

# Famous Last Words: Forgiveness

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[0:00] Good morning, Braemar Baptist. My name is Kent Dixon. It is my privilege to be your lead pastor. Happy St. Patrick's Day. I am Irish and Scottish, which is another story. I'm always at war within myself.

So I was going to ask Pastor Luan this morning to change the passing of the peace to the passing of the pinch because there are so many not wearing green. So for anyone not wearing green this morning, I have noticed.

But I decided against it. I was also going to preach my entire sermon this morning like this to recognize my Irish heritage. But my family wisely advised me against that.

So before we launch into our new series this morning, I'd like to clear up a few misconceptions that you may have about St. Patrick. First of all, this is not him. This is actually the mascot for Lucky Charms cereal.

That is not St. Patrick. Not even close. St. Patrick's Day has evolved into a commercial holiday that focuses on wearing green leprechauns and green beer, if you're into that sort of thing, and lots of other festivities.

[1:11] So it's become a very commercial holiday. And you know what? In Chicago, there's such a large percentage of the population who trace their roots back to Ireland that, I'm not kidding, so many people in that community, ever since 1962, they have temporarily colored, I'm not kidding, colored the Chicago River green for the St. Patrick's Day parade.

That is an actual photo. And there's a lot of history behind that tradition, but it has become a St. Patrick's Day tradition. It was originally a water treatment chemical that somehow turned a brown river green, and they thought, oh, wait a minute, this has potential.

So you see that with all of that, with all that commercialism and all these other pieces, it can be easy to forget that St. Patrick was indeed a real person. And St. Patrick is recognized by both Protestant and Catholic believers as the man who brought Christianity to, you guessed it, Ireland in the 5th century.

When he was about 16 years old, Patrick was captured from his home in England and brought to Ireland by pirates. What a great story. He lived there for six years before he escaped and returned to his family in England, where he then became a cleric.

Now, Patrick eventually returned to Ireland following a call from God, and he settled there, where he later became a bishop and ordained younger clergy. So there's your brief history lesson for this morning.

[2:47] Now, this morning, we're starting a new sermon series you'll see on the cover of your bulletin. Now, if you talk to almost any pastor who preaches regularly, you'll hear them say that they love starting a new series.

Maybe that's because we get concerned that people are bored with the previous one. But really, honestly, it gives us an opportunity to study something new, to look at something that God has put on our hearts and to share it with you.

So I'm experiencing that excitement myself this morning as we begin a new series together. And my excitement stems from the opportunity that we have, as I said, to unpack together what God has laid on my heart.

And now our new series is called, as you can see, Famous Last Words. I don't know if the red shows up very well in the beautiful sunlight. Famous Last Words. So as we begin this morning, I want to explore the idea behind that phrase, because it really does have a few different meanings for us.

And most of us love a good quote, don't we? We love quotes. We love to hear or read the words of famous people who are knowledgeable and wise. We enjoy funny quotes.

[ 3 : 59 ] Connor and I were riding in the car yesterday, and he was telling me, reading jokes off of a website called Nice One Dad, and challenging me to guess the punchlines before he told me, and I got some of them, which is sad.

But we like meaningful quotes also. We like powerful quotes. And we're often just as fascinated by things other people have said than things that we've said ourselves.

And some of you may be familiar with a book that's known as Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, often simply called Bartlett's. It's the most widely distributed collection of quotations.

It was first issued in 1855, and it's currently in its 18th edition that was published in 2012.

I love it. It's great. Take it out from the library, if you know a library. But pastors usually love quotations, and they're really the essential, partly the essential aspect of work as a preacher.

[ 5 : 05 ] Because we quote our loved ones as pastors, preachers. We quote authors of books that we've read. We quote other preachers or theologians who have come before us.

But most importantly, we quote the Bible. We quote Scripture, the living Word of God. For some reason, as human beings, we also seem to be particularly fascinated with last words.

Are you the kind of person that likes to get the last word in on a conversation? This lady is. You just can't let the other person wrap things up. You need to finish. You need to get the last thing.

You need to be the last statement. And as humans, we also seem to be fascinated with the literal last words someone says before they die.

A person's last words may be practical as they convey their wishes for their loved ones and their state after they die. Their last words also may reflect an essential part or aspect of their character or their values.

[ 6 : 14 ] Businessman and entrepreneur, P.T. Barnum, who you'll see on the left, said as he was dying, What are today's receipts?

