

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

July 16, 2000

**Scripture: *Luke 23:32-34*
Sermon: *Badness and Blindness***

People have always been fascinated by the final sayings of Jesus as he was dying on the cross. We know that there were 6 hours of indescribable torture. And yet, we also have a record that during that six hours that he spoke at least 7 times. One of those statements I wanted to read for us today. It is one that you have heard for many years and one that the emphasis has always been given on the first part and not on the second part. But this morning I want us to notice what truth we can learn from the second part of the statement.

This is the book of Luke, Chapter 23, Verse 32. Two other men, both criminals were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the skull there they crucified him along with the criminals, one on the right hand and one on the left. Jesus said, this is the statement – *Father forgive them*, that part we know. But notice the last part – *for they do not know what they are doing*. All of us understand that Jesus died on the cross because of the badness of people. And we understand that when you take all of the people that helped to put him on the cross that really what they are is just symbols of the sin that is in all of us. For example, there was the treachery of the Judas. The cowardice of Peter. The fear of disciples. It was the political expediency of a Pilate. It was to try to hold on to power by religious leaders. And then of course there was the silence by the multitudes. And we understand that these people are kind of paraded in front of us so we can look at them and we can see ourselves in them and understand that the sins that led Jesus to the cross are also the sins that dwell in each of us. So we understand that our sins led him there.

Now you know we live in a day where very often people who are facing execution will protest their innocence. But we understand that Jesus was innocent. And that, rather than why he was crucified is really because of the guilt that is in us and the badness that dwells within our life. But when you read this passage of scripture you also begin to understand there was something else that caused the death of Jesus and the Bible says it was caused because people acted blindly. He prayed for them, *Lord, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing*. And the problem then, that you and I have is really two big ones. First, we are bad. We are sinners. And second we are blind. And this passage of scripture tells you that you can be so prejudiced, so narrow minded, so provincial that you can actually cause the death of the Son of God and think you are doing God a favor. And we can actually become so away from him that we can do things and not even know that we are doing them wrong. People have understood this trait in human nature for years.

In fact, in old mythology, there is a story about Procrustes. Procrustes was a man who would sit on the side of the road and rob people as they traveled by. But he had a strange little instrument. It was called the iron bed. And after he had robbed them he would make them lay down on the iron bed. If they didn't reach both ends he would stretch them until they were long enough to fit his bed. If they were too long, then he would cut off part of them to make sure they fit his bed. Now all people had understood that you and I had the traits of Procrustes and that is, everything has to fit our iron bed. We have to make sure that when everything comes to it, we either stretch it or cut it off to make sure that it is in line with our own prejudice.

Now in our day we don't have an iron bed but we do have a saying that is pretty much like an iron bed. This is the statement. *If it ain't broke, don't fix it*. Now when you first hear that, of course people are not going around trying to find things that are not broke so they can fix them but you see there is another part of that statement that is tragic and that is you can leave what is broke not fixed because you don't know it's broke.

When I was coming along as a teenager my Mom used to say to me, "Just leave well enough alone." But the problem is, maybe well enough alone isn't right. Maybe well enough alone isn't what's needed. Maybe something needs to happen. Something needs to be changed, something needs to be different. And the tragedy that we are reading about today is that these individuals were just so set in what

they believed and what they did that when Jesus came, no new lights could shine on their life and they actually took him out and crucified him.

Listen to them again. Lord, they don't even know what they are doing. Now let me show you how that blindness works in all of our life. One way it works in our life is that it stifles anything new coming in. We almost build an iron curtain around us and regardless of what the circumstances may happen on the outside we just plow ahead and do everything the same way. I remember the man who was being recommended for another job and the man said about him, he had 10 years of experience but another workman said, "No, he has one year of experience that he's done 10 times."

