

The 7 Last Words of Jesus

The word of forgiveness
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Introduction

Coming to the foot of the cross is one of the most precious places for the believer to come. The cross is the place of rescue where we unworthy as we are were ransomed, betrothed, healed, cleansed, adopted. All of those best of memories are all tied to this one spot. We come here often to remember. The cross is the deathbed of our most beloved. When we doubt the love of God, the possibility of forgiveness, we come to behold Him dying for us to pay for our sins because He loves us. The cross though Christ's earthly hell is our earthly heaven. What do I mean by this? We cannot view the majesty and glory of God gathered around His throne with the angels, so we gather around the cross to behold the glory of God's gracious love for sinners; His costly mercy; His giving holiness and His self-satisfying justice. We do not see Him in His abstract glory or His naked power but all, for me. My God of grace not merely a God of grace; my God of mercy; my God of holiness and justice. The Christian loves to come and just gaze upon the beauty of the Lord silenced by another sight of our infinite unworthiness, His infinite glory, and the immeasurable cost that was paid. Today we are travelling a well-worn path to consider the cross once again, we want to hear, from His own lips, the 7 last recorded words of our Savior. Jesus was hung upon the cross at 9am, the time of the morning sacrifice; and died at 3pm the time of the evening sacrifice. These were designated as the times of prayer. Israel was encouraged to pray to God expecting to be heard because while they prayed the morning and evening sacrifice opened the way. Jesus is our Way. Jesus hung upon the cross for 6 hours. We have 7 recorded words. The first three were spoken before noon, but at noon darkness fell. The last four words are spoken under this darkness. The first three focus our attention on Jesus ministry to others; the last four focus our attention on His suffering under the wrath of God for us. We will follow the traditional chronological order.

The word of forgiveness.

Luke 23:33-34a, '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." Golgotha, or the place of the skull is a fitting setting for an execution. Some have suggested that the scene of Christ's cross being driven into the skull, the mount where He was crucified is a fitting picture of fulfilling the picture of the Seed of the woman crushing the head/skull of the serpent. Jesus is crucified. Every first century person would be familiar with this public form of execution. Invested by the Persians and perfected by the Romans it was intended to draw out the suffering of the victim for as long as possible. Nails are driven into the wrists and feet and the victim has to push on the nail in their feet to rise to breath. If the blood loss; or fatigue; or heart attack did not kill you, you would suffocate, usually by

someone breaking your legs so that you could no longer push yourself up for breath. Jesus after a long hard night; 6 mistrials, flogging, beating, mocking to the point of exhaustion that He could no longer carry His own cross is now nailed to the cross. With the fresh added pain of the nails His first recorded response is one of prayer. His first recorded words are not to curse those who were unjustly murdering Him, nor to beg God to curse His enemies, but a prayer for forgiveness. When you drive nails into the God-man Jesus Christ, along with the blood that comes out is prayer for forgiveness.

This was always a request that troubled me because as I thought about the words, 'for they know not what they do.' I thought to myself, 'But surely they contrived to kill Jesus, they knew what they were doing.' They were partially ignorant. They knew they were wrongfully condemning an innocent man, one who was likely a prophet and one who did real miracles, yet they did not know He was the God-man, Paul says as much in 1 Cor. 2:8, 'None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' What is so striking about this petition is that Jesus instead of focusing on the obvious evil of their sin and asking for what their sins deserve exemplifies His saving work by asking for mercy. He pleads the miniscule part of their ignorance which does not make them guiltless, but it is the part that He can plead before the Father to rouse God's mercy instead of His wrath. This example led to Stephen's own prayer for his murderers as they were killing them, Acts 7:60, "'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' Christ personifying the love of God to sinners gives us our example for how we are to love our enemies. It is this revolutionary love of enemies which has turned the world upside-down. The love of Christ for sinner's triumphs over their cruelty, and shines in the midst of their sinful behavior.

What is more consider whether the prayer was answered. Did God indeed answer this prayer and show mercy to those who were there and who participated in Christ's murder? The answer we know is yes. The Centurion who would have been in charge of the crucifixion and who observes Christ dying has a saving faith. The thief on the cross who was at the beginning railing against Him is saved. The crowds who had called for the guilt of Christ's blood to be upon them and their children were also present at Pentecost and thousands were saved. Acts 6:7 reports how a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Does He seek my forgiveness? He would seek your forgiveness even your own hand had driven the nail into His. This is what should give us confidence to come to Christ to be saved, to seek His forgiveness when we fall.

