

## 6 Hours

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**The only way a holy God can have a relationship with you is to forgive your sins.**

*<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

*<sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23-NIV)*

In 1969 I was a sixth grader in Everett, Washington. I often came home from Hawthorne Elementary school and made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. While eating at the kitchen table, I listened to Chicago and America on my transistor radio.

In the summer of nineteen sixty-nine, Woodstock drew unbelievable crowds to the East Coast for rock and roll. The Montreal Expos, the first international team to enter major league baseball, debuted with milestone attendance. Their first win was against the New York Yankees. Sesame Street also drew massive crowds as kids gathered around the family TV to watch a big yellow bird offer educational lessons.

In the northwest corner of the United States, far away from Woodstock and the Montreal Expos, a small group of football players gathered each afternoon to play touch football in the street in the projects of North Everett. My friends circled up and picked sides in front of my house on 722 Linden Street.

Within minutes the blocking was fierce. The football was flying. And the evening sun was fading on the horizon. After a couple of hours, dads started arriving from shift change at the nearby mill. One kid had a dad with a great arm. By now the score had become so lopsided that the fun of the game had diminished.

Suddenly the dad with the NFL arm and an addiction to football started walking toward us. As he approached, he asked out of fairness, "What is the score?" and "Who is losing?" You guessed it, he joined the team that was losing, and that was often mine.

His arrival on Linden Street sent chills down our backs. What had been a few minutes earlier a blowout, was now the beginning of a miracle comeback. As we joined him in the huddle, all eyes were on the dad who gave us hope.

Nobody else could. Nobody else did. Strong arm. Deep voice. But, most of all, **he had a plan.** He would look at us and call "z-streak on two. Ready break." As we approached the line of scrimmage, my childhood friends stopped groaning and griping. We didn't just have a dad

with a strong arm; we had a **dad with a plan**. The plays did not get us back on our feet; it was the **new plan** that got us upright.

In our series, 6 hours, Jesus has a plan, and it is this new plan that is getting each of us upright. When mankind was getting creamed according to the scoreboard of life because of sin, God sent Jesus to earth, a Sin-bearer who had a plan. How was the OT plan for salvation different from the NT plan for salvation?

Let's return to a hill called Calvary. The place of the skull-Golgotha. A debate rages today in Jerusalem as to where the true location of Jesus death is.

The fact he died, and rose again, is not in question, where it happened is. But those answers are for another time.

Jesus' back was whipped, his head was beaten, and for 6 hours he hung half dead, on a cross. We know that for sure. We know that from the gospel writers of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each provides a different literary picture and perspective of 6 hours.

Suddenly our scene moves from mockery to a mother. It moves from insults to intimacy.

*<sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19-NIV)*

The savior of the world (for God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son), becomes the savior of a women. Not just any women. The one who bore Jesus. The one who breast-fed Jesus. The one who babied Jesus.

Mary is older in age and older in agony. Streaks of grey mark her middle eastern hairlines. Her hands are calloused. A youthful Mary has given way to raising a household of children.

She is far from home. Jesus is far from home. She is close to the cross. And her firstborn is on the cross.

As Mary watches the torture, agonizing over the trauma, a flood of memories refill her mind, offering momentary relief.

An uncomfortable late 8<sup>th</sup> month ride from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

A baby's bed made of cow's hay.

Fugitive days in Egypt, remembering God's people lived in Egypt and were brought out by the mighty hand of a deliverer, and once again that same mighty hand is protecting the deliverer who will one day bring all his people out of Egypt again, freeing them from their sins.

A watchful husband Joseph carefully teaches his son how to fit a piece of wood or hammer a nail.

Her mind returns to a day of panic, when she asks Joseph, where is Jesus? I thought you had him; Joseph announces.

Dinner time laughter. Carpenter lessons. Torah teaching.

Jesus had other things on his mind besides pain.

John places his arms around Mary and holds her tighter, as words from Jesus fill the air. The voice is raspy. The depth of tone is gone. But the authority is clear, for John one last final instruction, from the Master.

John, you are now the son that Mary needs, and you are now the son that in some ways, I never was.

For a moment, Jesus' pain was no longer about nails, now it was from experiencing the emotional pain of good-bye. In a silent glance Mary and Jesus share intimacy. A secret. A slice of time. And Jesus says, "good-bye mom!"

Jesus words sparkle like diamonds. Forgiveness for the world. Love for a mother. Jesus gives his killers grace and gives his mother a son.

**Then Jesus answers the prayer of a thief.** Darkness has been falling like a curtain. Supernatural darkness.

Not a casual collection of clouds. And not an eclipse of the sun. Jesus is about to enter a 3-hour blanket of darkness.

Merchants in the market start to light candles. Soldiers begin to light torches. Heaven grieves. Jesus gasps. And hell cackles. It is now about 12pm. Christ went up on the cross at about 9am, he will be taken down at around 3pm. 6 hours. But it is noon. Straight up.

*<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, (Luke 23-NIV)*

Before Jesus slips into the darkest moments on the cross, a shaft of sunlight pieces the moment. <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23-NIV)

The thief went up a sinner and came down a saint.

