

Lesson 64: The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross

Today it is our joy to turn our hearts towards the cross of Christ. There is so much that we can say about our Savior but if we do not speak about His cross we have not spoken about that central thing that Jesus came to do to save His people from their sins. The 1689 chap. 8. Para. 4. says, 'This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that he might discharge he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us; enduring most grievous sorrows in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died.' There is so much that can be said about the cross. We could talk about His physical sufferings, going into detail looking at medical accounts that try to unfold the physical torments that He endured as He was crucified and flogged and abused. We could look at how the OT anticipated it. We could look at the necessity of the cross and the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. We could look at Paul's unfolding of this doctrine with key theological words like propitiation, ransom and redemption. But today we are going to look instead at the 7 sayings of Jesus on the cross. Through the lens of these sayings we will see the nature of the work of Christ on the cross and more. We often look at the cross as a summation of ideas but today we want to hear what Jesus said while on the cross as a way of opening it up.

As we begin we must think about the order, what was the chronological order of the sayings? We are doing a harmony of the cross sayings. I follow the traditional order:

First the word of forgiveness is Luke 23:34, 'And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Second the word of salvation, Luke 23:43, 'And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Third, the word of relationship/affection John 19:26-29, 'When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.'

Fourth, the word of anguish/abandonment Matt. 27:46, 'And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Fifth, the word of distress/suffering John 19:28, 'After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."

Sixth, the word of victory John 19:30, 'When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.'

Seventh, the word of reunion/contentment Luke 23:46, 'Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.'

Three words to men, the word of salvation, affection and distress.

Three words to God, the word of forgiveness, anguish and reunion.

One word to God, men, satan and all creation, the word of victory.

The cross was not an unfortunate accident, but foretold in detail by God. One writer lists some of the details of Christ's sufferings that were prophesied, 'How marvelously complete was the prophetic foreview! No essential item was missing from it. Every important detail of the great Tragedy had been written down beforehand. The betrayal by a familiar friend (Psalm 41:9), the forsaking of the disciples through being offended at Him (Psalm 31:11), the false accusations

(Psalm 35:11), the silence before His judges (Isa 53:7), the being proven guiltless (Isa 53:9), the numbering of Him with transgressors (Isa 53:12), the being crucified (Psalm 22:16), the mockery of the spectators (Psalm 109:25), the taunt of non-deliverance (Psalm 22:7-8), the gambling for His garments (Psalm 22:18), the prayer for His enemies (Isa 53:12), the being forsaken of God (Psalm 22:1), the thirsting (Psalm 69:21), the yielding of His spirit into the hands of the Father (Psalm 31:5), the bones not broken (Psalm 34:20), the burial in a rich man's tomb (Isa 53:9)—all plainly foretold centuries before they came to pass.¹ But not only were the details of Christ's sufferings foretold, but the 7 sayings themselves are prophetically anticipated, A. W. Pink writes, 'In connection with each one of our Savior's cross-utterances, a prophecy was fulfilled. First, He cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and this fulfilled Isaiah 53:12: "made intercession for the transgressors." Secondly, He promised the thief, "Today shall you be with me in paradise," and this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of the angel to Joseph: "you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins (Mat 1:21). Thirdly, to His mother He said, "Woman, behold your son," and this fulfilled the prophecy of Simeon: "A sword shall pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). Fourthly, He had asked, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and these were the identical words of Psalm 22:1. Fifthly, He exclaimed "I thirst," and this was in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21: "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Sixthly, He shouted in triumph, "It is finished," and these are almost the very words with which that wonderful Twenty-second Psalm concludes: "He had done," or, as the Hebrew might well be rendered, "He has finished," the context showing what He had done, namely, the work of atonement. Finally, He prayed, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," and, ... , He was but quoting as it had been written of Him beforehand in Psalm 31[:5]. O the wonders of the Cross! We shall never reach the end of them.'

The word of forgiveness

Luke 23:32-34, 'Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.' Jesus is numbered with the transgressors; subjected to the same treatments as them but worse, and the first thing that He does is pray for the forgiveness of the sins of those who were murdering Him. If we were to ask the question, what is the cross all about? Here we have the answer Jesus is seeking the forgiveness of the unworthy, actively standing in the gap for the forgiveness of their sins. And as stated this is part of what was prophesied in Is. 53:12b, 'was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.' Like Moses, a type of Christ making intercession before God for Israel after they worshipped the golden calf, here we see God in the flesh making intercession for sinners committing the worst of all human acts. What is the significance of the cross? Rom. 5:8, 'but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

But let us not miss Christ not only as Savior but as example. He instructed us to pray for those who persecute us, to love our enemies, to return good for evil. This first word giving His first reaction to all the injustice that has been heaped upon Him is our path to follow.

