

Seven Words from the Cross

#0461

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—April 16, 1976

Let's turn to Luke's gospel, the 23rd chapter. God had four men write the story of the life and death of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And each one of them contributed certain items which none of the rest included. So, we get a more complete picture by looking at the testimony of the different evangelists.

This morning we're going to gather about the cross in our memory, in our imagination, and listen to the closing words of Jesus as He hung there on Calvary. It so happens that there are seven recorded utterances of our Lord from the cross: Luke writes down three of these, John writes down three of these, and Matthew and Mark unite in writing another one. But they're not in this order. Luke gives the first one, then the second, and also the last.

Before we start reading from the scripture, let us go back to that day and that place where Jesus gave His life for us. You remember it was on a Thursday night that He went into the garden of Gethsemane and interceded in prayer there for three hours. Then the mob came and took Him. Betrayed by Judas, the Savior was bound, hurried to the high priest's palace, and there went through the farce of a trial repeatedly, and then to Pilate, and then to Herod, and then to Pilate again.

Through those various experiences, He went through various sufferings and abuse—mocked and derided, spit upon, kicked, beaten, scourged. And finally led out in the early hours of the Friday morning and nailed to the cross.

It is at this point that we hear these first words of Jesus. Luke, the 23rd chapter, and the 34th verse, we'll read the 33rd with it:

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do..." Luke 23:33–34.

As the soldiers were driving the spikes through His hands and feet, He prays for His murderers. "Father, forgive them." This is love, isn't it? Wonderful love. I'm glad that prayer includes me. For not only the soldiers, but each one of us is responsible for the death of Jesus and that prayer included us. We know that His love thought of us that morning:

"...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do..."
Luke 23:34.

Some of those that united in the crucifixion of Christ were saved before that day was over. We think of that Roman centurion who commanded the guard. Mark records that as Jesus died that afternoon, the centurion burst forth in an expression of his faith:

“...Truly this man was the Son of God” Mark 15:39.

For him, that prayer of Jesus that had been offered at nine o’clock in the morning was answered by three o’clock that afternoon:

“...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”
Luke 23:34.

Others were saved later. Others, of course, remaining rebellious and impenitent, could not receive the benefit of the Savior’s prayer. For while Jesus prays for each one, it rests with each of us whether to have Christ’s prayer answered for us. Doesn’t it? I’m so glad that as we hear Jesus’ prayer, we can say, “Dear Lord, if you love me enough to pray for me, I love you enough to help answer your prayer”:

“...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”
Luke 23:34.

Meditate, also, on this thought. We sometimes wonder when we come to Jesus and ask for forgiveness whether we’re going to be forgiven. We may think that what we’ve done is so bad that it can’t *be* forgiven, but here we listen to the prayer of Jesus for His murderers, and that includes you and me.

We need not trust in our own prayers or in our worthiness. We hear Jesus saying, “Father, forgive him, forgive her, forgive them.” And I know His prayer is heard for us this morning. What do you say?

Now, the second word of Jesus on the cross comes in verses 42 and 43. You remember that with Christ were two others crucified—thieves that had committed murder in the insurrection. And as they hung there, each on his cross, one on the right hand and the other on the left of Christ, at first, they united in cursing Jesus. They joined with the rabble in mocking Him. They echoed the cry of the priests, “If you’re the Christ, save Thyself and come down from the cross.” And they added, “Save us.” They meant that if Christ could come down from the cross, why not bring them down, too, but it was all in mockery, of course.

But as the moments ticked on and time went by, one of those thieves was softened and tendered as he yielded to the Holy Spirit. He saw the meekness and love of Christ as He hung there on the cross. He heard this prayer that we’ve just noted:

“...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”
Luke 23:34.

And finally, his heart came to the point where he longed for Jesus, that suffering One, to be his Savior. And so, he said in the 42nd verse:

“...Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom” Luke 23:42.

And although Jesus was suffering the most intense anguish, His ear caught that plea (and He never misses anyone). And although that man was a thief and although he had cursed Him earlier in the day, as he turned to Jesus, quickly the Savior answered:

“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” Luke 23:43.

That day, as He hung upon the cross, Jesus gave him the assurance that he would be with the Lord in the kingdom of God when Jesus sits upon His throne and all the redeemed are gathered home. What a message of love that was for that penitent thief. The remaining moments of his life were moments of peace and assurance. He had the word from Christ Himself that he would be with the Lord in the kingdom.

And again, this word is given to us, as well as to the thief. To each of us, Christ says, as we come to Him in penitence:

“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” Luke 23:43.

