

**Foundations: From the Cross 1**  
***Father, Forgive***  
**Luke 23:26-34 (AFBC 2/11/18)**

**<sup>26</sup> As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. <sup>28</sup> Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' <sup>30</sup> Then "'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"'" <sup>31</sup> For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"**

**<sup>32</sup> Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.**

I read an account of a Methodist minister who told of a young woman in his church who asked him this: "Why is it that our Order of Worship has a Prayer of Confession each Sunday? I don't need to confess my sins every week."

"My husband and I are good people. We are honest and treat people fairly. We try to live moral lives. We attend worship regularly. Why do we have to confess our "sins" when it seems to us there are some weeks we haven't sinned at all?"

Well, I trust we all understand that her question represents a problem—and it's one we all share. It's the problem of not knowing, not understanding or realizing the full extent of the problem of sin that plaques our lives.

She was unaware of the pervasive nature of sin. She did not know that even when she considered herself sinless, she was

harboring sins of self-righteousness, and false pride--two of the most common sins of people like us.

Also, she had completely overlooked sins of omission—meaning that we sin when we don't do what God would have us do. Each time we fail to carry out some task, or ministry, or miss a good opportunity to bear witness for Christ, it's sin.

She didn't realize. She didn't understand that even good, upstanding, church-going, Christian people still sin—and probably far more than we like to think.

Her problem was she didn't know—and not knowing can be a very serious problem, indeed. So let's talk about:

### **A. The Problem of Not Knowing**

For seven weeks in worship, as we make our journey toward Easter, we're listening to the seven statements we have recorded in Scripture that Jesus spoke while hanging from the cross. His first words were these: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing."**

Do you see what a problem "not knowing" is? But honestly, so often, that's how sin is—it's subtle, not obvious... yet, it's there.

"Well, there was nothing subtle about the crucifixion of Jesus," you say. It... was obvious—plain for everyone to see. His crucifixion was a blatant and horrible example of sin let loose to run rampant. Anyone can see that! Well, no. Not really.

Oh, it's obvious to us now; but to those who took an active role in Jesus' crucifixion, it wasn't so clear that what they were doing was wrong. I suppose they even thought it was the right thing to do—which should be a sobering thought for us!

The third chapter of Acts includes an account of Peter healing a crippled beggar at the Temple gate. A crowd quickly gathered when they realized what had happened: a man, crippled from birth, had been healed.

Peter began to preach to the onlookers. He told them this man was healed not by his power, but by the power of God. He told

them it was the same God they worshipped (the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob)--the same God who sent his servant Jesus into the world.

Peter then reminded them how they handed Jesus over to be killed, convinced Pilate to release a murderer instead of Jesus, and how, as a result, Jesus was put to death on a cross.

He reminds them of all this; but then he says, **"Now brothers, I know you acted 'in ignorance', as did your leaders."** Peter said, "I know you didn't know what you were doing."

They didn't realize they were crucifying the Son of God. If they had known—they wouldn't have done that; but... they didn't know.

Jesus told us this from the cross: **"Father, forgive them, they do not know what they're doing."** The angry mob didn't know. They thought they were crucifying a traitor.

The religious establishment didn't know. They just wanted to eliminate a heretic, a perceived enemy of what they believed, or at least, one who threatened their power.

The soldiers didn't know. They didn't have the luxury of trying to determine what was really true. They were just carrying out their orders.

Isn't this the way it is for us so often—even in our normal day-to-day living? We do something that brings hurt or injury to someone else, not because we're mean people, but simply because we didn't realize what we were doing.

How many times have we said an unkind word, or failed to lend a hand, neglected to say "thank you", or taken the other person for granted—and what we did or failed to do led to a strained relationship... hurt feelings? It happens all too often.

And when it happens, we say sadly, "Oh, if I had just thought. I didn't realize. I didn't know it would come to this."

We didn't mean any harm; but because we weren't paying attention--not mindful enough of the circumstances--we didn't know what we were doing, and somebody got hurt in the process.

Well, take all those little wrongs, multiply them a million times over, and you have that tremendous, hideous wrong we call Calvary—the crucifixion of Jesus, the Christ: the most awful instance in human history of failing to realize—just... not knowing!

**B.** So, let's talk about **The Need to Know**—our need to know.

We need to know when we're right, and... when we're wrong. We often jump to conclusions about this, because we fail to take into account the problem of sin in our lives, and the way it can cloud our judgement.

Friends, when we're guilty of wrongdoing—wrong thinking, or feeling, or siding with, or whatever--we need to know how vulnerable we are to this. All of us are. Only when we know can we recognize this and do something about it.

Ignorance is no excuse for sin. Sin is sin whether or not we know what we've done.

Our legal system acknowledges this. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. A person who robs a bank cannot use the defense that he didn't know bank robbery was against the law. Ignorance of the law won't get him off the hook.

