

DEVOTIONS FOR EASTER WEEK

PRAYERS FROM THE CROSS

Wednesday, March 28

Reading: Luke 23

Luke 23:34 *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing..."* **43** *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise..."* **46** *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

Luke's gospel contains many stories and parables not contained in the other gospels. One of Luke's favorite themes is prayer. Luke mentions prayer more often than any other gospel. He is the only one to record that Jesus prayed all night before choosing the Twelve. He alone records several of Jesus' parables about prayer. So it is no surprise when we get to Luke's account of the crucifixion that the statements of Christ he records all revolve around prayer.

Jesus' first cry from the cross in Luke is a prayer of forgiveness. The wording in the Greek suggests this was a repeated statement by Christ. As the soldiers were carrying out their terrible task and the religious leaders and crowds hurled insults at Him, Jesus asked the Father to forgive them. Some have suggested that Jesus was praying specifically for the Roman soldiers who really had no idea who He was. But the rest of the New Testament proclaims that everyone on the scene was ignorant of their true guilt (see Acts 3:17, 27; 1 Cor. 2:8). We are also guilty for Christ's death, for our sins put Him there. But Jesus' prayer of forgiveness opens the way for anyone who believes in Him and repents to receive eternal life.

Jesus' next statement is in response to the prayer of the thief dying at His side. The thief realized that he was a sinner and getting the just punishment for his crimes. He also realized that Jesus was the Savior and boldly proclaims that Jesus has done nothing wrong and calls on the Lord to remember him. He had obviously read the sign above Jesus' head and believed that Jesus was the King. He had more faith than most of Jesus' followers. Even though it appeared the kingdom was over and the King was dying like a criminal, this thief still believed Jesus would have a kingdom. Jesus' answer to his faith was the promise that as he closed his eyes in death on a cross, he would open them in eternity with the Lord. We all must come the same way - as sinners who have put our faith in Christ for salvation. This dying thief proves that no one is beyond the grace of God!

Jesus' final cry occurs at the end of the crucifixion. It is a prayer of completion. The work of salvation was accomplished. The price for sin had been paid and the separation between Father and Son was ended (Jesus once again calls God "Father"). This prayer is a quotation from Psalm 31:5 and was one that little Jewish children were taught to pray as they lay down for the night. Jesus willingly gave His spirit back into the care of His Father, knowing that soon He would rise again in victory.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep..."

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:11; 17-18)

THRU THE BIBLE Reading: Joshua 7-9; Luke 19