So, we are listening this morning as we gather at the cross, not only to the word of forgiveness, we are listening to the word of assurance. Jesus loves us and prays for our forgiveness. Jesus loves us and assures us that we will be with Him in the kingdom of our God.

Now, to get the next picture, we turn over to John’s gospel, the 19th chapter, beginning with the 25th verse. As Jesus looked over the multitude that had gathered about the cross, one figure stood out. He saw His mother, dear Mary. She was there with other of the women and with John, the beloved disciple supporting her.

She had been there when they led the Savior out to Calvary, but as she fainted as they were about to crucify Him, the disciples bore her away, but now she’d come back. She couldn’t bear to remain away from her Son.

She remembered how she had carried Him in her arms, pillowed Him upon her breast, watched Him grow up, guided that young, active mind in the study of the scriptures. What memories she had, as only a mother could. And now, this beloved Son of hers—God’s Son—was hanging upon the cross, and her hopes were dying with Jesus.

But as Christ hung there, He was thinking, “What can I do to help my mother? What can I do to provide for her?” As human beings would look at it, there was

nothing He *could* do. His hands were nailed to the tree, his feet spiked. He had no money. Judas had stolen the last few pieces that remained in the treasury.

What could He do? Ah, there was something He could do that no amount of money could buy. He could provide a home for her with somebody that would love her and care for her because they love Jesus, and she was His mother.

And this is John, the beloved disciple. The Bible calls him:

“...the disciple whom Jesus loved...” John 21:20.

And so, seeing Jesus hanging there, John looked up to meet His gaze, and Mary looked up to meet His gaze, and then came the word from the cross as Jesus looked to Mary and turned His eyes to John:

“...Woman, behold thy son!” John 19:26.

And then, looking to John directly, He said:

“...Behold thy mother!...” John 19:27.

And the scripture says:

“...And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” John 19:17.

Wasn't that a wonderful thing for Jesus in His closing hour to think of His mother and provide for her care? This was in harmony with the law that He Himself had written on the stone.

Let's repeat the Fifth Commandment together, shall we:

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee”
Exodus 20:12.

Christ's example was in harmony with His precept. He thought of His mother right up to the closing hour and provided for her needs. Wonderful Savior.

Now, for the next word from the cross, we turn over to Matthew, the 27th chapter. Matthew and Mark both record this experience, but we'll read it as Matthew wrote it down. Matthew was doubtless an eyewitness, and the Holy Spirit inspired him to tell about it:

“Now from the sixth hour...” Matthew 27:45.

This is 12 o'clock—noon.

“...there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour”
Matthew 27:45.

That's three o'clock in the afternoon. Three hours of darkness there at the cross.

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?” Matthew 27:46.

This cry from the lips of Jesus came after three hours of silence and darkness. What went on in the mind of Jesus during those three hours from twelve noon to three o'clock in the afternoon?

We may gather some idea by turning back to the 22nd Psalm. Will you turn, please. A thousand years before the birth and death of Jesus, Christ Himself inspired the psalmist David to write down what He would think and express on the cross—the experiences that He would go through nailed to the tree, in the 22nd Psalm.

You notice that the opening words of this Psalm are precisely the words that Jesus cried from the cross. They came from His broken heart:

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent”
Psalm 22:1–2.

Again, in the 6th verse:

“...I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him: let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in Him” Psalm 22:6–7.

These were the very words that men were saying there at Calvary a thousand years later after this was written. And yet, the murderers of Jesus and those that mocked Him somehow did not sense that they were fulfilling prophecy, but Jesus knew that everything was right on time. He was going through the agony depicted in this 22nd Psalm.

And so, as we read this Psalm, we can get some idea of the terrible agony that Christ went through. Notice the 14th verse:

“I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint...” Psalm 22:14.

Think of the pain as He hung there upon the cross suspended by those nails in His hands.

“...My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of My bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws...” Psalm 22:14–15.

Since the Passover supper the night before, He’d had neither food nor drink. And through the loss of blood and perspiration, He must have been greatly dehydrated, suffering in body and mind.

Sixteenth verse:

“For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet”
Psalm 22:16.

Think of it, a thousand years before the cross, the crucifixion was foretold—the piercing of the hands and feet of Jesus.

Seventeenth:

“I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture” Psalm 22:17–18.

This, too, was taking place about the cross. So, from the darkness of Calvary, there burst that cry that we noted, recorded by Matthew, echoed by the 22nd Psalm:

“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me...”
Psalm 22:1.

