Luke 23:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Analysis

From the cross, Jesus prays: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' This prayer for His executioners demonstrates divine love's extent—forgiving those actively murdering Him. The phrase 'they know not what they do' doesn't excuse their sin but explains it—they didn't fully comprehend they were crucifying the Son of God. This prayer models Jesus' teaching to love enemies (Luke 6:27-28) and demonstrates the gospel's essence—grace for the undeserving, forgiveness for enemies, love triumphing over hate. Stephen later echoed this prayer when stoned (Acts 7:60), showing Jesus' disciples learning His love.

Historical Context

Crucifixion was Rome's most brutal execution method, reserved for slaves and rebels. Jesus' prayer while being nailed to the cross demonstrates supernatural love transcending human capability. 'They' likely includes Roman soldiers (following orders without understanding), Jewish leaders (rejecting their Messiah), and ultimately all humanity—our sins put Jesus on the cross. Peter's Pentecost sermon later emphasized that crucifiers killed 'the Prince of life' in ignorance (Acts 3:14-17), yet offered forgiveness. Jesus' prayer was answered—many crucifiers later believed (centurion, Acts 2:41). This prayer reveals grace's heart—God forgives those who don't deserve forgiveness.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus' praying for His executioners' forgiveness teach about the nature of divine love and the gospel's reach?
2. How does the phrase 'they know not what they do' explain human sin and God's response to our ignorance of sin's full severity?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	Ἰησοῦς	ἔλεγεν	Πάτερ	ἄφες	αὐτοῦ	οὐ	γὰρ
G3588	**And**	**Jesus**	**said**	**Father**	**forgive**	**his**	**not**	**for**
	G1161	G2424	G3004	G3962	G863	G846	G3756	G1063

οἴδασιν	τί	ποιοῦσιν	διαμεριζόμενοι	δὲ	τὰ	ἱμάτια
they know	**what**	**they do**	**they parted**	**And**	G3588	**raiment**
G1492	G5101	G4160	G1266	G1161		G2440

αὐτοῦ	ἔβαλον	κλῆρον
his	**and cast**	**lots**
G846	G906	G2819

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 5:44 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Acts 7:60 (Parallel theme): And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 Peter 3:9 (Parallel theme): Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Romans 12:14 (Parallel theme): Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

1 Corinthians 2:8 (Parallel theme): Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Psalms 22:18 (Parallel theme): They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

Genesis 50:17 (Parallel theme): So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

Isaiah 53:12 (Parallel theme): Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Acts 3:17 (Parallel theme): And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

1 Timothy 1:13 (Parallel theme): Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.