

Famous Last Words: Relationship

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Braymar Baptist. Everybody sits in the back third. I'm going to start removing pews, I think.

I'm just kidding, maybe. So my name is Kent Dixon, and it's my privilege to be your pastor here. First of all, I want to take a moment to thank everyone so much for your kindness, your hospitality, your kind words last week for my induction service.

It was very moving, very meaningful for me personally, and very meaningful for our family. So thank you so much for that. We had some family visiting as well, and they were quite touched by the small but mighty nature of our community here.

So I want you to be encouraged by that. And that was definitely a new milestone in our journey together. So be encouraged by that.

This morning, we're going to be continuing our series called Famous Last Words as we focus on the last words or phrases that Jesus said from the cross as recorded in the Bible.

[1 : 09] I don't know if you've read the book, *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel. It was written in the 70s, and that doesn't make it a bad book. That makes it a longstanding book.

Lee Strobel is an excellent author. He's a journalist, and he began in the same way C.S. Lewis did, which was to debunk Christianity, tear Christianity down, disprove Christianity.

And in Lee's journey, the reason this is fresh in my mind is because I watched the movie. So if you're afraid of reading books, watch the movie. It's a pretty good version.

So I recommend the movie. I don't recommend lots of movies to people all the time, but that is one I recommend. And so in that story, Lee Strobel comes up against Christ, comes up against God, and takes apart piece by piece the story that we have before us, the story of the gospel, the story of Jesus, the story of his death, his resurrection, the truth of that story.

And being a dedicated journalist, Lee gives up. He tries for literally a year and a half, uncovers all the evidence he can, meets with doctors and theologians and historians, and tries and tries and tries to debunk something that he feels has taken his wife away from him after she accepts Christ.

[2 : 42] But my friends, the truth of that story is so powerful that historians, even if they aren't Christians, recognize the fact that the Bible tells us that over 500 people, more than 500 people, saw Jesus after his resurrection.

What is in it for those people to say, to make it up, to go along with something? There's absolutely nothing in it for them. People died for the truth of that story.

And so what you believe, if you're sitting here this morning, is absolute truth. It is God's truth. And it is as true today as it was when it first happened over 2,000 years ago.

And the words of Jesus from the cross are so powerful, as we've talked about in this series, because not only because of who said them, but where he said them from, which was the cross.

And last week, we looked at the second phrase of Jesus from the cross, which was, Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. And we saw in that phrase the truth of salvation and the fact that that salvation can only be found in Christ.

[4 : 03] We explored the mystery of the gospel and how that same truth can be perceived and accepted by some while being consciously rejected by others, despite what that may mean for their lives.

And we also acknowledge that salvation is not a passive transaction. You must choose to recognize what Jesus has done for you and choose to repent of your sins.

Because, my friends, in Christ alone, we place our trust, our faith, and our eternal hope.

This morning, we'll be focusing on the concept of relationship, as you'll see in the bulletin. And we're going to reflect on, as Richard read for us and we read together, that third phrase of Jesus from the

cross that is recorded in the Gospel of John.

So turn with me in your Bibles, or you can refer to the screen, as we read the words of John 19, 25 to 27. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

[5 : 16] When Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, Woman, here is your son.

And to the disciple, Here is your mother. And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home. I've always found this passage quite fascinating for so many reasons, but do you notice that it says, The disciple whom he loved.

Do you know who that's referring to? John. Who wrote the Gospel? John. So, theologians and historians find this fascinating because, and there's no real answer, I don't think, either John is so humble that he's saying, Yeah, I wrote this and I was that guy, but I really don't want to take any credit.

Or he was focusing on Christ. And I think it may have been a bit of both. Talking about the suffering and torture of the cross can be deeply disturbing for us, particularly as, I'll challenge us in this, particularly as Protestants.

Because while Catholic believers may focus on the sacrifice and pain of the cross, I believe that we as Protestants may tend to err somewhat too much on the side of the triumph and joy of the resurrection.

[6 : 48] Because these two realities of the cross are not mutually exclusive. And only when they are considered together do we fully begin to comprehend the depth and breadth of what Christ has done for us.

Because, my friends, for me, Jesus is somewhere in between. Scholars suggest that a severe beating and flogging before ultimately being crucified was common.

And that many people who had been sentenced to be crucified ultimately did not even survive the beating. That's the severity of the kind of beating we're talking about.

I think we're very quick to think, oh, he was whipped a bit and then he carried his cross to Calvary.

No, he was beaten nearly to death. He was flogged so severely that his skin was laid raw.

When we sing about the stripes of Jesus, those are literally the lashes on his back. I don't know how often we let that sink in.

[8 : 00] But that is the truth. And so for some, release from their suffering and pain came before the cross even became their reality.

