

He was Willing to Forgive

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It is of a piece with the great love and compassion of Jesus Christ, that as they were lifting His battered body on high upon a cross, having beaten Him, spat upon Him, and mocked Him, He looked out over His persecutors and prayed, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing.” ([Luke 23:34](#))

The Scriptures remind us, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” ([Romans 5:8](#))

The sins of men are manifold, and each of them was as painful to God as the next, who, in His righteousness cannot abide iniquity. Each sin is a slap in God’s face and a mocking of His authority and power. Each sin is like one of the nails that was driven into Jesus in order to crucify Him.

And yet, God so loved the world that He sent His Son to die for that world.

Jesus, looking down from the cross, knew that He was dying, not for fictional perfect people who were all goodness and light, but for the broken sinful masses of humanity who needed an opportunity for a salvation they could not provide for themselves.

And so, He could pray, in compassion, even for the ones crucifying Him, because it was those very people He was dying for. Even if they never took the opportunity to find the forgiveness He offered, He was dying so they would have the chance.

Jesus instructs His followers, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” ([Matthew 5:44-48](#))

This is not always an easy thing, but if we wish to be followers of Christ and children of God, it is a necessary thing.

We live in a divided world, filled with animosity, tribalism, sectarianism, factions and the like. Some people are, in all honesty, hard to like because they are just so rude and hateful. Others are conniving and dishonest, ready to cheat us or use us at a moment's notice, if they think they can get away with it.

But Jesus died for them too. Because they are exactly the sort of people that need forgiveness and compassion. Jesus said of such, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." ([Mark 2:17](#))

Too often this idea is ignored in our dealings with one another, or in our conversations about others.

Politics, of late, is a good example of this. Two teams, taking sides, both insisting that the other is evil, or stupid, or treasonous. Nasty things are said of one another, and offense is taken when the other side offers a rebuttal in kind. Forgotten by many who profess a faith in Christ is that Christ died for their political opponents too.

However, politics is not the only place we see such rancor and bitterness. How many mutter angrily about their bosses, their neighbors, their children's teacher, that person who just cut them off in traffic, those who drive too slow, the cashier in the store, or any number of other individuals throughout the day? How often do we forget, Christ died for that one too?

Christians are not to be grumblers and complainers. We are to shine as children of light in a world of darkness. Which means, learning not to speak ill of those around us. (cf. [Philippians 2:14-15](#)) More than just learning not to grumble, Christ wants us to learn to forgive them, even as He was and is willing to forgive. The One who prayed, "Father, forgive them," wants us to learn the same prayer. And having learned that prayer, to pray it. Again, and again. Seventy times and more if need be in a day. (cf. [Matthew 18:22](#))

We should be thankful that Christ is merciful, because that means He was willing to die for us. For each of us individually. But if that is true of me, then it is true of the one next to me, and the one next to them. Even the ones I might be angry at. And if it is true of you, then it is true of the one next to you, and the one next to them. Even the ones you might be angry at.

So, when we get angry; when we get mad, and we want to lash out... we would be well served to take a moment and remind ourselves, "Christ died for that one too."

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