Intercession

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[0:00] Now we turn our thoughts this morning to Luke chapter 23 at verse 32. And there were also two other malefactors led with him to be put to death, and when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors one on the right hand and the other on the left.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment and cast lots.
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Now, some number of years ago we attempted to take the sayings of the cross as a theme for Sabbath evening meditations.
And I want to take this theme again for our morning meditations from now until we come to our communion at the end of June, so that we will be concentrating our thoughts from now on, on the death of Christ, and these sayings of the cross, which are so full of theology, and meaningful to God's people.
Now, we don't know the precise spot where Jesus was crucified. There are those who maintain that what is known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre marks the spot where Christ was crucified.
[1:51] And then there are others who contend that it is the skull-shaped hill discovered by General Gordon, which is the place of where Christ was crucified.

That place is called Golgotha, and in the New Testament we read about Golgotha, and we also read about Calvary.
Now, these are two words. The one is a Hebrew word, and the other is a Greek word. The word Golgotha is the Hebrew word for skull, and the word Calvary is the Latin word for skull, so that the place where Jesus was led out to his death was well known in his day as the skull, the place of the skull.
And that is where our Lord was crucified. It was a place of ignominy, a place of horror, a place of darkness, a place of sorrow, a place of death.
Now, we can appreciate only a little the depth of the humiliation to which Christ our Lord was reduced. You see, what happened at Calvary was this.
[3:21] He was offered vinegar mixed with gall. That was a sedative. And as you and I know, when he tasted it, he wouldn't drink it.

He didn't want to go into a semi-comatose condition. He didn't want to lose his faculties at that particular point.
However excruciatingly painful the death of the cross was going to be, and however much these Roman executioners try to make it somewhat bearable, Christ Jesus was not going to meet death in a semi-comatose condition.
Jesus was going to meet death in the full possession of all his faculties. And having offered him this drink, what they did now was they stripped him of his clothing.
And this clothing was divided among the four soldiers who were there as the execution party. This clothing was divided among the four of them.
[4:37] But they didn't do that with the robe. What they did with the robe was, they didn't tear it, they didn't cut it into four parts. They used it as a stake in their game of gambling.

Who would win the robe? And then after that, they put the spikes and drove them through his hands and feet, raised this cross into its place, and there he was, a spectacle of woe in his weakness and in his nakedness, a gazing stock.
He now became the derision of men. And what they did was that they robbed Christ of everything. They robbed him of his dignity, they robbed him of his honour, they robbed him of his possessions, all the possessions that he had, and at last they robbed him of his life.

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What degradation and what humiliation our Lord had to suffer as the sin-bearer of his people. As we view Christ in that state of humiliation, you know, the words of the ancient prophet Jeremiah ring across the centuries.
He wasn't talking about Christ when he wrote these words, he was talking about the city of Jerusalem, which became a city of desolation, a city that was derided by its enemies.
[6:23] And the ancient prophet makes the city say this, is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

And you know, these words which apply to the city of Jerusalem can be taken and applied to our Lord Jesus Christ. And as he hangs there on that cross, can he not say too, is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?
Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.
And this was the day of the fierce anger of Almighty God. And God was afflicting this son of his because he was the sin bearer of God's covenant people.
What our Lord did was in terms of love. Greater love hath no man than this, than that a man lay down his life for his friends.
[7:50] And Jesus humbled himself on behalf of his people. He loved them so much that he bore their chastisement, the chastisement of their peace.

He became obedient to death for them. And he suffered this death of the cross. As the apostle puts it, Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich.
Well then, let's just for a little while think of the opportuneness of this cry of Jesus. Father, forgive them. Our Lord spoke seven times from the cross.
And he begins these sayings of the cross with these words, Father, forgive them. And when he comes to the end, the last of the sayings, he will use the same terms.
He will say, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. The one is the beginning of, begins with his sufferings, the other ends with his death.
[9:09] And in between, in between these utterances, there is a whole gambit of experience that we can never fathom.

You know, if ever men needed intercession, it was on that fateful day two thousand years ago when Jesus died.
If ever men needed God to intercede, or rather Christ to intercede for them, it was on that occasion. That was the day of days.
That was the day of the Lord's fierce anger. You remember our way back in the days of Noah. A whole civilization was obliterated by God in his anger.
It says this, that God looked down from heaven and he saw the wickedness of man. He saw that the imagination of man was evil continually from his youth.
[10:14] and God was so angry with civilization. His anger couldn't be restrained. He opened the floodgates.