But for Jesus, that beating was just the beginning. And we also don't know for sure. Scripture isn't clear how long Jesus was flogged and beaten mercilessly by the soldiers.

Even before Pilate sentenced him. But we can imagine it would have likely been for some time. He was exposed.

He suffered critical physical trauma and likely significant blood loss. And then he carried his cross. And so while the Bible isn't specific on details, some archaeologists suggest that those who were sentenced to crucifixion likely had to carry their crosses or at the very least the crossbar strapped to their back.

[9 : 07] They would carry that approximately a third of a kilometer. And they arrived at that figure by measuring the distance between Pontius Pilate's palace, where the accused would have been sentenced and beaten, from the distance from his palace to Golgotha, where the crucifixion would have taken place.

And so to put that into perspective, carrying a cross, a third of a kilometer would have been like carrying it more than four city blocks.

I did the math. More than four city blocks of our city blocks outside to carry that cross after being beaten nearly to death.

And there are also no exact figures in scripture that indicate the weight of the cross. But I did some research into that as well.

And it's believed that the cross would have been made of solid wood. They used solid wood beams for them. So the whole cross would have weighed more than 300 pounds.

[10 : 19] And the crossbar alone, the piece that they would have likely carried all that way, would have weighed between 70 and 90 pounds.

Can you even begin to imagine being beaten within an inch of your life, let alone being forced to drag from between 90 to 300 pounds of weight for more than four city blocks?

I love this picture. Love is maybe the wrong word, but I had never seen this picture before I researched my sermon this week. It's by a French painter and it's called View from the Cross. And the original hangs in the Brooklyn Museum. I have never seen this image before and now I want a print of it in my office. If you ever stopped to think about the crowd of people from all walks of life who would have been there when Jesus was crucified.

So imagine that would have been quite likely what Jesus' view from that cross would have been. That crowd would have included the Pharisee who told Jesus to save himself.

[11 : 47] Sadducees who were there to witness Jesus' death, believing there was no way he could be resurrected. It was done. It was over. Money changers who were there to take bets on how long the victims would live.

Soldiers in their heavy armor sweltering in the heat, looking forward to the end of their day when they could drink their wine in the cool of the evening.

Many people would have been there who could have been personally healed by Jesus. People who had been blind, lame, deaf.

People who had been the rejected and outcast members of society who had been seen and drawn into relationship with Jesus.

And there, very likely close by, were also members of Jesus' inner circle. The ones who remained faithful to the end. Joseph of Arimathea.

[12 : 54] John, his disciple. Mary Magdalene. Jesus' aunt, Mary. And his mother. Many of Jesus' closest friends who aren't even named in Scripture likely also watched that day.

Watched as their friend, their teacher. their Savior. Their Savior. Their Savior. Their Savior.

Their Savior. Hung on that cross, dying. And there are so many relationships that we could focus on this morning in this account, but I want to focus on one in particular.

If you're a parent, can you even begin to imagine the pain Mary would have experienced on that day at Golgotha?

A little more than 30 years ago, she had given birth to a son who the angel had told her was conceived by God himself.

[14 : 02] And yet here she was on that dark day, watching her little boy, now a grown man, a man who had loved, cared, healed, and comforted, being mocked and ridiculed, subjected to one of the most ruthless forms of torture ever conceived by man, even to this day.

Can you wrap your head around watching, if you're a parent, watching your own child suffer in that way? As my children have grown up, I have felt their pain myself, almost literally.

This last week, as Connor is recovering from wisdom tooth surgery, I look at him and I think, oh, and I wish many ways I could take it on myself.

And so, when our children are either hurt physically or emotionally, we often feel that, don't we?

Very deeply. And for me, many times, the greatest pain for me comes at a time when I'm unable to prevent my children from being hurt.

And even worse, when I know it's coming, and I can't stop it, or I know I shouldn't. So imagine that excruciating pain and helplessness that Mary felt that day.

[15 : 45] That relationship, arguably one of the most precious human relationships we can imagine, between a mother and a child, torn apart by the cruelty and hatred of others.

As I studied our passage this week, I began to wonder, at any time did Mary remember the prophecy that Simeon made about Jesus?

And about Mary herself, when they took him to the temple to be dedicated as a child. In Luke 2, we of course read about Jesus' birth, but we also read the account of that dedication at the temple.

In Luke 2, 34 and 35, we read, Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

And a sword will pierce your own soul too. A sword will pierce your own soul too.

[17 : 09] What a strange thing to say to a young mother at the dedication of her child. Isn't it? Do you think Mary and Joseph paused and thought, Gee, thanks Simeon.

Then, at least for the first part, was Mary hurt by those final words of that prophecy, or did they even impact her at all that day?