I am reminded of the football coach that was in the big game. Right in the middle of the game his first-string quarterback was hurt. He brought in his second-string quarterback and just before the game was over, he was hurt. So he looked down at the end of the bench and there was the third-string quarterback. He had never snapped a ball, never passed. The coach brought him over. He said, "Son, you are the only one. You have to go in. This is what I want you to do, now listen carefully. First play, you hand off to the full back. Second play, you hand off to the tail back. Third play, you do an end around and fourth play, listen to me now, you punt." First play, he handed it to the full back. He ran 40 yards. Second play, he handed it to the tail back and he ran 20 yards. Third play, no one was expecting him to run. Quarterback sneak. They tackled him from behind on the 2 yard line. Fourth down. He punted. Some of us are like that. That is, our minds are so set, we are going to do it and we are going to keep on doing it regardless of what changes on the outside. The second way it begins to affect us is that we begin to think that the knowledge that we have is final. That is the reason people used to look at a man like Christopher Columbus and said, "You can't sail around the world. You're going to fall off the edges."

Years ago, I had the opportunity to hear John Glenn just as he came back from outer space and he said, "So many people said to me the first man in space from the United States, if God wanted us to go into space you know, I mean, he would have given us wings. God never meant for us to go in space." I mean, we are consigned to be here on the earth and he said he recalled going one time and speaking and some lady turned to him and said, "Mr. Glenn, God never meant for us to go in space. Why don't you just stay home like the rest of us and watch television." Not recognizing that television was one of the greatest miracles that we have. But some of us get to the point in our life where we just say, "This is it. There is nothing else that we can learn."

There is, what is called the eighth woe. Woe to the man who is caught up with his horizons. Many of us have caught up, nothing new can come to us. Third way it works in our life, it leads us to pride. We feel like we've got all the answers. We understand everything. No need for us to try to broaden our horizons. We already know what needs to be done. A Man walked into the pharmacy and asked the pharmacist, "Do you have a cure for hiccups?" The pharmacist reached across the counter and punched him right in the nose. The man staggered back and the pharmacist came around and he said, "Bet that got rid of your hiccups, didn't it? He said, "I didn't have them. My wife's got them out in the car."

Do you understand? We have answers even though we don't understand the question. We are so quick to know how things work we never even stop to ask. And the fourth thing that is so difficult about it is that you can let it get so bad in your life that actually you will do evil and think you are doing good.

They took Jesus to the cross. You can't question their patriotism. You can't question their sincerity. You can't question their zeal. They thought they were doing what God wanted them to do and in their blindness they killed the Son of God. So when you and I begin to understand what is wrong with us, what's really wrong with us, then what do we need to do? One of the things we need to do is, we need to confront it.

Let me ask you a question. When is the last time you have confessed not your badness but your blindness? When is the last time you said, "Lord, I am a product of my culture, I am a product of my family, I am a product of what I read, and maybe Lord, that is not enough." And when I went to church this morning, I read about people, good people, who crucified the Son of God. Oh God! Am I blind? Forgive me, Forgive me, for living a life with blinders on and not being able to see what I need to see."

We need to come to the point in our life where we confess to God and say, "Lord, shine on my sincere ignorance and my conscientious stupidity. Lord, help me to put together intelligence and goodness. Help me to understand that my heart is never right if my head is wrong. Lord, forgive me."

Many of us have lived through a culture where men used to go to church and read their Bible to find proof text where they could keep people in slavery. Read proof text where they could justify segregation. Proof text to try to put women and children in their place. And never recognize that most of

that is sin. And it is our blindness – you and I need to come to the point in our life where we come to confess it. Second word we need to do is that we need to come to live a life of creative tension and that is where we are always trying to enlarge to see more, to understand more and to begin to see things as God would have us see them..... to do that is that you begin to know about Jesus Christ and you begin to look at the world through his eyes. Wonderful thing you see when you begin to look at things through Jesus' eyes the whole world begins to open up. When you begin to study the Bible then you begin to understand things that no one else can begin to see.

Now, in my wife's larger family, there was one member who made a great deal of money. And when we lived in Germany, we received a letter from him saying on such-and-such a date he and his wife would be on an around the world tour and they would be in part of Germany and asked us to come see him. So Judie and I went in this big city and found the only big four-star hotel in the whole city. Now, I want to show you the round the world tour he went. He went round the world and visited every four star hotel. He asked that the food would be equivalent to what he could buy in the United States. And every day after he would eat grits and bacon and eggs, he would get on an air conditioned bus, go see the tourist sites, get back on it, and the next morning he would fly to another four star hotel so he could see the world. Do you understand that only when you begin to look at things through the eyes of Jesus can you really ever see the world. You see, and he's going to come in and start tearing down barriers like he did in his day.

