

The Last Sayings of Christ

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[0:00] In Luke's account, Luke 23, verses 32 through 34, reads like this.

! Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him. 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. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And they cast lots to divide his garments. Even while experiencing the excruciating pain of crucifixion, these words that were spoken, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, are perhaps the most profound revelation of Jesus' love for his enemies.

Because he petitions God the Father to forgive those who are responsible for his demise. As he looked at the crowd that was gathered around the place of the skull, whether it was the Jews, whether it was the religious leaders, whether it was the Roman officials, whether it was the soldiers who were assigned to death squad duty that day, or even anyone who had a hand in his execution, what is clear is that forgiveness was Jesus' response to human depravity.

[1:52] And Jesus probably prayed this way for his enemies throughout his entire ministry. Remember, he taught his followers to recite and practice forgiveness in the disciples' prayer.

Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. In the Sermon on the Mount, he instructs his disciples to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

And it is here that we see what Jesus practiced. This is what he preached.

This is where the rubber meets the road. Because in a hostile situation that Jesus was in, he had to look past cruelty, brutality, the ugliness, the evil, and the sinfulness of his tormentors.

He had to see beyond all the hostility that was poured out on him. He had to see souls that were lost. Souls that needed God's love and compassion.

[3:09] And that is one of the reasons why he prayed for his tormentors. For they do not know what they do. Jesus recognized the blindness of his enemies to the light of divine truth.

They could not see who he was. They could not see his mission or his assignment. In his prayer, however, he did not excuse them from their guilt of sentencing him to death on the cross.

But what he did, he put his enemies in the best possible light in his prayer to God the Father. All due to their ignorance. We, as followers of Christ, we, as people of God, we have to show the same kind of love by praying in like manner for our enemies.

When we pray like this for our enemies, we make the promise of forgiveness to God, not to the person who wronged us. You see, we can't make that promise to them because oftentimes they are reluctant to repent.

But when we make the promise to God, we keep our hearts free from the cancer of resentment and bitterness. And we put ourselves in a position ready to forgive.

[4:37] And they divided his garments and cast lots. What was customary during crucifixions, executions like this, the victim would be stripped of all their clothing.

And the soldiers would divide it among themselves. And most times they did it by gambling. You see, Jesus came all the way down the social ladder.

He accepted the fate of a criminal. The worst of the worst. Being a curse to accomplish salvation for us.

He was basically stripped of everything. His reputation. His dignity. And as I said earlier, even his clothes.

Crucified victims were stripped of all their clothing. They were naked before the crowd. This was all to humiliate condemned criminals.

[5:50] Jesus became poor for us. Jesus endured the worst for us. So that we could become blessed.

And so that we could be people who are rich in the grace of God. The Apostle Paul, in a letter to the Ephesians, says it like this.

In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses. You see, forgiveness costs us nothing. Our costly obedience is the fruit.

Not the root of being forgiven. That is why we call it grace. But it costs Jesus his life. That is why we could say the justice of God was served.

How precious is this good news. That God does not hold our sins against us. And how beautiful is Christ Jesus.

[6:55] Whose blood made it right for God to do this. Freeing us from the slavery to sin, guilt, and shame. The next saying of Jesus is found in Luke chapter 23 and verse 43.

It reads, And he said to him, Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in paradise. During the season of Easter, we concentrate on the cross and what that means to us as Christians.

This verse has some very significant meaning to help us as we understand the cross as sinners.

One of the first things noted is that it was Jesus that was speaking to the thief on the cross.

Here is the God who created the world. He was giving a promise of this repentant sinner. Of God has the power to create the universe and the world.

He has the power to forgive sinners such as us. This is our hope. When I've heard this verse preached on, much has been talked about the word paradise.

[8:04] So that phrase, With me in paradise. Let's take just a couple of minutes and think about the first part of that. The word today. Now there's two ideas and thoughts that can be fleshed out with this.

And one being that the act of crucifixion usually was a very long and painful process. For those that were crucified, it was common for that process to linger on for several days.

Now, not only was he the God of the universe, but he also had an understanding of the season that they were in, in this time when Jesus was crucified. It was a holy week.

And there was a desire to basically get the deed done, to have this crucifixion over and cleaned up so that they could go on with the rest of the Passover and this time of season.

I think Jesus foresaw that and actually also understood that there were measures that were going to be taken to speed up the deaths of those that were hung on the cross for those criminals.

[9:08] Being in this predicament, you know, I'm not sure whether that gave that thief comfort, but it does really comfort us and can comfort us. Just the thought of Jesus telling the thief that today you would be with me in paradise.