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." If ever there were a person who could picture our irrationality, our empty bitterness, our vitriol and our deep unworthiness of salvation, it is the thief on the cross. A man who wasted his dying breath to insult the King of life. If ever there was someone who would be an object lesson

of someone who did not deserve forgiveness and yet found it, it was him; and yet he found it.

Think about the thief that came to saving faith. He took the matter of his own death to heart and gave up the irrational raging. He realized the truth of his own sin and unworthiness. But he also had a clear sight of Christ. We see that the thief has a clear view of Christ as the promised One of God, the Messiah. It is not an exhaustive faith but it is a true faith, in fact there even appears to be some misunderstandings in it. He sees something in Jesus which convinces him that Jesus is indeed the King of the Jews. Did he have some prior knowledge of Christ, perhaps witnessing a miracle; did He look at how Jesus loved His enemies and prayed for them and compared that with his own hatred; did he see how Christ responded to mockery with mercy? We don't know, but by the Holy Spirit this man was given eyes to see. He sees that Jesus is the King, that Jesus is innocent and being wrongly killed, that Jesus is the promised one who will somehow come into His kingdom despite the fact that He is dying on a cross. His faith is not complete because he only conceives of Jesus kingdom as future. But his weak and incomplete faith is rightly placed in Christ and he asks for mercy and receives it.

V43, 'And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." We see here the certainty of saving grace as Christ says, 'truly' and 'I say to you.' We see the immediacy of saving grace as Jesus says 'today' because he has believed he has been saved and will receive the inheritance of the saints and be swept into the presence of God in death that very day. We see the graciousness of God's grace as this thief who has sinned his whole life and has earned a criminal's death by his crimes is forgiven by faith and not by works. We see the eternal nature of saving grace as the thief is promised eternal paradise. And we see the richness of saving grace as Christ promises His personal presence in paradise.

Christ was challenged to prove that He was the Messiah by saving the thieves on the cross. And so He does as He saves the one who has faith in Him. If died today, which thief would you be?

The word of relationship

John 19:26-27, '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.' This is an interesting one. Some have thought that Jesus when addressing Mary as woman have is disrespectful. This is not the case, in fact, you could argue that Jesus regular calling of Mary, 'woman' John 2:4, is a deliberate linking of Mary to the promise of Gen. 3:15 because Jesus is the Seed of the 'woman.' Because of this connection some have looked at this exchange on the cross as a call for Mary to look upon Jesus as her seed; and when Jesus says that John should view Mary as his mother, that as an apostle he is representing the church and is called to take Mary as the mother of the Church. Although Jesus reference to Mary as woman does point us to Gen. 3:15 we should not use this exchange to build a view of Mary as the mother of the church. No instead we have a wonderful look into the perfection of Christ's lawkeeping and love.

We know that Jesus was born under the law to keep it on our behalf; that He came not only to pay for our sins by dying on the cross, what we call His passive obedience. He was also born under the law to keep the law, as a Second Adam, on our behalf. We have broken every law of God, Jesus has kept every law of God. Every one of us has disobeyed their parents, and not properly recognized or honored the parents God has given us. Christ perfectly obeyed the 5th commandment. The final scene demonstration of Jesus obedience to the law is a love filled, other's focused family situation. It is a touching scene, when a mother's heart would be absolutely breaking that Jesus as a loving and perfect Son would not only demonstrate His perfect obedience but tenderly provide for His mother's needs. This is a wonderful blend of lawkeeping and heartfelt love. This attention to detail for the earthly provision of a weeping mother's emotional and physical needs points us to the love and not merely external actions that fulfill the law.

