

Famous Last Words: Salvation

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[0 : 00] So Dennis left his notes. I was afraid Dennis was going to take my notes, which would have been unfortunate. Slide that out of the way. So my sister-in-law last night, she and I were discussing the term induction, and we came up with the idea that it might actually mean redaction.

So they would just take me with a black felt right out of the history of the church. The last time I heard the term induction, it was related to the birth of my child, so that had me a little bit scared. It induced worry in me anyway. My aunt's booing in the audience. Well, good morning, Bramard Baptist. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my privilege to be your lead pastor.

Truly humbling this morning. That service, that affirmation, that commitment from you to us, and we wholeheartedly echo that back to you.

So this morning we'll be continuing in, I always have to look over my shoulder and make sure my slides are there. This morning we're continuing our series called Famous Last Words, and we are focusing on the last words or phrases that Jesus said from the cross as recorded in the Bible.

[1 : 25] As we reflected last week, these words are powerful, not only because of who said them and all that he means to us, but also because of where he said them from.

The cross. These seven words, or more accurately statements, reveal so much about the heart of God. Last week we looked at the first phrase of Jesus from the cross, which was, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

We recognize that not only Jesus could have taken action against everyone who stood against him, but we also recognize the fact that he didn't.

He humbled himself, asking his Father for forgiveness on our behalf, not only for the people on that day and in those circumstances, but for all people, for all time.

Can you wrap your head around that? We also recognize that that same forgiveness that was given that day is available to us every day.

[2 : 43] As we confess our sin and receive that forgiveness that is freely given to us. As I was studying this week, I recognized something interesting, that gathering all of those seven sayings of Jesus from the cross actually means reflecting across all four gospel accounts of the crucifixion.

Because not all of them are recorded in one single account. Not all of those phrases are in one account. And the traditional order of these phrases, or the order in which they were said by Jesus, some scholars differ in their interpretation of that or their impression of which came first and so on. But the order that we are going to be covering them in our series is the most commonly accepted order. And there's some interesting differences in the accounts. Matthew and Mark, in those gospels, Jesus is quoted in Aramaic, which was his language.

And he shouted the fourth phrase. The first, second, and seventh sayings occur in Luke only. The third, fifth, and sixth, there'll be a quiz after, by the way.

The third, fifth, and sixth sayings can only be found in the gospel of John. So to me, it's fascinating that in scripture we receive a harmonized account of the events of the crucifixion.

[4 : 12] And the literal last words of Jesus spoken on that day. And this morning we're focusing on Luke's account, as this gospel account is where the phrase we'll be considering this morning is recorded.

And as I've titled this week's sermon, Salvation, because that's the essential message of the second phrase of Jesus from the cross. So turn with me in your Bibles, turn your Bible app on, or you can refer to the screen.

As we read the words of Luke 23, verses 39 to 43. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him.

Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us. But the other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence?

We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[5 : 20] Jesus answered him, truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. The word of the Lord.

Have you ever noticed that nearly half of Luke's narration of the events of Jesus on the cross involves details about the two criminals who were crucified with him?

I found that fascinating as I reflected on that this week. It's interesting to note that in the account of Jesus' crucifixion, I don't know if you've noticed this, but the names of the two men who were crucified with Jesus were not mentioned by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

In their accounts. Luke's account is the one that's the most unique, perhaps, as only he, for some reason, uses the Greek word *kakourgoi*, which means criminals for them.

While Mark and Matthew call them *lestai*, which means bandits. John says even less, simply referring to them as to others.

[6 : 28] And some scholars have drawn the conclusion that this criminal section, as they call it, represents the core of Luke's crucifixion scene. But as we dig deeper into not only the details of the criminals and their interactions with Jesus, but also some of the other events that Luke focuses on in his account, we see actually what many identify to be a basic theme of Luke's entire gospel.

And that is salvation. And as we reflect on the overall account of Jesus' crucifixion in Luke's gospel, we can actually identify three separate times when Jesus is taunted about salvation.

About saving himself from the cross. The first time comes in Luke 23, verse 35, where we read, The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him.

They said, He saved others. Let himself. Let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one. The leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah and challenged him to save himself from the cross. The second time comes in Luke 23, verses 36 and 37. The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

[8 : 02] The soldiers mocked him for being given the status of a king and challenged him to save himself. The third time comes in Luke 23, verse 36 and 37.

The third time comes in the passage that we read this morning as one of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him, saying, Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us.

The leaders, the soldiers, the criminal next to him, they all had the same understanding of salvation. They saw it as a personal and individual act.

A demonstration merely of his own power and a sense of self-preservation. Their understanding was limited to Jesus coming down from the cross.

And he alludes to this, Luke, early in his gospel, in chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, where he quotes Isaiah 40.

[9 : 09] He says, Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth, and all people will see God's salvation.

It was only through Jesus' obedience to God, even to the point of death on the cross, that salvation for all people could be secured.

My friends, the cross was not a singular selfish act, but a communal and sacrificial one. You may remember that I briefly mentioned reconciliation last week, as we considered that theme of forgiveness and Jesus' first phrase from the cross.

And only through Christ's death on the cross could humanity receive not only forgiveness of sins, but a reconciled and renewed relationship with God.

In our passage this morning, we see that only the second criminal seemed to fully comprehend the connection between forgiveness and salvation.

[10 : 28] But we also see in that man a sincere change of heart. Because in Matthew's account of the crucifixion, he notes that both criminals who were crucified with Jesus mocked him.

But later, as the first criminal mocked him again, the second one condemned that action. He had recognized that he deserved his fate and sentence, but that Jesus did not.

That second criminal, a new convert, was already speaking up for Jesus. And I think we recognize that this was more than many of Jesus' seasoned followers were doing for him at that point.

