

From the Cross of Jesus Christ, forgiveness and peace¹

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If we heard God speak today, what would we hear? Would it be a condemnation of our sins, or a list of remedies we should be applying. Rather, if we simply want to know what God is saying to us, his word is peace—peace with us, and in us and among us. He is the God of peace—not just the God who has peace but who makes peace.

Psalm 85:8; Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; Ephesians 2:14-19

This word has been spoken to the world through Jesus Christ. If we want to hear God speak, the word we hear is actually Jesus himself. He is God's Word.

We may agree that Jesus is the great teacher and counsellor, leader and miracle worker for this world and that if we follow him, the world could be at peace. Jesus did not have such thoughts. He knew he would not make peace until he made it with this blood. As soon as his disciples confessed that he was the Christ, he began to teach that he would die. He said his life would be a ransom—a payment made to set us free from slavery. Later, he offered his disciples wine to drink saying that it was his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:20; Mark 8:31; 10:45; Matthew 26:28-29

Sometimes, we don't want to hear God speak. Beneath our restlessness is a refusal to have God in our thinking. Somehow, we think it is possible to close ourselves off from God and still have a normal or happy life and a peaceful community. However, if we close off to God, we become isolated and this is a breeding ground for all manner of evil. Here are some examples.

- There are idols—we worship and trust parts of the creation instead of God.
- There is pollution—our faculties and relationships are forced into false forms by the intense desires that have not found God for their resting place.
- There is fear—because we can never be sure if God is for us or against us.
- There is hatred and anger—because people fail to aid and abet us in our desires.
- Then, there is hopelessness—if life cannot be controlled and directed to a good end, why bother?

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These problems do not get solved by good leadership, counselling, teaching, or even miracles. We don't need a change of circumstances; we need a renewal of communion with God and one another. We don't need to get to 'the bottom of things'; we need someone to bring us up from 'the bottom of things.' We don't need to 'get ourselves a life' or 'move on'; we need to hear the promise of Jesus Christ. We don't need ideas or knowledge; we need the Father. The miracle we need is a miracle in ourselves and that miracle is Christ. He was given up for us, crucified and resurrected. Those who see this are raised up to live with God.

We think that our wrong doing is a small thing, something that we can change like we change clothes. We have enough evidence before us to know otherwise but our hope springs up again to 'have another go.' Even if we acknowledge that we cannot change who we are, we tell ourselves that sin is a small thing to bear. We tell ourselves that time heals all wounds.

Jesus knew otherwise. He offered himself up as the bearer of our sins and we see the results of this when he was crucified. He knew the bitterness of human injustice and rejection, he knew the viciousness of Satan's accusations and murder. Worst of all, he knew the isolation of being abandoned by his Father God. He knew the emptiness of having spent himself entirely. But then, he was not bearing his own sins. He had none to bear. He was bearing our sins for us. He was showing us what it means to be a sinner in the presence of the holy God. And God was revealing his judgment against those who violate his covenant.

We try to sedate the pain of being a sinner. We try to compensate for it. Jesus bore it himself, in his body, and before God. Our sin has been exposed and judged.

While Jesus was being fixed to the cross, he was saying, 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' This is an amazing statement, because, in fact, Israel was warring against God, murdering his Son and expressing their hatred of his rule. They were attempting to remove their judge so as to vindicate their own religious life. They could then claim their inheritance with no God or Christ to intervene. We may well ask, how much can you sin and still be forgiven?

[Luke 23:32-47](#)

What did Jesus mean when he said they didn't know what they were doing? (Peter repeated this statement on the day of Pentecost.) If people sinned ignorantly in Israel, there were provisions for their forgiveness. When they became aware of it, they could go to the temple with a sacrifice prescribed by God and they would be forgiven. Jesus was now saying that Israel did not understand their own God. They could not see that they were doing anything wrong even when they were killing Jesus—the one who had come as the Saviour promised to them. They were guilty alright, but ignorantly guilty. He offered the sacrifice necessary for them to be forgiven. He did what Isaiah said God's Servant would do. 'He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for

the transgressors.’ He was bearing our sins, and he was praying for us to be forgiven.

Acts 3:17; Leviticus 5:17-19; Numbers 15:25-31; Isaiah 53:12

While Jesus was on the cross, something else was happening. The two criminals crucified with him were scoffing, along with the crowd. If he was so great, he should save himself. One said, ‘Save yourself and us.’

Matthew 27:44; Luke 23:39

However, one thief changed his mind about Jesus, about himself and about God. He argued with his fellow thief that they should fear God. Perhaps he had seen the reverence Jesus had for his Father and seen how he refused to react to what was happening. Perhaps this taught him to reverence God for the first time. He knew that he and his fellow thief were guilty and deserved what they were getting. Trying to deal with his own sins and the sins of others had made the thief an angry and violent man. On the other hand, Jesus was an innocent man and he had prayed for his persecutors to be forgiven.

Here was true glory—not just naked power but the love to forgive and to restore broken human beings and an erring nation. As the Son of his Father God, Christ had peace and made peace. He was Israel’s King. Jesus was what he had claimed to be and would soon reign in his kingdom. The thief asked to be remembered by Jesus when he came into his kingdom. He was no longer concerned with the power of the state but with the judgment of God, and he knew Jesus would be his judge. He no longer believed that ‘might was right’. What mattered now was that he receive mercy.

This man had always evaded God and looked for other solutions to life’s problems. Now he feared God and came to him, and God spoke peace to him through Christ. ‘Today you shall be in Paradise with me’ he said.

Luke 23:43

We now know that sin and death have been defeated. There is a kingdom where the power of sin has been taken away, where no accusation can reach, where peace can thrive. Everyone who turns to Christ as this man did has been transferred to that kingdom. Then, with the Son of God, we can be peacemakers and be recognised as children of God. The love God had in sending his Son comes to its goal in bringing us out of hate and into love and peace.

Colossians 1:13-14; Matthew 5:9; I John 4:9-12