For a while he was cursing, now he was praying. The political robber had sunk to the bottom of the cross. The robber was groaning in agony. With each passing hour, the scene of crucifixion was a progressive depletion of life through asphyxiation. As moments passed each breath from the victim was shallower.

But the robbers decline was nothing like Jesus' decline. Jesus came to the cross-half dead. Already beaten. He had not eaten. Jesus had no water since the night before. For hours Jesus had become increasingly dehydrated. Jesus was closer to death than the thief asking for relief. Romans 3, provides a picture of everyone's approach to God.

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;  
11 there is no one who understands;  
there is no one who seeks God. (Rom 3-NIV)*

If no one seeks God, then how can a person be saved? No question is more important. And Jesus provides us an answer. Before he slips into darkness and separation from God (from 12 noon to 3pm), and before a thief slips into eternity and separation from God, Jesus answers our concerns and a thief nearby. Let me remind you one more time.

If no one is good enough, if no list of achievements is adequate, how is a person to be saved?

No question is more crucial. To hear Jesus give us the answer is freeing and final.

On the cross, one man died **in** his sins. On the cross, one man died **for** our sins. On the cross, one man died **to** his sins.

It is this robber who died to his sins, he answers our question, "how can a person be saved?" Rome declared this man guilty. Guilty as a thief. The same mouth a few minutes earlier cursing Christ, now defends Christ.

*40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"<sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." (Luke 23-NIV)*

The same mouth that cursed Christ, now cares about Christ. He did not see a miracle. He did not hear a sermon.

He did not get baptized or go to church. He did not know who the trinity was or even that Jesus was born of a virgin. According to Luke all he had was a last breath prayer for mercy. For grace. For hope.

Something often happens to a person when they get in the presence of the Christ who atones for sins. Who dies for sins. Listen to the words of repentance opening the door and to words for restoration. Words of forgiveness. Words of hope.

*<sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23-NIV)*

Here is the core to faith. And the message comes from one who went up a sinner and came down a saint. He was far from God and is now close to Christ. Tragedy and trauma often reveal character.

Can you be any further from God, can you sink any lower...

Can you sink any lower than crucified men, mocking the crucified?

Though this robber was once far from God, now with his eyes open, he is near to Christ. Near to death. Near to heaven. And more of all near to life.

Can I suggest from the mouth of a criminal, robber, and thief the message of the gospel:

I am wrong. Jesus is right.

I am dying. Jesus is living.

I have failed. Jesus was nailed.

Jesus has not sinned. This man has done nothing wrong.

I deserve to die; Jesus will make it so I can live.

A criminal knew very little about Jesus, but what he did know was just enough. He knew an unjust death for Jesus, meant an offering of unjust mercy and grace for him.

He saw forgiveness, he heard forgiveness, and now he received forgiveness. Words spoken hours earlier, words still ringing in his ears.

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

If you are a recipient of that prayer by Jesus on your behalf, you are heaven bound. You are no longer bound by sin. This train is bound for glory, this train. An innocent man was dying with no retaliation, and no complaints on his lips.

So, a thief asks for help. And Jesus gives it to him. The heavy head of Christ lifts and turns to the robber and their eyes meet and Jesus says, **“today, you will be with me in paradise.”** The first sins, Jesus carries for the next 3 hours, are the sins of the thief who just asked for mercy. **And that is all you need to go to heaven.**

Broken because of sin. Broken beyond recognition. Wandering without a home, wandering without a father.

Eking out a living.

Stealing to survive.

Stealing to thrive.

His name-criminal. His name-homeless now.

His life accomplishment, death by crucifixion.

His character-depraved and sinful.

Until the last moment.

Until the last encounter.

Until his last words.

Jesus, all I have is a, Hail Mary. With seconds running out on his clock of life-Jesus catches the prayer and announces-today, you will be a winner with me.

What has the man done to deserve help? To deserve forgiveness? Nothing. He wasted his life. He wasted others' lives.

Who is this thief to beg for forgiveness? Just a few minutes before he was scoffing, now he is about to dance on heaven's streets. What right does he have to pray a prayer of desperation?

The same right we do. You see, that is not criminal on a cross, that is you and me on a cross. Naked. Hopeless and homeless. Desolate and depraved. Damaged and destroyed. In spite of what I have done, in spite of what you have done, and in spite of what others have done, there is still a last-minute stay of execution. There is a last-minute pardon available to the guilty.

And all you have to do is identify Christ as righteous, you as a sinner and beg for mercy and grace in the form of a prayer, and home you sail. Home, you go.

We don't brag, we beg.

We don't produce a list of good behavior; we produce a list of sinful behavior.

We don't focus on pain; we focus on prayer.

And we don't pray to Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, or to ourselves, we pray to Jesus.

When we are desperate and depraved, now we get more than we deserve.

So, like a thief on cross, begging for Jesus the sin bearer to help us, we not only pray we are pardoned. So today, make sure you say to Jesus...