The word of abandonment

Matt. 27:45-46, 'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 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?" In Exodus 10:21-22, the 9th plague the one just before the Passover when the blood of the Passover lambs would be spilled, was the plague of darkness. Darkness is a symbol of God's judgement. Jesus with our sin upon His shoulders experienced what was a literal judgement day. He literally took the curse of our sin upon Himself and all of God's wrath towards our sin was poured out in full. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had asked that He not have to drink from a certain cup. What cup, the cup of God's wrath stored up for our sins on judgement day. Jesus the first man in all of human history experienced what it would feel like to stand as a condemned criminal before God to be punished for sin. Although Christ in His divine nature could never be separated from the Father, for the Father and Son are one. In His human consciousness He experienced all that any human being would experience on the final day of judgement. The mystery here is deep, for according to His divine nature, the Son can never be separated from the Father and the Spirit, for they are One; yet according to Christ's human nature He experienced the torment of being forsaken of God. Christ on the one hand was a stench to God as He took the full weight of our sins and bore the righteous indignation of God's holy and unrestrained anger towards our sin; and yet at the same time it pleased the Lord to bruise Him and He delights the Father in His obedience in bearing our sins. The God who cannot suffer as man suffers; the God who cannot sin as man becomes sin; the God who cannot die as man dies. Jesus as our substitute was forsaken for you and me. This darkness was over Christ that you and I might be in the light. He experienced judgement that we might know mercy. As one Puritan said, "Christ drank the cup of wrath without mercy that we might drink the cup of mercy without wrath." He knew anguish that we might know joy. He knew our sin that we might know His righteousness. He was estranged from the Father that we might be adopted. He tasted death for us that we might know eternal life.

The word of distress

John 19:28-29, 'After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.' The

end is drawing near. All that needed to be done to pay for sin is coming to a close. In order to fulfil scripture He says 'I thirst.' This saying is more difficult to understand. What scripture is John indicating? Some have thought that it is the thirst of Ps. 42:1-3 where the Psalmist longs to be in the presence of God. And Jesus who is soon to see the Father now expresses that longing for reconciliation. I think that traditional view is correct, that Jesus is referring to one of the Messianic psalms, either 69:21, where the psalmists treacherous companions give him sour wine; or Ps. 22:15 which describes the thirst that accompanies being close to death. The one who offers water that we never thirst, is thirsty. The one who saves us from thirst as a judgement of God in hell, suffers judgment and thirst upon the cross. These words indicate several things, that Jesus was truly human and suffered as a human being for us; that his death and dying in this fashion by terrible betrayal was prophesied and is now being fulfilled; and that He was thirsty that we might not be. John 4:14, 'but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' Rev. 22:17b, 'And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.'

Word of triumph

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.' Lips and mouth freshly moistened from the vinegar, Jesus probably shouts with whatever strength is left to Him this single word in the Greek. Never has a single word meant so much for us. This is not a word of defeat but victory; this is not the sigh of someone who is living with great disappointments who is resigning Himself to death, it is an announcement of a necessary work completed in full. What is the 'it'? The 'it' is God's work of redemption and all that was needed to secure it. The 33 year life of full submission to the will of God was perfectly completed. The sufficient sacrifice and payment for sin was paid in full. The full execution of Christ's priestly office in the offering of an atonement to pay for our sins was complete. The plan of God promised from the beginning of Creation of the overcoming of satan was fulfilled. The unfinished obedience of Adam to gain access to the tree of life has been performed. The way of access granted into the presence of God has been made open. No more sacrifices are needed; no more priests are needed; no more temple is needed. All the types and shadows pointing to Christ have come to their zenith. The end of this age has come and the dawning of the new has arrived. Hardly were more significant words ever spoken.

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 Son having finished His work is now going home. These words spoken by our forerunner, spoken by the one who goes through death on our behalf, the one to whom we are united. The one who casts the mold for how we will die. He models for us how we are to meet death. We go to meet God not as our judge but as our Father. So we look death in the eye with confidence not fear. We can commit our spirits into His hands for safe keeping and He will protect what is His. That death is not a separation from God but a drawing nearer to Him. And as the spirit of Christ went to the presence of the Father, though His body died and went to the grave until the resurrection. So our spirits will leave our bodies upon death, absent from the body and present with the Lord, to live is Christ but to die

is gain. When we die we will be gathered up to be with all the dead saints in the presence of God until the trumpet sounds and like Christ our spirits will be united with a resurrection body.

The 7 last words of our Savior are an incredible lens to view the saving work of God. In the word of forgiveness we see the willingness of God to save; in the word of salvation that terrible sinners like ourselves can receive mercy; in the word of relationship the compassion of Christ for our physical needs and His perfect obedience to the law; in the word of abandonment Christ suffering the wrath of God as our judgement day is poured out upon Him, so that we can be reconciled to God; in the word of distress we see His true humanity, His prophecy fulfilling life and death, and the promise of the water of life; in His word of triumph we are assured that all that is needed to save us and realize God's plan is fulfilled; and in the word of reunion we see our own way to overcome death and we follow our forerunner.