



LEADER'S GUIDE – April 7

Series Overview: As a life ends, words matter. Some bring closure, others fall short and leave us questioning. Some speak healing, others cause deeper wounds. But no matter what is said, last words last. This is no different with the last words of Jesus; but Jesus' last words didn't just last, they changed the world. During this series, we will look at Jesus' words on the cross and how not just his words, have changed our life forever.

PRIMARY PASSAGE

- Luke 23:32-43:** ³²Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³When 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. ³⁴Jesus said, ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*** And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.
- ³⁵The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”
- ³⁶The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”
- ³⁸There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.
- ³⁹One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”
- ⁴⁰But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”
- ⁴²Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
- ⁴³Jesus answered him, ***“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”***

1.) Read vv. 32-38. Take a look at Jesus' words on the cross. When he says, "them," who do you think he is referring to? The "them" in this verse can be understood as a few people: 1.) Jews/Sanhedrin who arrested him out of envy and bitterness, 2.) The Romans who stood idly (Pilate) as Jesus was falsely accused and the soldiers that beat, mocked and killed him, and 3.) us. Though we are were not at the scene of the crime, we were the reason Jesus was. He went to the cross to forgive us of our sins. **Why is Jesus' words so surprising?** Who could forgive someone for killing them? When you contrast the goodness that Jesus pours out to the wickedness of the people he gives it to, it makes no sense. No one deserved Jesus' forgiveness, but he gave it not because of their goodness, but because of his.

2.) Think about forgiveness in your own life. Why is it so hard? Have people share. There is no right or wrong answer, but a trend you will most likely see is that to extend forgiveness is to give something undeserved and to let go of something we deserve (the right to be angry/hurt). **As you reflect on how Christ showed forgiveness on the cross, how does that challenge or encourage you?** If Jesus can forgive us, how can we not forgive others? We must give what we have received.

3.) Let's take a moment and think about how forgiveness works between us and others. Read Matthew 5:23-24 and Matthew 18:15. What do these verses say about who is responsible to seek reconciliation? Matthew 5 shows how if we think we have offended someone, we should close the gap. Matthew 18 shows that if we have been offended, we should close the gap. Regardless if we have been offended or were have offended others, it is our responsibility to seek reconciliation through forgiveness. Another potential follow up question is "Which scenario is easier for you to seek reconciliation?"

4.) Read vv. 29-42. What are the differences you see between the two thieves? One thief hurled insults while the other thief defended Christ. The second thief not only defended Christ, but asked for him to remember him in eternity. **What do you think Jesus' words in v. 43 meant?** Ultimately, Jesus response meant that your sins have been forgiven and you will be in heaven with Christ. If you have some people who struggle with work-based faith, a great follow-up question would be: "What good works did the second thief on the cross do to earn eternal life?" None. He was saved by faith alone.

5.) Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Comparing this passage with Jesus' final words in Luke 23, what stands out to you about forgiveness and eternal life? This question is an amazing time to make sure your group understands the Gospel. If you have seekers or new believers, make sure they understand that the Gospel is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Which of these three questions do you need to think on this week:

- **Have I received forgiveness from Jesus Christ and been welcomed into his forever family?**
- **Am I asking for and receiving forgiveness regularly in my walk with Christ?**
- **Is there someone in my life that I need to ask for forgiveness or forgive?**