Today you will be in heaven. This very day really gives us comfort. That even as he forgave and promised eternity to that thief, we can claim that same promise.

As wretched sinners, a holy God took our place, which gives us comfort and confidence that when we sin and confess our sins, God will forgive those and will bring us back in that right relationship with him.

Today helps us understand that the confession of our sins wipes them away immediately. We don't have to do anything such as say prayers or give our penance or anything such as that because the work of the cross is finished and our sins are remembered no more.

As far as the east is from the west, our sins are separated, us, and have been separated from us.

Now of course there is much ink spilt on that, spilt on the word paradise, and it's very understandable.

[10:25] The word of that refers to an enclosed park or a pleasure ground. Some commentaries would draw us back to the land of Eden and the creation of the world where it was a perfect world where there was no sin at that time.

And of course there's all kinds of beauty in this world. You know, the beauty of this country, the sea and the sand. Others would think as they think about God's creation, the mountains and streams, the foothills, and just the rolling hills.

I think we can picture a lot of those things, but just the comfort of paradise and knowing that our souls will be beside the still waters can give us peace and comfort.

Comfort and assurance of Jesus' promise to that thief on the cross that our sins are forgiven. As we acknowledge them and ask for forgiveness, they are forgiven immediately and completely.

The peace and comfort and understanding that this work is done, gives us access to the wonders of heaven and the joy of spending eternity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[11:43] Praise God that our understanding of that work, just like the thief, it was the Savior of the world that through that work and power of the cross we stand forgiven.

Amen. Well, good morning. We now come to the third saying, as recorded in the Gospel of St. John, chapter 19, verses 26 and 27.

The Gospel writer says, When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, behold, your son.

Then he said to the disciple, Behold, your mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home.

Never before had earth witnessed such condescension, such sacrifice, and such grace.

[13:02] Jesus' pain and humiliation was without precedent because he had no equal. Yet in this moment, he provides further evidence that he had disrobed himself to become fully man, though fully God.

Why? Because he remembered those who was closest to him. And anyone who has ever had a near miss or was seriously ill would confirm that among the first things that crosses one's mind are these questions.

What would happen to those I love if I die? And how will they handle my death? For a moment, the welfare of one's loved ones seems drowned out, seems to drown out the pain as it were.

No doubt, Jesus was experiencing the same thing. Perhaps he was mindful of Simeon's prophecy to Mary as recorded in Luke.

This is what the prophet Simeon said, Behold, this child, Jesus, is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.

[14:33] And then Simeon said these words, that a sword shall pierce through your soul, Mary. This was this woman who gave birth to Jesus and walked him to sleep could not now put ointment on the still bloody scars on his back.

The one who nursed him could not now allow him to rest his thorn-battered head on her lap. Instead, she could only watch helplessly as he was publicly humiliated and brutalized by the hands of men he came to save and without just cause.

How indescribable was the pain of one who buries a child and even worse, one who witnesses him being publicly dehumanized and brutalized both physically and emotionally.

Though heartbroken, undoubtedly Mary was comforted when Jesus spoke directly to her, his words reflecting his respect for her place in his life and the value he placed on relationships.

[15:55] Jesus would give his mother the best gift he could at the time, the care of a dear friend whom Jesus knew very well and whom he trusted.

Yes, even at his lowest moment, Jesus was thinking of others and he was giving. How much more when he comes into his kingship will he give to those whom he loves?

Jesus' instructions to John were equally powerful. It demonstrated a level of friendship and trust that far too few of us take the time to cultivate.

Jesus not only knew that John could care for his mother, but that he would. Moreover, it should come as no surprise that Jesus, being mindful of the role that John would play in the early church, wanted John to benefit from the wisdom, the humility and the experiences of his mother.

Jesus could have thought to himself, I'm here paying the penalty for Mary's and John's sins, so that they might live with me forever, so I'm not going to concern myself with what happens to them.

[17:20] He could have thought that and only that, but Jesus did not do that. that fact should comfort us knowing that Jesus is mindful of what happens to us during our earthly sojourn.

So yes, yes, Easter reminds us that grace for our eternal salvation flows freely from the cross, but it also reminds us that grace for our temporal needs flows freely from the cross as well.

Amen? Amen. We've now come to the middle saying, the fourth saying of Christ. And the place of this middle saying is fitting because it is the focal point of the cross.