He swept that entire civilization away in judgment. Or take another occasion. It's away from the days of Noah.
History has moved on. We are now in the days of Lot. And here are these cities of the plains, Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin that they are perpetrating and committing is abominable.
It is hideous. What is God going to do? God is looking down in anger.
He sees this abomination. the time has come for him to exercise judgment. He doesn't sweep these cities away with a flood, but he incinerates them.
[11:29] He sends the fire and the brimstone from heaven and destroys these cities and burns them up. It was the day of the Lord's fierce anger on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Just as it was the day of the Lord's fierce anger upon civilization in the days of Lot. But let's move on again in history.
And we come to the days of Moses. And here are these men who are defying God and all that God stands for through his servant Moses.
These men are Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And God watches them and he sees what they're doing and he sees their terrible rebellion against his servant simply because his servant is carrying

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out the divine instructions of Almighty God.
God. And what does God do? He splits the earth. Suddenly there is this terrible chasm in the world, in that region of the world.
[12:43] Down they go with their families buried alive. It's the judgment of God. The judgment of God is a terrifying thing, my dear friend.

That's why the apostle Paul says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But you know this was the day of the greatest act of wickedness that has ever taken place.
There was never an act of wickedness like this or on this scale. This was the total rejection of God by men.
They took the Son of God and they did this with him, what we have just said. They robbed him of his dignity, of his honor, of his earthly possessions, and now of his life.
And in derision they hanged them between two thieves, as if to say you're nothing but the chief of them. there are the robbers and they deserve to die.
[14:02] And you along with them, you're just the chief of the robbers because you're robbing God by saying that you are the Son of God. You know, it wouldn't have been surprising, would it, if God had shattered the earth at that moment?

It wouldn't have been surprising if God had sent more than a flood, or if God had sent more than fire and brimstone. It wouldn't have been surprising if God had done more than just split the earth to swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.
It wouldn't have been surprising if God hadn't wiped out the world completely from his sight. And why didn't God do it?
If God is a God of judgment and if he acts in this way in judgment, why didn't he do it? Well, because as you and I listen, from that lonely cross there comes this cry, Father, forgive them.
It's one of the most beautiful sayings in scripture. It's one of the most beautiful prayers ever uttered.
[15:28] And it's like a pebble when you throw it in the water. The ripples begin to go out in concentric circles. And as you and I listen to this prayer, Father, forgive them, the prayer stretches across the ages.

And down from that hour at Calvary, they come to this hour now. And Jesus is still saying, Father, forgive them.
They know not what they do. But let's look at the substance of the prayer. prayer. We can say that as far as this prayer is concerned, it was what we call filial intercession.
Because here we have a son who is addressing his father. Now throughout his earthly ministry, we find this relationship expressed between God the Father and God the Son.
you remember how at the commencement of his ministry when he went down into the waters of baptism, and when he ascended from these waters, suddenly there was a voice from heaven, and that voice from heaven proclaimed this, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
[16:58] that is filial love. Or again you remember on the Mount of Transfiguration, when suddenly the whole being of Christ was transformed with a heavenly light that they had never seen before.

And suddenly the disciples who were with Jesus on that occasion, Peter and James and John, heard this voice from heaven saying this, this is my beloved Son, hear him.
And our Lord Jesus repeatedly refers to God as being his father in a very unique way. My father, he says, and your father.
But he's always thinking in terms of my father. In a unique way, you see, God was his father. father.
And so here on the cross, as he is engaged in this work of bringing his people to God, he intercedes.
And you know, Jesus taught his disciples this, he said this to them, here is a human father, and when his son comes to him for bread, what does the father do?
[18:28] He doesn't offer his boy a stone, that would be mocking his son. And if the son comes to him for a fish, says Jesus, the father doesn't give him a scorpion, which would sting and poison him.

That would never be the way of a human father. And if God, if a human father does that for his children, what more will God do for his?
And so, when Jesus said, Father, forgive them, he was staying the hand of his father. He was asking his father to withhold his hand from exercising judgment, which would be swift and catastrophic.

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But not only was it filial intercession, a son speaking to his father, it was also priestly intercession. You know, our Lord had the divine prerogative because he was God's son to be able to forgive the sins of men.
You remember the man sick of the palsy came to Jesus and Jesus said this to him, Son, be of good cheer, thy sin, thy sins be forgiven thee.
[19:53] Or you recall how the woman came to Jesus and she anointed his feet with ointment and he spoke to that woman with all her sins and he said to her, Thy sins are forgiven.

