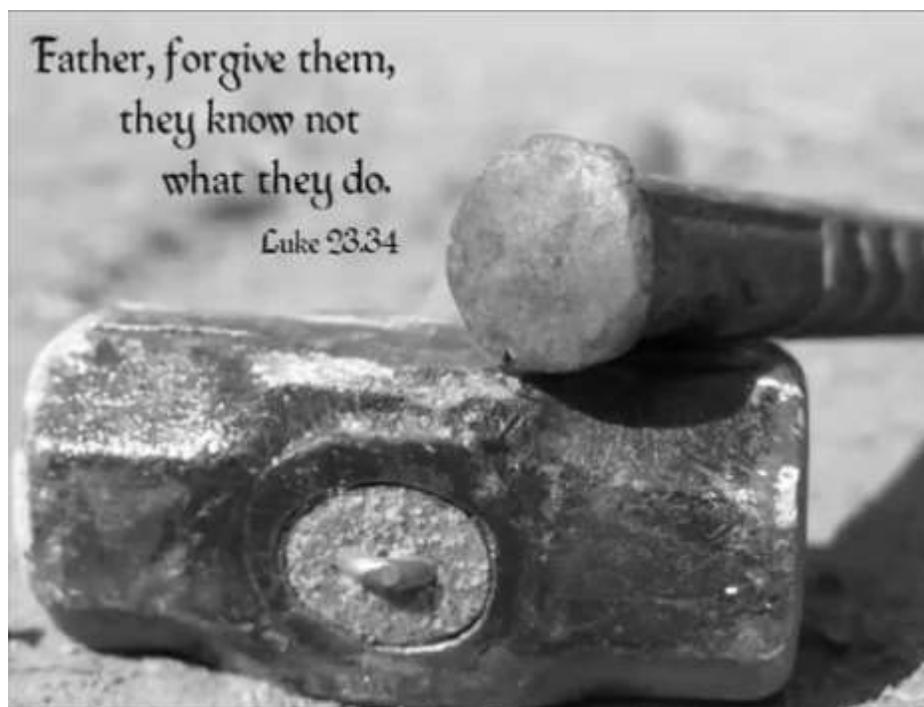


Jesus: Forgive them Father for they know not what they do

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In the final eighteen hours of his earthy life, Jesus was mocked as a false prophet by the Sanhedrin who blindfolded, assaulted and spat upon him. He was mocked and arrayed as nobleman by Herod before being returned to Pilate. He was then judged, scourged, mocked, and spat upon as a "King" by Pilate's Praetorian guard who went so far as to bow before Jesus and "hail" him as the "King of the Jews." Jesus, hemorrhaging blood from the beating by flagrum, a whip with claw-like end pieces that scraped away a person's flesh, was then led to Golgotha for his crucifixion. Simon, a man from the North African City of Cyrene, was made to carry his cross.

As he made his way to Golgotha, Jesus chastised his contemporaries one last time for having allowed the coming of the Messiah to morph into a cruel sideshow, saying, "For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry? (Luke 23:31)" Prior to that, while he carried the cross, he noticed women in the crowd who were grieving for him. He told them to weep not for him but for themselves and their children (Luke 23:28). Indeed, four decades later, they and their children would suffer while Romans unleashed a blood bath in Israel to destroy the Holy Temple and to obliterate Jerusalem.

As the Roman guards beneath his raised cross cast lots to see who would win the royal robe placed upon him in Herod's court, Jesus found it within himself to call out to God, saying, "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)."

With this prayer, Jesus forgave more than the Roman guards and the jeering crowd. He forgave Pilate, the Romans, Herod, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Chief Priests, John the Baptist, members of his family as well as Peter, James, John, Judas as well as all those who had conspired to kill him. When Jesus could easily have judged, he forgave.

Luke describes Jesus' final hours saying that the land was filled with darkness for the sun had "stopped shining." Just before his final breath, "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46).

Jesus entered Paradise, and darkness, lightning and tremors from the earth were unleashed on Jerusalem. One of the centurions who was present, recognized at that moment that the Galilean "imposter" was innocent, and a man of God (Luke 23:46).

Pilate, along with the thief on Jesus' right, and a member of the Roman guard were the only ones who dared to publicly proclaim Jesus' innocence. While this must have been a small comfort to Jesus, he knew that many more had not spoken on his behalf. Indeed, those who knew him best witnessed the execution from a distance and remained silent (Luke 23:47).