After caring for his dear mother and entrusting her to his disciple John, Jesus experienced the worst aspect of the crucifixion and indeed the darkest moment of his life.

In Mark's gospel, chapter 15, verses 33 through 34, we read, and when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

[18:48] And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

This fourth saying of Jesus is the most unusual of all the sayings. And it is unusual because it is not just a saying, it is actually a cry.

It is an anguished cry. And naturally we should ask ourselves, why? Why this anguished cry? Why did the Son of God in the midst of unusual darkness cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why did he not cry out when the Romans were crucifying him and torturing him? Here's why he cried out. Jesus cried out because in that three hour period of darkness when he was experiencing, what he was experiencing was far more horrific than what the Romans had done to him previously. In that moment, Jesus cried out because at the brightest hour of the day from 12 noon to 3 p.m., utter darkness fell over the land and in the midst of that darkness, the unrelenting righteous wrath of God was being poured out upon him for the sins of sinners.

[20:24] in the darkness, Jesus was experiencing the justice of God. God was expressing his justice in pouring out his furious wrath against sin while at the same time expressing gracious love for sinners.

Jesus hung on the cross as our substitute and so what happened to him should have happened to us, to every one of us.

He took our place. He took our punishment. He absorbed the wrath of God on our behalf. The atmosphere of darkness reflected the spiritual reality of the darkness of sin and the separation of Jesus from his father as he took our place on the cross.

Some believe that Jesus cried out because of the excruciating pain of the crucifixion. The cruel crucifixion had gotten to him, some say. But that's unlikely because many, countless, had been crucified.

Indeed, two were being crucified on the side of him. We have no record of them crying out. Actually, one was cursing. For Jesus to cry out because of the physical aspect of the crucifixion would make him less than those who had been crucified before and those who were being crucified with him in that moment.

[22:01] Some say Jesus cried out because he felt forsaken. Brothers and sisters, the truth is Jesus cried out because he was forsaken.

He didn't feel forsaken. He was forsaken. And he had to be forsaken because he was taking our place and God had to treat him and deal with him exactly the way we deserved to be treated.

Jesus was on the cross as our substitute. He died the death and you and I deserve to die. And God forsook him as we deserve to be forsaken.

Standing in our place, he cried out after experiencing God's righteous wrath and judgment and experiencing separation from God.

And here, brothers and sisters, we don't appreciate the grace of God until we understand the wrath of God. It was necessary for the wrath of God to be poured out on Jesus so that grace can be extended to us.

[23:24] Friends, Jesus experienced utter darkness and separation from God so that every sinner who puts his or her faith in Jesus will never know that separation.

They will never know that utter darkness. No matter what dark seasons we know in this life, never be that dark. He was a man of sorrows who cried out in untold agony so that sinners like us on this Good Friday can sing out as we have been doing this morning.

We can sing out with unbounded joy because he cried out in unbounded sorrow. Thank God on this Good Friday we who deserved to cry out for our own sins can now sing out O the rugged cross my salvation where your love poured out over me.

Now my soul cries out hallelujah praise and honor unto thee. After this Jesus knowing that all was now accomplished said to fulfill the scripture I thirst.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry he made it abundantly clear that he was not on earth to destroy what was written in the law and what was written throughout the length of the Old Testament.

[24:56] Instead he emphasized that he was here to perfect or to fulfill them. In Matthew 5 he stressed that not even the smallest letter or even a dot would be removed from the scriptures just as they had stood throughout the ages.

We see God fulfilling scriptures fulfilling his prophecies through Christ. We see Christ fulfilling the scriptures in being born in the city of David in being of the earthly lineage of David being born to a virgin and having a triumphant entry into Jerusalem and being rejected by his people and being betrayed by one of his own.

And the list can go on and on and on. In all there are more than 300 scriptures of prophecy that have been identified as being fulfilled by Christ.

The work of prophesying the Messiah was given in great detail in the Old Testament. And we see through Jesus' life that the work of fulfilling those scriptures was just as meticulously carried out.

And he continued that work on the cross. John 19 and 28 says, Christ out of the words, I thirst again to fulfill the scriptures.

[26:23] But what scripture? commentators have linked the passage to Psalm 22, which begins with, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

We heard in the fourth reading how Christ was filling the awesome weight of every sin, how he became the object of God the Father's holy wrath.

Now we see in Psalm 22 that this scene was described a thousand years before it played out. In vivid detail, the death of Jesus Christ was described prophetically by David.

Psalm 22 says, For dogs encompass me, a company of evildoers encircle me. Consider the crowds that acted like blood thirsty wild dogs surrounding Christ, calling for him to be put to death.