And the Jews were right, you see, when they maintained that none but God can forgive sins. and because he was the son of God Jesus had his right to grant pardon.
Well it may be asked, why didn't Jesus exercise that right now from the cross? Well it must be remembered that on the cross he was now sustaining a different relationship to his father in the process of redemption.
On the cross you see he was now the sinner's representative and as the sinner's representative he was not entitled to exercise his prerogatives and that is why on the cross he has to assume the role of a suppliant and what Christ was now engaged in on the cross was his office as priest and the function of the priesthood is intercession.
On the great day of atonement the priest interceded for the people and in the book of the prophet Isaiah it says this with regard to the coming Christ he will be numbered with the transgressors he will bear the sin of many and he will make intercession for transgressors and so this prophecy was now being fulfilled he is there Jesus among transgressors he is bearing the sins of many and he is making intercession for transgressors but also too we might say this that it was loving intercession as you and I go to the cross of Calvary we will listen in vain at that cross at that place of the skull we will listen in vain to hear any word by way of recrimination we will listen in vain to hear any word of retaliation coming from
[22:38] Christ you remember how Jesus preached the sermon on the mount where he said love your enemies bless them that curse you do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you who can measure the dimensions of love who can measure the dimensions of love it's a wonderful thing love true love I often read it at wedding services in that classic that classic definition that is given by love of love by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians what does he say about love it suffereth long and is kind it beareth all things it endureth all things and says the apostle Paul it is the greatest of the Christian virtues do you remember

Samson when he was at the mercy of the Philistines he prayed now let's listen to the prayer of Samson it's so like the prayer that we would make oh Lord God he says remember me I pray thee only this once oh God that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes that was the intercession of Samson or let's even go to Stephen and listen to his intercession he's being stoned to death you see as a Christian man by his enemies and he begins to pray but as you and I listen to his prayer his prayer is taken up with himself first of all and then at the end he prays for his enemies but go to the cross you will never hear
Jesus speak about himself until he comes to the end of his utterances and at the very commencement of these terrible sufferings he is thinking of his enemies praying for them father forgive them a tremendous example you know our lord has set before us but let's ask ourselves this question for whom did he pray well let's look at those who are standing around the cross on that terrible morning of condemnation first of all there are the roman soldiers the executioners they are there is he praying for them well they are within the scope of this prayer what about the jewish priestly party who condemned him to death is he praying for them as they watch him well they are within the scope of this prayer prayer is he praying for all the spectators who came out on that morning to watch him die is he praying for them well they come within the scope of his prayer what about these thieves one on either side of him well they come within the scope of the prayer too you see the prayer is for
Jew and Gentile and also as you and I listen to that prayer it comes across the ages as we have already said it is an all embrace of prayer and it's a prayer that carries the people of God in it and it's a prayer that carries you and me in it if we will avail ourselves of it because let's remember this that what happened to Christ at the cross was nothing more than a manifestation of the evil rejection that's in the heart of man towards God there was an old free church minister called Horatius Boner one of the famous Boner brothers there were three of them sometimes you know in families you find God may use certain brothers and maybe sisters too but I'm thinking just now of

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brothers whom he uses in his service there was
Peter and there was Peter and his brother James not Peter and Andrew I should say and there was John and James and coming down through Christian history we find brothers being converted and being used together we find these Boner brothers John Andrew Horatius Horatius was the poet the minister of that church which is called in Edinburgh today St.
[28:16] Catherine's in the Grange sometimes my wife and I go there because her grand aunt used to worship there long ago in the last century Horatius Boner puts it like this I see the crowd in Pilate's Hall I mark their wrathful mien their shouts of crucify appalled with blasphemy between and off that shouting multitude I feel that I am one and in that din of voices rude I recognise my own I see the scourges tear his back I see the piercing crown and off the crowd who smite and mock I feel that I am one around

John Cross says Boner the throng I see mocking the sufferers groan yet still my voice it seems to be as if I mocked alone you know we were there in our attitude to Christ we were there but still Christ says from that cross Father forgive them they know not what they do you know through that prayer the dying thief was brought to Christ beside him suddenly that man was awakened and he turned to Jesus and he said to Jesus Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom and Jesus said today thou shalt be with me in paradise
Father forgive him he doesn't know what he's doing or at Pentecost when three thousand were converted and many of them had been at the cross Father forgive them and they were brought in he doesn't intercede from a cross now Jesus is within the veil but he is there our great high priest making intercession and I ask you do you sometimes ponder and maybe it is your thinking some of you here are young some of you are middle aged some of you are getting older but maybe you're thinking as you've never thought before and you're saying what a sinner I've been my life as I look back on it it's so marred so putrid so ungodlike yes it might be a
Christian person is saying that you're speaking to me minister you're saying yes you look back you've failed you haven't lived up to what you had hoped to be you're coming perhaps towards the end of your life you're wondering what's going to become of you well all we can do today is place ourselves within this prayer let's say to Jesus Lord have mercy on me and we will hear him saying this Father forgive him isn't that what you want to hear Christ saying this Father forgive him that's the intercession of Christ someone has put it like this and from my smitten heart with tears to wonders
I confess the wonder of his glorious love and my own worthlessness yes our worthlessness but his love let's pray our gracious God we give thee thanks for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who endured all that had to be endured at Calvary Golgotha the place of the skull the place of indignity the place of woe we thank thee for his work we thank thee for his glorious cry of intercession Father forgive them and we would gladly place ourselves within its embrace be with us throughout the rest of the day and pardon all our sins in Jesus name we ask it
[33:35] Amen

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