How much money had they made? How well attended had the circus performances been that day? The gentleman on the right is Karl Marx.

The story goes that as German philosopher, economist, and social revolutionary Karl Marx lay on his deathbed in March 1883, his housekeeper came to record his last words.

Tell me your last words and I'll write them down, she said. Marx retorted, go on and get out. Last words are for fools who have not said enough.

Wow. Are they really, though? I want to share a story with you this morning. Now my dad's wife is here, so I have to do this without breaking up.

[ 7 : 18 ] But my father, when my grandmother was dying, she'd been a believer all her life. Very strong Christian, very deep faith.

She was lying in her deathbed at home. And my dad was sitting with her in her final moments. And as they sat there, she was not medicated.

She was completely lucid and aware. She knew my dad was there. She was well aware that she was dying. And she paused for a moment. And she paused for a moment. And my dad said it looked as though she saw beyond.

And she looked excited and said, I'm over here, Mel. Mel was my grandfather's name. And he was gone before her. And she said, angels. And she said, angels.

One of the very last things she said was, angels. Angels. Last words sometimes have value.

[ 8 : 21 ] Now, for my grandma, her last words revealed her love for her husband. Her deep faith and trust in God.

And for me personally, the closest and most meaningful sense of proof of what waits for us after death than any other I have ever heard.

That story has encouraged me personally whenever I think about it. When Connor was littler, he asked me once, how do we know, Dad?

How do we know there's more? How do we know beyond? I told him that story. And as I cried a bit, he cried a bit and said, wow. And I said, so I'll just leave that with you.

That story has encouraged people over the years that I've shared it with, too. I shared it at my father's memorial service. There's truth there.

[ 9 : 21 ] And I think we're going to see it one day. In this series, we're going to be focusing on the last words of Jesus as recorded in the Bible as he hung on the cross.

And these words are powerful not just because of who said them and all that he means to us, but also because of where he said them from.

Now, these seven words, or more accurately statements, reveal so much about the heart of God. As Christ was doing his greatest work on earth at the cross, he was also uttering some of his greatest words.

And will it be exploring them together between now and Easter Sunday? I've titled this week's sermon, Forgiveness, because that's what we're going to begin with as the statements from the cross.

And I don't know if you noticed, but I love that when Leah and a worship team and I are able to work together and reflect holistically across the service the message that we have for us today.

[10:38] And so I hope you heard some of that encouragement, some of that hopefulness in the songs that we sang, because that is what it is about. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me, turn them on, swipe them, whatever it is you need to do, or look on the screen.

We're going to be reading the words of Luke 23, verses 33 and 34. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left.

That first word, father, there's no doubt, is there, to whom that appeal was being made.

In his anguish, in his abandonment, as the object of mockery and betrayal, Jesus returns to his father.

Our Lord reminds us and reorients us back to the proper focus of all things in our lives. He reminds us that we must begin with God.

[12:12] And I've said this before to you, who is both his father, Jesus' father, and ours. And you've probably reflected on this over the years, but Jesus could have called an army of angels to crack that mountain in half, to take him down and take him away, to kill every living thing on that mountain, in that city, in that country.

And he did not. He could have asked his father to take vengeance and punish everyone who had turned their backs on him.

But he didn't. He hung there on that cross and experienced a level of intense human suffering and anguish that few, if any of us, could ever possibly begin to imagine.

And then Jesus said, forgive them. Have you ever stopped and parked on those two words before? I did that this week. Forgive them. Do we immediately assume that he meant the soldiers who nailed him to the cross?

[13:50] That's an answer. What about the soldiers who were mocking him and gambling for his clothes? Sure. The criminals who were crucified with him?

Absolutely. But have you ever thought about the disciples who were too embarrassed, ashamed, heartbroken, or disillusioned to even be there that day?

What about the religious leaders who had doubted, judged, and ultimately condemned him? Pilate for releasing a criminal at the people's request and literally washing his hands of the whole thing. But can you also hear in those words the assurance of our own forgiveness? On that cross, with those words, Jesus died so that we, you and I, would be forgiven.

there is a quality to me of once and for all in those words that I don't think is a coincidence.

[15:07] Now, we must acknowledge that we cannot know for sure what Jesus meant when he said these words, but I think there's a sense of the eternal there.