¹ Pink, Seven sayings

The word of salvation

Luke 23:39-43, 'One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" The cross has been said to reveal many things. Here we see the terrible sin of man, where we take the Holy One and number Him with the transgressors; we take the Lord of Glory and humiliate Him; we take the Lord of life and kill Him. But the cross is also a display of the saving grace of God. This is no more clearly seen than in this scene with the believing thief. There were two thieves who were hanged on the crosses next to Christ. Both lived long lives of sin; both mocked the Savior along with the crowds. But we see the power of God to save as He opens the eyes of one who had every reason not to believe. Who could believe that a man who had been tried before Pilate and the Jewish leaders, and was sent to die on a cross, and who was being mercilessly mocked as He went to His death, as He was being goaded while dying, that this man, this weak and overcome victim accused of being a criminal was the promised Saviour? Yet we see that this thief who was a mocker becomes a believer, one who was a recalcitrant sinner owning his sins. Two things should stand out for us. Firstly, in the words 'remember me' we can hear the thief's plea for mercy. This man who was a self-confessed bad man, a man deserving of justice, he watched Jesus pray for the forgiveness of other bad men, men doing terrible things to Him an innocent, and yet He seeks their forgiveness. This thief learns here on the cross one of the greatest lessons we need to learn, that Christ loves sinners, that He seeks the forgiveness of sinners, that He is not merely full of good intentions and words but is literally dying to secure forgiveness for unworthy sinners. This thief amazed at such mercy says, 'me too', remember me. Secondly, in the thief's words 'when you come into your kingdom' we see that the thief had come to see the identity of Jesus. That sign that Pilate refused to change which had been placed above Jesus head which read that He was the King of the Jews. Unlikely as it seemed the thief by the power of the Spirit was given eyes to see, and he believes. Though dying he believes that Jesus will come into His kingdom, that having a kingdom He is a king. Here we see all that is needed for saving faith, to see Jesus as Lord/King, and Saviour, willing to save. But more wonderful still is the fact that this thief asks, and is not rejected, is not scolded, is not turned away but is given more than he knew he was asking for, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Christ makes a pronouncement that must not be doubted, underlined for its veracity. That that very day, when the thief died, as soul departs from body, He will receive the kingdom he asked for, but the kingdom is no mere earthly kingdom but paradise, the presence of God, a place of Christ's reign where no enemies are permitted and all of God's children are blessed. And he will not merely be admitted to sit in a corner in some far off place from the King, but Jesus says the words 'you will be with me.' What do we learn about the cross from this second word? We learn that Christ loves and receives sinners.

The word of relationship

John 19:26-29, 'When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he

said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.' At first it might appear that a rather mundane domestic scene intrudes into the more profound moments we have recorded on the cross, but this is not the case. As we have already highlighted, Mary's sorrow, of a sword entering her heart was prophesied, and here we have a prophecy fulfilled as we see her there. We can only imagine her sorrow as the sorrow of a mother is added to the sorrow we can all have at this scene. What is important for us to note regarding this scene is Jesus love and sense of duty. It has been pointed out that Jesus was born under the law, and here we see what a perfect obedience to the fifth commandment looks like. We are saved not only by Christ's death on the cross but His law keeping life, in particular here we see His obedience to the law and what it looks like. Honouring our parents includes helping them and providing for them in their later years. Christ the firstborn son of Mary makes sure that His mother is provided for. But secondly, we can see that Jesus has a heart for widows. Here He is dying, and what is He thinking about, the provision of widows. On the cross we see Jesus heart for sinners, His prayer for sinners, His welcome of sinners, but we must not miss the way He makes earthly provision for parents and widows. The cross is focused primarily on our sin need but also demonstrates an upholding of earthly relations and serving earthly needs.

The word of anguish

Matt. 27:46, 'And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is a terrible thing if a husband forsakes his wife; or a mother her children, but there is no worse lot than being forsaken by God. We have said many times that the spiritual anguish of becoming sin in God's eyes, of having to bear the terrifying disapproval of God's wrath against not just the sins of one life but all of God's people is beyond our ability to measure. Of one who has only known fellowship and love from the Father is now, not in His divine nature but in His human consciousness made to bear all the weight of judgement day. When Christ suffered the guilty sentence for sins He had not committed in a human court He was silent; but before God, as He stands as the substitute for our sins, as He is made to feel truth of our alienation in Himself. He is not silent, He must cry out. The words of Ps. 22 in the experience of David can only give a quiet echo to the reality of what Christ is experiencing when crying out the same words. For David who spoke of never seeing the righteous forsaken, to cry out as forsaken is more poetic lament than reality for he was in covenant with God, not under an eschatological curse. But Christ is made to stand where sinners will and feel what sinners on judgement day will feel. When foreshadowing what Christ will be before God at this moment, God chose the symbol of the bronze serpent. The serpent, the arch villain, the most worthy of judgement in God's eyes, Christ would now take that honour, that shame, that position before God upon Himself and bear the wrath of our sins.