Make sure you say to Jesus, "in spite of what you see, and in spite of what I have done, can you remember me when you get to heaven?"

A word from the scriptures and word from heaven, no matter what the pain, you are almost home my child!

If yours is the pain of divorce, you are almost home my child!

If yours is the pain of poverty, you are almost home my child!

If yours is the pain of depression and anxiety, you are almost home my child!

If yours is the pain of loss, grief, and mourning, you are almost home my child!

If yours is the pain of sickness, suffering and sickle cell, you are almost home my child.

If yours is the pain of abuse, abandonment, and anger, you are almost home my child.

Today, Jesus tells children, you will be with me in paradise!

As we conclude, let me see if I can spell out for you what this forgiveness looks like. Now that you have it. You can receive **divine forgiveness** because Jesus hung on the cross for 6 hours:

You receive divine forgiveness when you come into a relationship with God. Here is the first benefit.

\*Jesus removes your transgressions (Is 53:5),

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Jesus removes our transgressions is what Isaiah tells us. He removes our sins. Look at Psalm 103:10, He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.

Ok, listen you ought to say, "thank you Lord." Think of a sin, you should be punished for, and say, "thank you Lord." Think of a misstep, you should suffer some consequences, and say, "thank you Lord."

*he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far  
has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103-NIV)*

Some of you did not know where that verse was. Here it is. Psalm 103:12 This is one of the best benefits you can ever experience with Christ. He has removed our sins. **Let me explain the difference between iniquity and transgression.**

They are both sins. There is a difference. Iniquity is inward motivation. Transgression is the outward manifestation.

Iniquity is the inward motivation that will drive us toward sin.

Transgression is the outward manifestation of the sin.

We do not use the word transgression very much; it is the modern-day word trespass. The word transgresses or trespass means to step over a boundary. And that is what happens with sin. We step over God's holiness. Iniquity is the heart(inside), and transgression is the hand(outside). Iniquity is the attitude and transgress is the action.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount reminds us his new standard distinguishes between lust(inside), and adultery (outside).

Jesus wants our actions to be right, but he also wants our attitudes. Jesus wants our beliefs and thinking to be right.

Lust and adultery are both a sin. The Pharisees of Jesus day, taught, if you don't transgress with your actions, then you can run wild with your attitude. Jesus tells us, No!

In essence, the Pharisees would tell a guy in bible study, don't commit adultery on your wife, but it is ok, to window shop. Yes, I did say that. And it would be good to say it again. Men, no window shopping.

Jesus also said, don't murder and don't be angry with your brother, don't transgress(action) and don't commit iniquity. (thoughts)

Iniquity is the attitude and transgress is the action.

You love God's word; I love God's word. Let me show you this another way. Iniquity is on the inside and transgressions are on the outside. Isaiah 53, this messianic text, showing us this clearly-



*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

Jesus was pierced, wounded on the outside and he was crushed or bruised on the inside for iniquities. Bruising is inward bleeding and look what it brought us, inward peace. Peace is inside.

The only way a holy God can have a relationship with you, is to deal with your sin. The only way a holy God can have a relationship with you is to forgive your sins.

He has removed your sins. Here is the second benefit to divine forgiveness.

\*Jesus remembers your sins no more (Is 43:25)

*"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*

Jesus 6 hours on the cross provided once and for all, forgiveness of sins. And I will not remember your sins. God chooses to not remember your sins.

By the way, the older I get, the more I believe in the hereafter. I walk to another room in the house, and I ask myself, "what am I here after."

Here is another verse. *Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

God has chosen not to bring up your past. Let's thank him again.

God thank you for not bringing up my past...stealing, lying, perversion, gluttony, anger. Why not just thank him for a minute. We did this earlier, let's do it again.

Let me tell you who will remember your sins. The devil. The evil one. The slanderer. The deceiver. Satan loves to bring up your past.

Listen. Let me tell you what kills marriages, friendships, parenting relationship. Bringing up the past. We remember each other's mistakes and sins in marriage.

Quit bringing it up. Here is how you do it. Use the promises of forgiveness. And ask God to give you the grace to do this. Here is how forgiveness works.

Forgiveness is a transaction. Forgiveness is God's at His best when man is at his worst. Forgiveness opens the door to a fresh start. So, when you forgive, offer the *4 Promises Of Forgiveness*

- \*Avoid rehearsing in your mind the events associated with the offense.
- \*Refuse to bring the offense up and use it against the person at a later date.
- \*Flee the temptation to tell others about the offense.
- \*Forsake the desire to let the circumstances of the injury hinder the relationship.

Finally divine forgiveness releases you from your sins, and you can start living for God.

- \*Jesus releases you from your sins. (Psalm 103:3)

*who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,*

Father, I receive your forgiveness through Christ's death. I accept the fact that apart from you I can do nothing to earn eternal life.

God, Lord Jesus, grant me the supernatural provision of Your grace to forgive, heal and let go of my past, the courage to not fret and be anxious about tomorrow. As I live in the day, and give up control, possessing the faith to believe You will guide my life for Your glory and my good.

In Jesus' Name Amen.