

# **"THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"**

Sermon by Rev. Bruce Zagel 6th April, 2011



*Ye who think of sin but lightly,  
Nor suppose the evil great,  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the sacrifice appointed;  
See who bears the awful load;  
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed,  
Son of man and Son of God.*

Thomas Kelly (1769-1855)

**Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34a**

Has anyone ever called you ignorant?

**"You are so ignorant!"**

I suspect that if you heard someone say that to you, you probably would not feel very good about your communication with them. Being called ignorant in our culture is not exactly a compliment. In our text for this evening that is essentially what Jesus is saying, "Father forgive them for they are ignorant." In the original language that the New Testament was written in the word that Jesus speaks there literally means "to not know" and it is the word "ignorant". Being "ignorant" simply means "to not know". It doesn't mean you are stupid - you simply don't know. I have to acknowledge there are lots of things in this world about which I am completely ignorant.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross there were at three different classes of ignorant people there that day as he looked around while he was hanging there dying.

The ones that are probably are the most important to the story are the Romans soldiers. The gentiles, people who had come from a background with virtually no knowledge of the religion of the Jews and even less knowledge of who this Jesus of Nazareth was who they were nailing to the cross. They were truly ignorant. They truly did not know what was going on. They were unbelievers. They were people brought up far from the faith of Israel. It made it extremely difficult for them to hear about Christ as anything but an enemy, someone they simply needed to dispatch. They were truly ignorant.

A few weeks ago Kathy and I read a book called "Son of Hamas" a book written by the oldest son of one of the founder's of the Hamas terrorist organisation in Palestine. A fascinating story because it really illustrates the ignorance of people and what happens when those ignorant become knowing. The son, named Mosab, was brought to faith in Jesus Christ a few years ago and has now moved out of Palestine for fear of his own life and is living in America. He was ignorant of this Jesus of Nazareth just like the Roman soldiers, just like many millions of people around the world who are ignorant and totally unknowing of who he is and what he has done.

The second group of ignorant people there that day, who should not have been ignorant, were the Jews themselves. Mocking Jesus as he hangs dying there, ridiculing him as we heard in the Gospel reading. If anyone should have known who this Jesus of Nazareth was, it was these people. They had the Old Testament Scripture, they had heard the several hundred prophecies from Genesis through Malachi of the coming Messiah and what he was to do in healing the sick, raising the dead and giving sight to the blind and yet they were ignorant. Through their own rebellion, their own lack of faith in Christ the Messiah they were ignorant of what was happening. Totally ignorant while watching this man die on the cross they did not know that this was more than one more crucifixion at the hands of the Roman.

Much more. So much more.

And they remained ignorant. Although they were the chosen nation they were ignorant when they failed to heed Jesus and his preaching of the coming of the kingdom.

Yes, when Jesus said, "Father forgive **them**." Both the Gentiles and the Jews qualified because they did not know.

We come to the third group, a group which you really would not expect to be ignorant for it is the disciples. Scripture records only one observation of one disciple present at the cross, that being John standing there with Mary. It would not be out of the realm of possibility that a few others, at least, were hanging around on the edges wondering what had happened, trying to figure out what had gone wrong in the last 12-18 hours. Here just a few days ago Jesus was welcomed as the Messiah. "Hail King of the Jews!" "Hail Son of David!" Now Jesus is in agonising pain and where are his disciples? The ignorance of Christ as the messiah is rooted in their own sinful nature. They simply did not know. They were ignorant of what it means to be a disciple. The cost of discipleship was more than they believed they could pay. They had truly also been ignorant.

Jesus' words, "Father forgive them!" applies to the disciples too.

Would the same hold true tonight?

As you hear Jesus' words "Father, forgive **them**, for they know not what they do." Who is "them" tonight?

I am one of them. For I too am ignorant. All too often I don't realise or appreciate just how sinful my own nature is. All too often I have much too much confidence and faith in **ME!** All too often I am merely ignorant.

I wonder if any of you feel the same way?

Ignorant. Just not knowing...but you do know that ignorance is no defence.

I was driving into town from the Secondary campus along George street today where I notice the speed sign by the school. It was almost completely covered by branches and it is only at the very last second that you notice the 40. Imagine not seeing it then you notice some light flashing behind you then saying to the police officer, "But I didn't know! The sign was covered with branches." I was ignorant.

Have you ever tried that with a traffic officer?

Almost immediately the officer of the law will say, "Ignorance of the law is no defence!" And the same goes for ignorance of the law of God.

Ignorance of the law of God is no defence when we stand before God. We may want to plead ignorance but it is my responsibility to know just as it is my responsibility (even as an American) to know the local laws and abide by them. Ignorance of the law is no defence.

Rather than claiming ignorance we have the opportunity to fall at the foot of the cross pleading for mercy and forgiveness.

You notice in Jesus statement, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." he does not distinguish between the three classes of ignorant people there. He doesn't say, "Well they are more ignorant than this group." He simply says, "Father forgive **them**" because Christ's death on the cross brings forgiveness for **all**.

Whether we are raised in a Christian home or not Christ's forgiveness is available for all. As the Holy Spirit bring us to faith in Christ our ignorance is changed into faith and we can then say, "Thankyou Lord. Thankyou for not only changing me from ignorant to knowing but thankyou for your forgiveness because forgiveness changes everything."

Forgiveness does not excuse us from the law.

We still are accountable for our sin against the law and ignorance is still no defence but rather than be punished for our sin in forgiveness our punishment is meted out. It is accomplished but instead of upon us it is accomplished upon Christ. Forgiveness lifts the penalty of breaking the law and places it on the only one who can truly bear it. Forgiveness also allows us to see sin for it really is. Rebellion against God and truly as the soldiers did when we sin we spit in the face of Christ. Every time we sin we spit in his face. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Forgiveness also gives us the strength to turn away from that sin for the sake of Christ.

All people have a knowledge that there is a God. It is called the natural knowledge of God. But just because people have a natural knowledge of God doesn't mean they are not ignorant.

We are all ignorant unless the forgiveness of sins in Christ is revealed to us and even then we act in ignorance over and over and over again.

Christ leads us, the ignorant to Calvary to watch him, to view the sacrifice appointed, to watch him bear the awful load and then to leave Calvary, free, forgiven, washed clean.

So fellow ignorants ... view the cross and leave in joy for Christ says "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Amen