Mary may have even forgotten those words over the years, but an important perspective on relationships, particularly within families, would continue to be a core part of Jesus' perspective, his words, and his ministry.

We read in Matthew 12, 46 to 50, this passage will be familiar to most of you. When Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.

Someone told him, Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you. He replied to them, Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Pointing to his disciples, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers.

[18:26] For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. At this moment, Jesus didn't take the opportunity to exalt his mother and say, Oh, Mom, come in, come in.

I've been waiting for you. Mom, get in here. This is my mom, folks. But instead, he took the opportunity to stress the importance of doing the will of his heavenly Father.

From this account, it doesn't sound like Mary was there to hear Jesus say what he said. But wouldn't his words have given her a moment's pause to reflect on what Simeon had said so long ago?

Do you think she felt dismissed at all? I've heard people use this passage as a way of suggesting that Jesus was somehow diminishing the value of family or family relationships here.

But I don't believe that was the case. I believe that Jesus was being clear that the most important relationship for his followers and those who love God is to do God's will and obey his commandments.

[19:48] And you may have heard this before. Vern has talked about this in the adult study on Tuesday nights, but we don't obey because we're merely following rules.

Do children obey their parents solely because of the threat of punishment? We obey because we love. We obey because we honor. We obey because we respect.

That's what our obedience to God is about. That obedience is a direct result and an expression of our love.

A version of this picture is in our house. My dad gave it to us when our children were born. You can't see it super clearly with the light from the windows, but this is a picture of Simeon, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus with Simeon dedicating and giving the blessing.

We can see on that day at Golgotha, can't we, that some, that somewhat odd prophecy that Simeon had given to a new mother was coming true because that sword was indeed beginning to pierce her soul.

[21:10] Mary, who had washed Jesus as a baby and dressed him lovingly, now stood helplessly as his all but naked body stood out starkly against the dark sky.

The woman who had heard her son's laugh, who had heard him preach and teach to huge crowds of people, was now helpless as he was all but silenced.

The woman who had seen his hands develop the skill and craftsmanship that he had learned from his father, who had seen those hands heal people, who had seen his feet leap for joy and run with his friends, now saw those same hands and feet cruelly stilled by hard hearts, cold nails.

and rough wood. We don't know for sure how long Jesus had been hanging on the cross before he noticed Mary and the disciple whom he loved, John, standing there.

To me, it's astounding that after all he had been through, Jesus was even still alive, let alone able to recognize or acknowledge them.

[22:39] But in that moment of connection and recognition, we see into the heart of God. Because the pain and isolation of the cross was defeated that day when Jesus broke the silence.

First, we remember through our series that he broke the silence as an intercessor with the words of forgiveness. Then he broke the silence as a king promising a thief a share in his kingdom.

And now, this morning, we hear him speaking again out of that vast abyss of pain and suffering. Not as an intercessor or a king, but as a son of man in his dying hours with his mother and one of his closest friends.

And my friends, we see here the importance of relationship modeled for us. You may already know this, but in the culture of Jesus' time, widows faced potentially dire circumstances.

If a man died and left his wife alone, unless the family stepped forward, there would be no one to provide for her or care for her.

[24 : 11] She would be left to fend for herself literally, depending on the kindness of strangers. So after Joseph died, Mary would have relied on her family, and it seems Jesus to provide for her.

So in his final hours, Jesus recognized both his mother and his trusted friend, John. He connected them and ensured that that relationship would continue after his death, and that his mother, whom he dearly loved, would be cared for.

the Son of God, who is fulfilling his ultimate destiny on earth, was also taking time to tend to his mortal responsibilities.

It's here that we see the importance of relationship modeled for us in the words and actions of Jesus, and in the ultimate act of Jesus on the cross that act of God to restore relationship.

That God through Jesus would experience the depth of pain and loss and broken relationship that happened on that day at Golgotha.

[25 : 39] And in that sacrificial act, our relationship with God would be restored. that, my friends, is the value of relationship.

That, my friends, is love. That, my friends, is your God.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you that you see us. Thank you that you love us. Thank you that you sacrificed so much for us so that you would understand what it means to be human, what it means to suffer and be in broken relationship.

And, Father, this morning I particularly want to acknowledge that there are broken relationships in this room. There are broken families and broken marriages and things that are facing challenge and we struggle, Father.

And we recognize that this one sermon this morning doesn't heal at all, but it does give us hope.

And you give us hope, Father.

[27 : 05] So, Father, I pray for healing and hope in the relationships that are reflected here this morning, that are reflected in our church, our city, the world.

Father, the healing of relationship is what you are about. And by healing our world of its broken relationships and by restoring relationships between your people and yourself, your kingdom will come.

thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your son. Amen.