John 19 and 15 says, They cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Again, in Psalm 22, they have pierced my hands and feet.

[27:42] And consider the act of crucifixion, which was completely alien to Israel at the time that David was writing this psalm. remember that this form of capital punishment had not even been invented at the time.

And it would be at least a few hundred years before it is believed that the Assyrians or the Babylonians used crucifixion. Still, it was rare that a rare thing, even among them, until the Romans perfected and effectively used it just before the time of Christ.

Psalm 22, verses 17 and 18. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and fall on my clothing they cast lots.

And we see this again fulfilled in John 19, verse 23. So at the beginning of John 19, verse 28, when Jesus knew that all these things had been finished and fulfilled, he was looking at all these things that were being played out, that were fulfilling scriptures.

In fact, he was looking at everything that was written in scriptures about him, about his birth, about his ministry, about his death. He had a divine checklist, and all these things were being checked off.

[29:15] They were things that had to be accomplished. And so he completed his checklist with I thirst, which is referenced in Psalm 22, verse 15.

And that says, My strength is dried up like a pot's herd, and my tongue sticks to my jaw. God. But the most important part of the checklist, Jesus knew was that it was the thing that would be the result of his death.

He was, as was prophesied in scriptures, the perfect lamb of God. He was the divine sacrifice that atoned for the sins of God's people, that set them free from sin, that justified them before a righteous God.

That was the greatest thing that was being accomplished. I thirst. The one who gives living water now is in need of being refreshed, which means he poured out himself completely for us.

But perhaps Jesus, through these simple words, was not just speaking of a physical thirst, but also a spiritual thirst. as he was forsaken by God, perhaps he's reminding us that he would remain the one who gives living water, that crunches spiritual thirst.

[30:47] If so, we could believe him without a shadow of a doubt, that he would satisfy our thirsty souls. And how do we know that?

well, he went through the great effort of fulfilling every single thing that was ever said about him over many, many centuries.

This is to hold up proof to us of his plan, of his order, of his power to deliver on what he promises. promises. The one who said, I thirst, is still the one who says, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

The history that Christ gives us with him adds up to convincing evidence that we can trust his words, that the living water that he will give will well up to a spring of eternal life in us.

John 19 and 30 reads, when Jesus had received the salt wine, he said, it is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

[32:03] Whenever we hear that someone has died, we want to know how they died and what were their last words. And in many cases as they near death, there are no last words.

The greatest last words ever spoken came from a dying man on a cross. Those words were not whispered, but were shouted, and the power of those words was so great that they riveted throughout the heavens and earth and will continue to echo for all eternity.

For those words were not the words of defeat, but the words of victory. Those three words were among the most profound words ever spoken by the man who lived the most profound life that has ever been lived.

It is finished. The moment Jesus shouted it is finished, heaven rejoiced and hell trembled with terror and fear. It is finished suggested that something was completed.

He did not say I am finished. He said it is finished. finished. The question then is what was finished? In order to understand the question we must go back to when creation was finished.

[33:23] In the beginning God desired an everlasting loving relationship with man. Adam was made in God's image. It had always been God's desire to reveal himself to us and he did that in the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the cool of the day. But Adam chose to disobey God's command, producing sin which separated mankind from God and brought about a breakdown in the relationship with God resulting in shame and judgment.

But God because of his amazing love and grace always had a plan from the very beginning to save man from his sin and that was for his son to die on the cross.

The Greek word for it is finished is te telestai. Te telestai is also a business term which means paid in full. In those days when a debt was fully paid, the parchment paper on which the debt was written was te tel which means paid in full.

When Jesus uttered the words it is finished he was declaring that the debt owed to his father was wiped away completely and forever. He was declaring that the work on the cross was completely done and that what was done cannot be undone.

[34:54] Jesus eliminated the debt owed by mankind, the debt of sin. Jesus' words it is finished literally means that all of our sins, our past sins, our present sins and all of our future sins have all been lifted off us and placed on him.

The debt was paid in full. Yes we still have a sinful nature within us that we struggle with but our sins have all been placed on Jesus at the cross.

The moment we choose to believe in Christ and to accept him as our Lord we are immediately forgiven and given the great life gift of eternal life.

When Jesus said it is finished all of the Old Testament prophecies from the coming Messiah and the seed who would crush the serpent's head to Jesus' life, ministry and death were fulfilled and completed at the cross.