Before moving back to South Carolina, Pam and I were in Roanoke, VA, for 9 years. Right after we moved there, I was driving down one of the roads in the city.

I assumed the speed limit was 35—which, as we all know, means a bit more than that--but a policeman pulled me over and told me the speed limit on that road was 25. I apologized, and explained to the officer that I was new to the city and didn't know.

Showing great compassion, the kind officer gave me something to remind me. And that ticket cost me enough that I never forgot the speed limit—at least, not on THAT road!

“Not knowing” was no excuse; and it’s that way with God’s law, too. Some may refuse to hear that God has given us the ability to choose between right and wrong; but when they choose wrong, they are no less guilty.

Those who put Jesus Christ to death did not know what they were doing, but they were still guilty. They still needed forgiveness.

**“Father, forgive them,”** Jesus prayed. We need to be aware of sin. Like the Prodigal, we need to “come to our senses” and realize the mess that sin makes of our lives... and our world.

And listen: I don’t know of anything that makes us so aware of our sin as does the cross of Christ. In our mind’s eye, we see Jesus hanging on the cross and we’re forced to face what we in our sin are capable of doing.

We took the very incarnation—the embodiment--of love and holiness and goodness, and nailed Him to a cross. Along with Jesus, we hung our own complacency and cruelty and ignorance on the cross for everyone to see.

It’s the cross that makes sin so obvious. Jesus’ cross forces us to know that we are sinners in need of a Savior (beyond all doubt!).

And as if this were not enough, in the midst of all the jeers, and pain, and suffering, Jesus looked out on those who were torturing Him to death, and said, **“Father, forgive them.”**

Once again, if we have any spiritual sensitivity at all, we know we have a problem. Our lives and our ways of loving just don’t stack up against that kind of life and love. There’s this wide gap between Jesus’ life and ours; a deep chasm between the nature of our love... and His.

The Bible is clear: this separation is caused by sin. Our sin is the reason we can’t live and love like Jesus. And it’s the cross—yes, even as ugly as it is—the cross makes us aware—it fulfills our need to know. Not knowing is a problem; but by way of the cross, God makes our sin obvious. Now... we know!

C. One other thing we need to consider: **The Response of Knowing.** So... when we know, how do we respond?

Let's talk Gospel. Before we're ever aware of our sin, God reaches out to us with forgiveness.

Jesus' plea from the cross was a sign of God offering forgiveness to His children, even before they had made any effort to ask for it. What does this mean? You and I and all others need only to respond to that which is already offered. That's Gospel!

Knowing that we are sinners, knowing how far we fall short of God's will for our lives, creates its own response. When we know what we've done—sinned against the God who loves us so much that He sent his only Son to die for us--response happens.

Christ and his cross cause us to really see ourselves. We hear how Jesus' plea from the cross is pointing us to our deepest need. We are sinners who need to be forgiven, sinners who desperately need to be reconciled to God and be changed in the process.

We couldn't admit this if it were not for God's gracious gift in Christ Jesus. Without this assurance of God's love and forgiveness, we wouldn't be willing to hear the truth about ourselves. We'd choose instead to "not know."

Jesus helps us to face the fact of sin, to confess it, and to receive forgiveness—and not just God's forgiveness. We are also enabled to give and receive forgiveness to and from each other. In fact, Jesus said we cannot separate the two!

The Gospels are filled with people whose greatest need was forgiveness. There was the woman taken in adultery and the paralytic on his couch. There was that little, dishonest tax collector named Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, Peter who denied Jesus, and the thief on the cross.

They all had the same problem: sin.

They all had the same need: forgiveness.

And they all received it in the same way: through Christ Jesus.

Even Paul acknowledged both his need and the answer to his need when he wrote: **“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** Then he adds, **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ.”**

Even Paul was a victim of “not knowing.” For some time, Paul was the chief persecutor of the church. But when, on the Damascus road, Paul realized what he’d been doing, it changed his life.

When he realized that even in spite of all he had done, Jesus Christ still loved him... and held out to him the offer of forgiveness, it turned his life around. He was a new man in Christ, and he spent the rest of his days telling the world about it.

He hadn’t known! He was on the wrong side, and didn’t know it. But when Paul came to grips with the wretchedness of his sin—and when he discovered that God loved him anyway—once he knew, he responded!

Paul gave his life to Christ. He accepted all the grace and forgiveness that was offered him—once he knew—and this changed Paul’s life forever!

We need to know—to know what we’re doing when we sin. That we’re sinning against the God who loves us completely, we need to know that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that He offers us forgiveness, complete with new and eternal life.

So know this! Know it by placing your faith in Christ and by accepting what He’s done for you. He died on that awful cross; and even while he was suffering there, he prayed, “Father, forgive them.”

And that includes me; and it includes you. So, once we know, how should we respond? Respond by embracing this love, this forgiveness, this new life in Christ Jesus, our Lord!