He told a story one time about a good man but he said, "Oh, the bad people in the story is the Priest and the Levite and the good man is the Samaritan." Well, I mean, if a Jew saw a Samaritan he would cross the street where he wouldn't pass on the same side of the street. He began to touch people who had leprosy. He began to bring women into his group. He began to say, let the little children come to me. And the statement that I have always remembered is, Jesus is always ahead of his time and he will continue to expand your horizons to enable you to be able to see. So you need to always live in a sense of creative tension.

Now, let me ask you. How much would you know today if you never went to school? Suppose when you were about 6 and the law said you had to go to school you just went to your Mother and Dad and said, "Mom, school would be a waste of time for me. I pretty well know what everybody who goes to school knows." Well, you would say, "Of course not." Why is it then that we as Christians in our spiritual life, trying to see the world as it is, think that we can do it without ever going to a Bible study class, without ever getting into Sunday School, without ever getting into small groups, without ever having a plan to read the Scripture, and here we are, 6 years old, saying, "Why do I need all of that, I already know what needs to be known." Of course you don't. So how can you learn? You continue to expose yourself and put that creative tension in your life to help you to learn.

Our members are aware that every year we send people overseas on mission trips. Now, I want to tell you why we do that. We do it because we can help a lot of folk, but that is not the major reason why we do it. One of the major reasons we do it is so that when they go they will see the world as it is. We have in our congregation now over 100 adults who have gone around the world in various mission trips. When I stand up and say pray for missionaries, I don't have to explain that to them. When I begin to say give, I don't have to tell them why. When I begin to say the world is lost, they understand that, they have been there and they have seen it. Now, you don't have to go around the world to be able to appreciate it but it does mean maybe you need to sit down and study it and understand it so you can know what kind of world you really live in. Dr. Graham and Dr. Harrington, in our church have just returned from taking about 10 of our teenagers along with them overseas to the country of Tanzania. It has been exciting to me to hear as they have come back what they are saying, what they have seen, what they've learned. I became tickled the other day. One of the fine families in our church, their daughter went and Maurice said, "Have you heard about the problem," and mentioned her name and I said, "No, did we have a problem?" He said, "Yes, we had a problem." He said, "In the country of Tanzania, one man saw this beautiful teenager in our church and came to Dr. Harrington and offered 2 goats and 4 bushels of sweet potatoes if she would marry him. Now the father of the girl said really what he was doing he thought was that if she was worth that much he was going to hold out for a little more. Dr. Graham told me that one of the parents said, "Our child has said more to us in the last 24 hours than maybe in the first 17 years of his life." Just the whole world suddenly became real to them.

Do you understand that you need to find something in your life that will help you to be able to understand and to broaden your horizons and to be able to see, because friends, if we can be blind enough to crucify the Son of God, we can be blind enough to put ourselves in the way of what God wants us to do.

And we need to pray and we need to offer ourselves to do it. David Livingston said the last year of his life he said, "I don't have anything but two things. I have my books and I have my dreams." I wish under God you and I could get to the point where we say we want to learn and we want to see what God wants us to be in this life. There is in Rye Essex in England, a little church that when you get ready to go into it, has a little plaque on it. Listen to what it says. *Oh, God, deliver me from the laziness that is content with half-truth, from the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth. Oh, God of Truth, deliver us. Father, forgive them. Good men that don't even know what they are doing. But surely our prayer ought to be today, Lord, let your light shine on me that I can see what you want me to see.*

Some of you in this room have never caught the first vision, the vision of what God wants with you. The vision of what he could do with you. The vision of the kind of life he wants to open up to you. And maybe something has been going on in your life and you are saying, "Lord, I need something more than I have." The answer is Jesus Christ. And maybe today, you need to come to give your heart and your life to him. There are Christians in this room today who need to take the second step maybe in your Christian life and that is to become really active in a church like this. Maybe you have been feeling God has been leading you here. This is your way of stepping forward and saying, "Lord, I continue to want to expand and I want to grow, I want to be what you want me to be."