

Message of the Week "Then," Said Jesus, "Father Forgive Them"

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One subject takes the form of the adverb "THEN," expressing the time, or setting of a particular event or action. "Then, said Jesus, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

To fully grasp the subline significance of this statement we must first understand the action preceeding it. The verse preceding our text reads, 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."

Here we are face to face with the capstone of the Church's mission, to be stewards over the great heritage of love left to us by our Lord Jesus. Here love is demonstrated rather than communicated. We have been entrusted with many of God's graces. But today let us look at the major possession we have from the Father. Jesus has made us to be stewards over His love. These are His very words, "Love ye one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:11-12). This love that the Father bestowed upon us is not our own. We are but "vessels meet for the Master's use" in pouring out His love to those who are unloved as well as those who seem unlovable.

In this is demonstrated the character of the church in the community. The church does not live as a true witness to the mainifold love of Christ by the height of her spire, the stateliness of her edifice, nor the dignity of those who worship at her altar, but by that action which grows out of the "then" situations of life as she lives out her creeds in the market place.

As the second century of the American Church draws to a close, there is a demand that our deeds outreach our creeds. Today, as well as in Jesus' day, there is a need for love in EXPRESSION rather than love under DISCUSSION. It was so in Jesus' time that pity had replaced compassion. For you see, pity is demonstrated by hot flashes of uninvolved concern which diminishes as suddenly as it was aroused. But compassion is demonstrated by a comitment that stays riveted to the task until the hurt has been resolved or the crisis has passed.

When did Jesus resort to forgiveness? THEN, when all ugliness of mankind had been hurled into His precious face. THEN, when spittle leaked into the corners of His mouth, THEN He prayed, "Father, forgive them." How sweet it forgiveness? Forgiveness is the honey from the comb of God's eternal mercy. The church must practice the policy of Jesus. Jesus had no problem with practicing what He preached. Often in our lives we cannot bring the two together. But in the life of Jesus the gulf is bridged. During the ministry

(John 13:35;.) often about forgiveness. This strange doctrine of forgiveness awakened the questioning mind of Peter. "How oft," he asked "shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him, till seven times?" Peter wanted to be legal and stay within the confines of the law. But Jesus reponded by affirming that the law of love sets no limits on forgiveness. "I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." To forgive, taught Jesus is not an act of the law, but an attitude of love.

If we would win the world for Christ, it must be by our acts and attitudes of love. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to the other" (John 13:35;. THIS BICENTENNIAL YEAR FINDS THE CHURCH STANDING AT THE CROSS ROADS OF DECI-SION. What will we do? Will we continue to tread the low road, giving lip service only to the high challenges of Jesus, or will we take the high road of love, making ourselves vulnerable to the agonies that

go with the life lived under the reproach of the cross? All of us have our "then" opportunities.

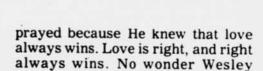
IN CONCLUSION LET US AGAIN VISIT THE TEXT, "THEN SAID JESUS, FATHER FORGIVE THEM..."

He said this when the mob crowd had arrested Him from prayer meeting with His sleepy disciples. "THEN!"

This was His Heavenly prayer when earthly hopes failed. He prayed, "Father forgive them..."

Well, He could have prayed, Father send Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, let them strike my enemies dead, and rescue me from this cross...But, "THEN" He said, "Father, forgive them...!"

What a prayer this was! Jesus



Presented by

Rev. Norman E. Kerry,

Pastor

Greater Mt. Sinai

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wrote: "Love divine, all love excelling Joy of heaven, to earth come down! Fix in us Thy humble dwelling;

All Thy faithful mercies crown." The Church must follow on in His footsteps; though they lead us into the dark valley and the eerie shadow of death. It led Him there. But His love was transforming and transcending love. It transformed the cross into a lauching pad that catapulted Him into the ages as Lord of Eternity. His love transcended the grave, transforming it into a tunnel, through which He walks with every believer into the bright light of victory at the other end. "THEN said Jesus, Father..." THE

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Thursday April 15, 1976-THE CHARLOTTE POST-Page 13

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Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church 747 W, Trade Street Rev. Thomas W. Samuels, pastor Nazareth Primitive Baptist Church 2230 Bancroft Street Rev. James A. Frieson, pastor In order to perfect our witness we must often return to these words of Luke about our Saviour: "Then said Jesus, Father forgive them..."

I'm convinced that no sweeter words have ever reverberated upon the human heart than these of Jesus.





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