I had professors at seminary who said it's okay to use what they referred to as sanctified imagination. It's okay in the context of scripture to extrapolate ideas, to dig a little deeper than the surface of the text.

That's not to put in your own interpretation. That's something entirely different. It's not proof texting. It's using the evidence that we see before us and considering possibly further.

So that's what I'm doing a bit this morning. for they. There's no suggestion here that Jesus is referring to a specific person or people.

Merely that he's speaking in the plural of more than one person. That's the language is very clear. But consider again the breadth and scope that the word they might include.

[16:23] It should give us pause for deeper reflection. And next we read do not know.

Some translations say also know not. But knowledge can be a tricky concept as we talked about a few weeks ago when we considered the idea of wisdom.

And the idea of a lack of knowledge can become even more tricky because a lack of knowledge can mean many things. Audience participation time. A lack of knowledge can mean what? Ignorance. Is this a lack of knowledge I'm seeing now? Don't be afraid. Denial. Being naive. Being ignorant. Can even mean being unintelligent.

[ 17 : 27 ] But it can also mean that we are so focused on what we personally believe to be right that we intentionally exclude all other options.

while someone may genuinely not know what they're doing in a given situation they may also be so focused on their own agenda that they completely miss out on the better choice.

And by anchoring ourselves in only one option we may miss out on all the others. Does that happen to you sometimes? By sticking to our own agenda we may actually be causing in the worst scenario harm to someone else.

We need to be aware of both ignorance and selfishness or pride when we act because they are equally dangerous. Now continuing in our passage what they do.

it's just three words but the implications of them are significant. In the context of the events of scripture so many things were done weren't they?

[ 18 : 48 ] So many actions were taken by different people. The Pharisees pushed for Jesus to be tried and judged. Pilate chose to release Barabbas and condemned Jesus to be crucified.

the soldiers chose to follow orders making Jesus walk to his death and nailing him to that cross. But what about us? Do we know what we're doing? When we choose to ignore a situation when someone is being mistreated or marginalized when we choose to ignore a sense of conviction by the Holy Spirit to speak into someone's life or step out of our comfort zone to help someone who needs us?

Do we know what we are doing? when we ignore the call of Christ to turn towards something he is asking of us or to turn away from something we know to be sinful or against God's purpose from our lives?

what have we done? The implication here is that for everything that is done in our lives something may be left undone and that's not my subtle way of saying that you need to occupy yourself all the time oh you need to do more Pastor Kent said we need to do more what must be done got to be done nor is it my way of sending you into a fit of anxiety in over analyzing everything you do oh should I have done that I tell people do not should on yourself I should do this I should not have done that don't do that that is not God's grace that is not God's voice in your head your forgiveness should be contagious you are forgiven people you have been forgiven of the debt of your sin not yesterday not today not tomorrow but for all time for your entire lives that's grace that's amazing grace but I encourage you as forgiven people extend that forgiveness to others do you let go of things that people have done

[ 21 : 30 ] I'm not saying forgive and forget that's not a great expression to use all the time because we can't always forget but you can forgive a friend of mine who's a pastor when I was talking to him about this sermon this week he said oh great you're going to talk about forgiveness are you going to talk about reconciliation and I said not in one sermon man we'll get there one day but that's the fullness of forgiveness is reconciliation not just to forgive but to reconcile and heal that broken relationship as God has healed our relationship with him through Jesus by being someone who holds a grudge and is slow to forgive I believe here's some conviction for you you're cheapening your own forgiveness and as the saying goes by not forgiving someone else you are actually allowing them to live rent free in your head and your heart you ever stop to think about that grudge that you're holding against someone that bitterness in your heart oh it doesn't take me any effort at all

I just can't stand that person I won't talk to them that takes effort my friends think about it if there's someone you are intentionally holding out of your life or intentionally not forgiving that conscious decision is an absolutely exhausting drain on your resources and you're not hurting as much as you might think as we continue this series and particularly this particularly this morning may we be people of forgiveness who give it even more freely than we have received ourselves let's pray oh god you have forgiven us we do not deserve it we cannot earn it we cannot buy it we cannot repay it it is a gift that you have freely given to us father may we be people who forgive may we be people who recognize in the words of your son from the cross in this series the truths that you have for us the nature of his character that is ours to adopt that is freely given for us to receive as we walk the road to

Easter we pray your grace and your mercy on us we pray these things in the name of your son  
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