

The Dying Prayers of the Lord Jesus and Stephen

*Luke 23:33-34;
Acts 7:54-60*

While dying on the cross Christ prayed for His enemies, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

In a similar way, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed for those who were stoning him: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60). One writer believes that Stephen’s enemies would not be judged for their sin of stoning Stephen, but only for their other sins: “I think that when those men come into the presence of God they will never be asked to answer for the stoning of Stephen. They will be responsible for other things, but not for this.” But it is unthinkable that a just and holy God would decide not to punish certain sins of those who go to the grave in unbelief. Is he suggesting that our Lord’s atoning death can be partially applied to a lost soul? No, those who reject Jesus Christ will die in their sins (John 8:21, 24), all of them!

F. B. Hole has a better perspective: “To the Lord Stephen committed his spirit, and desired mercy for his murderers. The prayer of the Lord Jesus from the cross for His murderers was answered by the sending forth of the Gospel, beginning at Jerusalem. The prayer of Stephen while being stoned was answered in the conversion of Saul.”

Christ prayed that His enemies would be forgiven, and this was answered because His death and resurrection provided a way for every guilty sinner to be forgiven (Luke 24:47; Acts 10:43). Stephen prayed that His enemies would not be charged with the sin of killing him. God would gladly answer this prayer for anyone (such as Saul of Tarsus) who would believe Stephen’s message that Jesus was the promised Messiah. How many others in that hostile crowd later believed the Gospel we do not know.

~George Zeller: www.middletonbiblechurch.org



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