It is finished meant that the suffering Jesus endured while on the earth and especially in his last hours the torture, excruciating pain and unrelenting mockery were completed.

[36:07] Never before since has there been such suffering. God's will for Jesus was accomplished in Jesus' perfect obedience to God, his Father.

But more importantly, it is finished. Sorry. But more importantly, the power of sin and Satan was finished. The moment Jesus said it is finished, Satan realized that he was forever defeated and that

he had just helped to bring to pass the very thing he was trying to start.

When Jesus said it is finished, he gave us the wonderful gift to now live by faith as new creatures in Christ. Jesus' finished work on the cross was the beginning of a new life for all who were once dead in trespasses and sin, but who are now made alive with Christ.

Because Jesus said it is finished, the sacrificing of animals was ended, as the ultimate sacrifice had been made. When Jesus hung on the cross, he became the lamb and the high priest.

He offered his blood for the permanent removal of sin, which God symbolized by tearing the curtain from top to bottom, which concealed the holy of holies.

[37:19] It is finished meant the turning point when one period ended and the other began. It was the turning point in the history of mankind, because it was the moment the law came to an end and no longer possessed the power to condemn.

It is finished meant a new covenant began. Romans 10 and 4 said, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Because Jesus said it is finished, we are now clothed with the righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ.

Because it is finished, we don't have to experience the terrible wrath of God. Because it is finished, we have a promise of eternal life in an eternal kingdom.

And at the end of the day, we want to be able to say like the apostle Paul, who as he came to the close of his life, wrote, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith. Just as Paul had finished the race that God had given him to run, God wants for you and me to complete the task that he has given us to do. So on that day, we will receive a crown of righteousness, because Jesus said, it is finished, and completed his work on the cross.

[38:39] It is finished. Those are glorious words, because they communicate that the price has been paid in full for sin, and sinners can be reconciled to a holy God.

We now come to the seventh and final saying of Jesus. Luke records it in Luke 23, verse 46, as follows.

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Having said this, he breathed his last.

These final words of Jesus stand in direct contrast to his earlier cry, when he cried out to God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But now it's all finished. And Jesus, having finished the work of redemption that the Father had given him to do, could have simply hung his head and died.

[39:58] But he didn't do that. Instead, what he did was he looked to his Father, the one who had earlier poured out his wrath upon him, the one with whom he is now at peace, and he says to his Father, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

In these words of Jesus, we have a hopeful example of what death is like for the believer. Those of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, if we are conscious in the moment of death, and we are aware that we are going to die, we too can know this peace, knowing that our redemption is finished and that the price for our salvation is paid in full.

And because of that, we don't need to fear the judgment and the condemnation of God for our sins. Jesus was judged and condemned in our place for all of our sins, as we've just heard, past, present, and future.

And so we need not wonder if we are righteous enough to stand before God and make it into heaven. Jesus lived a perfect life that we could never live.

And God credits his perfect life to all sinners who put their faith in him. And so these final words of Jesus, they assure us that all of us who die, that we can die in peace just as Jesus died in peace.

[41:47] We too can commit our spirits into the hands of a just and gracious God. But not only do these words of Jesus assure us that we can die in peace with God, they also assure us that we can die with confidence about our destiny, about where we're going to go, where we will spend eternity.

Those of us who have trusted in Christ don't have to wonder about what happens to us when we die. Jesus helps us to see that when we die, we leave our bodies on this earth and our spirits ascend to

God in heaven.

Jesus said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. These words assure us that we can die with confidence about our destiny after death.

Our spirits don't go to purgatory as the Roman Catholics teach. Our spirits don't sleep in the grave as the Seventh-day Adventists teach.

But instead, our spirits ascend to God as scripture teaches. We will be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

[43:06] So even as we think of Christ's death this Good Friday, we should think of our own death. Let us think about our own death.

And if you've trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, these final words of Jesus should remove any fear and any uncertainty about your death.

We don't know how we will die. And none of us wants to die a challenging and torturous and difficult death. But here's what we can know about our death if we have trusted Christ.

We can have certainty that like Jesus, we can commit ourselves into the hands of our great and gracious God.

But if you're here this morning and you have not yet trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior, these assurances of peace will be with God and confidence of where you will spend eternity can be yours if you will put your trust and faith in Jesus Christ.

[44:18] But if you die in your sins, you will be eternally separated from God and not the beneficiary of this promise.

But should you repent, you can draw great comfort from these final words of Jesus and you can die having peace with God, you can die having confidence of where you will spend eternity.

Let's pray together. Amen.