one and only, one of a kind, sinless Son to the cross to die a horrendous death with a magnificent result.

2 Corinthians 5:19 tells us what God was doing:

2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV): that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting their sins against them.

Part of the nature and character of God is that He is a God

who is full of forgiveness; especially for people who do not know what they are doing, but who need to be reconciled to God today.

William Willimon speaks about this phenomenon that he calls "the pre-emptive strike of God." A pre-emptive strike is when somebody else makes the first move before you even have a chance to do anything.

On the cross, before we ever had an opportunity to confess our sins, acknowledge our sins and take responsibility for our sins, God made a pre-emptive strike loaded with forgiveness.

What is present in the nature and character of God is One who is overflowing with forgiveness even when we did not know what we were doing. On the cross, Jesus unites God's forgiveness with our ignorance.

"Father, forgive them because they don't know what they are doing."

That is good news! And it's interesting because many have been conditioned to think primarily about forgiveness coming in response to our confession and our ownership of knowing we did wrong.

Let me try and explain. . .

1 John 1:9 (NIV): If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And this verse is indeed truth from the heart of God. And I believe we need to confess with our mouth and repent of what we know to be in conflict with what the Scripture says, and what the Spirit of God convicts us of.

I say the Spirit of God because the enemy will throw accusations at you as well. But his are condemning the Spirit of God is living. That's why we read in Romans 8

Romans 8:1–2 (NIV): Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Let me read this as well from The Passion Translation

Romans 8:1–2 (TPT): So now the case is closed. There remains no accusing voice of condemnation against those who are joined in life-union with Jesus, the Anointed One.  
2 For the “law” of the Spirit of life flowing through the anointing of Jesus has liberated us from the “law” of sin and death.

Having said all that. . . There is. . .

However, something else that we see in our text today. What Jesus says in Luke 23:34 took place well before anything we ever said or took ownership of in response to 1 John 1:9.

Do you realize that almost nobody in the Gospels initiated and asked for forgiveness from Jesus?

Jesus is the initiator by telling people something they were not even asking about or for when He says, "Your sins are forgiven."

Nobody stood at the cross and asked Jesus to forgive them of their sins. The text says they stood around. Some cast lots for his clothes. Some mocked. Some scoffed, but nobody "prayed a sinner's prayer and asked Jesus to be their Lord." Instead, Jesus makes a pre-emptive strike and prays for them a prayer that echoes over our lives. "Father, forgive them."

Jesus knew that without forgiveness being the first word from the cross, there would be no FACETIME between God and humanity. In a sense, those initial last words we hear from the cross are first: "Hey, you're forgiven." Then, "Can we talk?"

If you've ever heard the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 where the son blows the family inheritance on loose living, wild parties and then decides to come back home to Dad, before the son even can say a word, the Dad says,

"Hey, you're forgiven." Now... "Can we talk?"

It is important to realize that the word "confess" in the phrase from 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins...", is the Greek word homologous. This word means: "to say the same thing as."

Therefore, when we confess our sins from a literal and biblical understanding of the word, we are saying the same thing about our condition that Jesus already has been saying on the cross. If we could role play this out in an imaginary conversation between ourselves and Jesus, it might sound something like this.

Jesus says: "I'm on the cross because you don't know what you are doing."

I say: "Jesus, you are right. I don't even know what I am doing. I say the same thing as you are saying about my life. It's a mess. I'm a mess. I really do not know what I'm doing so much of the time."

Jesus says: "I know you don't know; but you know what? You're forgiven."

Confession is saying the same thing about our messed-up lives and then walking into the pre-emptive forgiveness that Jesus already set in place for us to experience. The cross is a stain remover for all the sin-marked places in our lives. Calvary's cross absorbs our depravity because of the last words of Christ: "Father, forgive them."

We not knowing what we are doing is a FACT! It is not an excuse. However, it does have consequences just the same.

We not knowing stems from trusting and acting on bad advice back in Genesis 3 when the serpent was tempting and lying to Eve in the Garden of Eden about the effects of eating the forbidden fruit. Do you remember the lie he tells Eve in Genesis 3:4-5?

Genesis 3:4–5 (NIV): “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Translation: "If you eat from that tree, Eve, you will know what you are doing."

However, remember what God already said just a few verses earlier in Genesis 2:17.

"...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Eve bit the lie. Adam bit the lie. It goes on to say in Genesis 3 that their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked.

And church truth is we bite into the lie and eventually, we come face to face with the cross as we have the same realization.

We think we know what we are doing, but in the end, Jesus was right: THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING! Therefore, Father, forgive them. Father, forgive us. Father, forgive me.

By the way Jesus is always right.

The best thing "knowing" brings us is how utterly dependent we are on God for covering because we are so exposed and vulnerable in our sin-scribbled lives before a holy and magnificent God.

A great definition of forgiveness is: "Forgiveness is giving up all hope of ever having a better past."

What Jesus wants us to understand from that first magnificent word from the cross is that we never-ever are going to have a better past. It is hopeless to waste time wanting such a thing.

I wish I had. . .

And honestly you can go through live with so many regrets that it will limit you on your journey with Father God. Regrets are from the enemy of your soul who wants to hold you back from your full potential in the Kingdom. Remember Romans 8 verse 1.

And here's the good news what we can have is forgiveness and hope for a new present and better future.

We can walk into the pre-emptive forgiveness that Jesus offers today. We can walk right into forgiveness knowing that we are accepted by God because of what Jesus did and said on that cross to pay the price of your sins and mine. The words Jesus spoke can change our lives inside and out, just like the man Jesus healed that was before Him on the mat that day that his story of healing and forgiveness was recorded in Matthew 9. His life was never the same after that encounter with Jesus and His powerful words. May our lives be changed as we encounter these words of forgiveness that He continues to offer today.

And church if you need forgiveness, while Joy is playing. I invite you to come to the altar, kneel at your seat, sit and meditate on the Lord. Whatever you find comfortable doing. But I encourage you to confess before Him and He will be faithful to forgive. As a matter of fact He initiated it on the cross.

Join us next week as we look at the Rich Young Ruler.