What does the cross communicate to us here? We learn of the holiness of God, I love how Pink put it, 'What human pen is able or fit to write about the unsullied holiness of God! So holy is God that mortal man cannot look upon Him in His essential Being and live. So holy is God that the very heavens are not clean in His sight. So holy is God that even the seraphim veil their faces before Him. So holy is God that when Abraham stood before Him, he cried, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). So holy is God that when Job came into His presence he said, "Wherefore I abhor myself" (Job 42:6). So holy is God that when Isaiah had a

vision of His glory he exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone...for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa 6:5). So holy is God that when Daniel beheld Him in theophanic manifestations he declared, "there remained no strength in me: for my loveliness was turned in me into corruption" (Dan 10:8). So holy is God that we are told, "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and can not look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13). And it was because the Savior was bearing our sins that the thrice holy God would not look on Him, turned His face from Him, forsook Him. The Lord made to meet on Christ the iniquities of us all: and our sins being on Him as our substitute, the divine wrath against our offences must be spent upon our sin-offering.' We learn of the sinfulness of sin, for even when our sin was placed upon one so Holy it must still be punished. We learn of the justice of God, because there was no other way, sin could not be overlooked it must be paid for. And we learn of the grace of God. For He was willing to bear what we could not, to pay what we could not, to suffer what we could not, even though we deserved it and He did not. He took what we deserved, being forsaken that we might be eternally and irreversibly united to Him as children. A Son was treated as an enemy that enemies might become sons.

The word of suffering

John 19:28, 'After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." This word of suffering or distress underscores the humanity and suffering of Jesus for our sin. Fully was fully God and fully man, He did not merely appear to be human, or pretend to be human but was truly human in order to represent human beings. This word underlines the intense sufferings of Christ. since His arrest, his imprisonment, his 6 trials, the abuse at the hands of the soldiers, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the walk up to Golgotha, the crucifixion, the intense suffering of spending 6 hours upon the cross, it was all adding up to extreme bodily fatigue and dehydration. But please note that John highlights knowing that all was now finished and in order to fulfill the scriptures He said 'I thirst.' He was underlining for our benefit that fact that His death was ticking all the boxes of what was predicted, Ps. 69:21, and 22:15, 'my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.' This thirst speaks of our sinful condition and desperate need, and the terrible thirst that will be present in hell. It speaks to the thirst we experience and the thirst He satisfies. But since he is preparing to die, I suspect He is also wetting his mouth to say the next words for all to hear.

The word of victory

John 19:30, 'When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.' A single word in the Greek and one that the history of the world was waiting to hear. Having come to the end, having suffered all that was needed apart from the final moment of death, Christ deliberately informs us that He has succeeded. Jesus who obeyed the Father tirelessly, who endured all that was necessary to do the will of His Father, who suffered much in Gethsemane as He submitted Himself to accept the wrath of God for us, has come to the end of His long life of obedience and suffering. Every law has been obeyed, every sin has been paid for, every prophecy fulfilled, every promise kept, all that was needed to make a full payment of sin has been paid in full, and now there is nothing more that we can do but receive the free gift of His finished work. He has done it all and we cannot add to it. Pink tells this story: 'Some years ago a Christian farmer was deeply concerned over an unsaved carpenter. The farmer sought to set before his neighbor the Gospel of

God's grace, and to explain how that the finished work of Christ was sufficient for his soul to rest upon. But the carpenter persisted in the belief that he must do something himself. One day the farmer asked the carpenter to make for him a gate, and when the gate was ready he carried it away to his wagon. He arranged for the carpenter to call on him the next morning and see the gate as it hung in the field. At the appointed hour the carpenter arrived and was surprised to find the farmer standing by with a sharp axe in his hand. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "I am going to add a few cuts and strokes to your work" was the response. "But there is no need for it," replied the carpenter, "the gate is alright as it is. I did all that was necessary to it." The farmer took no notice, but lifting his axe he slashed and hacked at the gate until it was completely spoiled. "Look what you have done!" cried the carpenter, "you have ruined my work!" "Yes," said the farmer, "and that is what you are trying to do. You are seeking to nullify the finished work of Christ by your own miserable additions to it!" God used this forceful object lesson to show the carpenter his mistake, and he was led to cast himself by faith upon what Christ had done for sinners.'

The word of reunion

Luke 23:46, 'Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.' The last words of Jesus Christ are words of great comfort. They show us the Son no longer under forsakenness but in fellowship with the Father. These are words of faith and confidence quoted from Ps. 31:5. Even though Jesus dies as our sin bearer, His confidence in the finished work is such that He knows He is not going into death and the great unknown to undergo eternal torment, but is returning to His Father. These are words that would have a peculiar application for Christ but words that are also a pattern for us. It is not a coincidence that the first Christian martyr Stephen prayed likewise, Acts 7:59, 'And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'" Stephen can face death confidence in the same way that Jesus did. Jesus finished all that was required for the payment of sin and now we can have confidence that we will die, and be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

There is so much more that we could say. But what do the seven sayings of Jesus tell us about the cross, the cross speaks about the grace of God, the holiness of God, the willingness of God to forgive sinners; it demonstrates what faith and repentance look like, a concern for the needy, and what responding to enemies looks like. It speaks of redemption accomplished, of sins paid, of true righteousness before God and a certain hope of entering into the presence of God when we die.