We talked about last week the fact that many of those followers were conspicuously absent at the crucifixion, suffering broken hearts and shattered hopes.

And even in this account, we see something that's not uncommon in the world today. That sometimes, it's the ones that know the most who do the least.

[11 : 45] And the ones who know the least who do the most. The second criminal confessed his sin, confessed the wrong that he had done that brought him to judgment and that cross.

But he also recognized that not only was Jesus an innocent man, he recognized and confessed Jesus as the only one who could save him.

He also recognized that salvation meant somehow something more than coming down from the cross. It meant an eternal salvation and reunion with God.

Did you notice something in the request of that criminal? He asked Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Have you ever noticed that before? He called him by name. There was a personal connection there. And especially when we remember that most of Jesus' closest followers called him what?

[13 : 01] Master? Teacher? Rabbi? We don't get accounts of Paul and some of the other disciples saying, Hey, Jesus, come over here.

I have a question. They revered him. But this man recognized Jesus for the essential nature of who he was because in Hebrew, the name Jesus means the Lord saves.

Jesus. This criminal made his request by recognizing that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be. He also didn't say, I don't know if you noticed this, he didn't say, Jesus, remember me if you come into your kingdom.

Because keep me in mind, just in case that actually happens, he said when. He recognized his sin and his need for salvation.

He acknowledged Jesus as the son of God and the ruler of an eternal kingdom. And perhaps most importantly, he recognized Jesus as the only hope for his personal salvation.

[14 : 19] When the second criminal asked Jesus to remember him, Jesus answered our phrase for this morning, Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Truly, I tell you, Jesus is making a promise here, speaking truth and conveying a sense of trust. He speaks to the man personally.

This is not a broad or vague statement or pronouncement, but a direct and deeply personal connection he makes here. The word today is so powerful in this verse.

This is not an eventual salvation, a general sense of salvation, something that's coming down the road, but the instant and immediate fulfillment of the promise Jesus is about to make to that man. You will be with me. You will be with me. Again, there's a personal, deeply relational connection here.

[15 : 32] Commentators note, it's interesting, that Luke only uses the phrase with me four times in his gospel as he relates the words of Jesus.

four times with me. Each time, Jesus invariably meant an exceptional kind of presence.

Not with me as we sit on the beach and have breakfast. With me forever. And so there's a very, very much a deeper meaning here than our temporal here and now understanding of what it means is to be with someone.

The with Jesus speaks of conveys an abiding presence promised today of those who ask.

Something else that's interesting is the word paradise that Luke uses is not mentioned in the crucifixion accounts of Matthew, Mark, or John.

It can only be found that word, paradise, here in Luke. And as we know from scripture, Jesus himself didn't ascend to heaven until after he was resurrected.

[16 : 49] So we can only correctly assume, and again, I've talked about sanctified imagination before, and it's okay to extrapolate when you're doing it in the context of understanding scripture.

So we can correctly assume that Jesus meant that the criminal who had recognized and confessed him as Lord would not literally be with him that same day.

Because again, as we talked about, it's very confining to say today with, meaning a very limited temporal sense. But he meant that this man's ultimate salvation would be assured, that he would be with Jesus again.

It's not uncommon to fear death, and even for believers whose eternal destiny is assured, the fear of death is not necessarily guaranteed.

Death involves an inevitable ending. And you may not be aware of this, but the odds of death for each one of us, 100%.

[17 : 53] You can bank on it. But in these words of Jesus from the cross, we have the opportunity to take comfort that there is something more.

We don't simply cease to exist. Popular culture says, live fast, die big, burn out and fade away. Not a chance.

In Jesus, we have the amazing hope and assurance of an eternity spent, not only with others who have believed Jesus and who died before us, but with Jesus and the Father as well.

What an amazing family reunion that'll be. Have you ever stopped to consider the mystery of the gospel that we see in the account of these two criminals?

As author Greg Laurie says, amazingly, both men, both men heard these words of Jesus. Both saw his flawless and incredible example.

[19 : 05] Both were dying and needed forgiveness. One unrepentant thief died as he had lived, hardened and indifferent.

The other repented, believed, and as a result, joined Jesus in paradise. It's amazing to me that one person can hear this simple message, believe, repent, and be changed forever, while another can listen without really hearing, and freely choose to turn away from grace, hope, and salvation forever.

This morning, I'm going to ask you a question, and it's a rhetorical one so you don't have to answer out loud. Have you heard this message?

Have you recognized Jesus for who he is and the hope that you can have in him, not only in this life, but in the next one as well?

Because, my friends, salvation is not a passive transaction. You must choose to recognize what Jesus has done for you and choose to repent of your sins.

[20 : 35] And repentance means not asking sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, over and over again for the same thing, but turning and intentionally walking the other way.

If you know and have accepted Jesus, all heaven weepypastor.com, I should have a website.

If you have accepted Jesus, all heaven celebrates that decision with you. And I encourage you to live your life for Jesus as someone who has received his sacrifice, his forgiveness, and his grace.

If you're here this morning and this is something that you have never heard before, or you've heard it but you just don't get it, or you've heard it and you have questions, please come and see me after the service.

Because... Dumb induction services? Because I would love to hear your story, I really would, and I would love to tell you how Jesus can make a difference in your life.

[22 : 03] So I'll close this morning with a prayer that I read this week. Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, when my life is over, as I go through this life that is so unjust, remember me.

Father, remember us when you come into your kingdom, when Jesus comes. For we see so much wrong with this world, and yet we also see so much good.

Father, they say the best things in life are free. Surely, my Lord, the love you give us is the ultimate of all gifts.

And for this, I can only say, thank you, Lord. Amen.