Why, indeed, was He forsaken? Because He was taking our place, because He was suffering our death, and because He was enduring what we deserve.

Now, let us turn back to John’s gospel, the 19th chapter, and we will listen to the next word from the cross. As the darkness lifted, Jesus returned to a sense of His physical suffering, and in the 28th verse, we hear another cry from the cross—just two words:

“...I thirst” John 19:28.

Yes, indeed, He was thirsty. As I say, He had had neither food nor drink since the evening before. And as one of the soldiers, touched with pity, took a sponge and dipped it in a vessel of vinegar, reached it up to where the lips of Jesus could touch it, He got that brief moment of respite, but oh, what a little thing it was.

The multitude and the priests would not even cooperate in that gesture. They said, “Let Him alone. Let’s see whether anybody comes to help Him?”

“I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me...” Isaiah 63:3.

Then came, in the 30th verse, the great cry of triumph:

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost” John 19:30.

This was as great a cry of triumph as that cry from the darkness was of despair. How could Jesus go from the depths of despair to the heights of triumph in that short period? I’ll tell you how, dear friends, He did it by faith. There was no change in His feelings, and He had no visible manifestation. The Father did not speak to Him as He had at baptism and the transfiguration. No. But by faith, as He went through those wonderful verses of the 22nd Psalm, He came down to those closing words:

“...He hath done this” Psalm 22:31.

Another way of translating it says, It is finished, and as He had begun the psalm with those words of sorrow and despair:

“...why hast Thou forsaken Me...” Psalm 22:1.

...He came out strong and clear on the closing climax, “It is finished.” In these words, He addressed the Father. Before the creation of the world, the Father and the Son had clasped hands in a solemn contract that if man should fail, Christ’s life would be given as the substitute and ransom.

This contract Jesus had fulfilled. He had given everything, and now, He says, “It is finished,” and it says he:

“...bowed His head, and gave up the ghost” John 19:30.

But turning back to Luke 23, we find one closing expression, just as He breathed His last. The prayer of submission and resignation of full surrender and trust in Jesus.

The 23rd of Luke, and the 46th verse:

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice...” Luke 23:46.

That’s the cry we heard in John—It is finished.

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost” Luke 23:46.

He committed His life to His Father and bowed his head and died. And so, this morning, in memory, we gather at Calvary, and we hear these seven words from the cross, each one breathing love.

First, love expressed in forgiveness:

“...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”
Luke 23:34.

Then, love expressed in assurance:

“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in
paradise” Luke 23:43.

Then, love expressed in providing. He arranges for the care of His mother.

Then, love expressed in that deep moment of despair. That He would rather
die lost and have us saved than save Himself and have us lost:

“...why hast Thou forsaken Me...” Psalm 22:1.

He cries, and there is no answer, but He gives Himself to that awfully dark day.

And then, love expressed in physical suffering:

“...I thirst...” John 19:28.

He could have come down from the cross, but He lingered there, enduring all
the pains of body, mind and spirit that men and devils could inflict. He stays on to the
end.

And then, love, shouting that triumphant cry of victory, as by faith He plants
His banner on the eternal heights, and says to the Father:

“...It is finished...” John 19:30.

And then that closing cry of resignation:

“...into Thy hands...” Luke 23:46.

I commit my life.

“...I commend My spirit” Luke 23:46.

It's love all the way through, isn't it, friends? As we sang in our opening hymn
this morning:

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down,
Did 'ere such love and sorrow meet,

Or thorns compose so rich a crown.
Since I who was undone and lost,
Have pardon through His name and word,
Forbid it, then, that I should boast,
Save in the cross of Christ, my Lord.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

Oh friends, how many of us would like to send Him the word this morning that we appreciate that love and respond to it by giving our all? May I see your hands? Is that our response this morning? May God make it true, doubly true, forever true, with each of us.

There's a little song that speaks of the memory of Calvary that I want Dona to sing for us right now:

Where He will lead me, I will go,
For I have learned to trust Him so,
And I remember, 'twas for me,
That He was slain on Calvary.

[Dona sings—I Remember Calvary.]

Where He will lead me, I will go,
For I have learned to trust Him so,
And I remember, 'twas for me,
That He was slain on Calvary.

Refrain: Jesus shall lead me night and day,
Jesus shall lead me all the way,
He is the truest Friend to me,
For I remember Calvary.

[Elder Frazee joins]

O I delight in His command,
Love to be led by His dear hand;
His divine will is sweet to me,
Hallowed by bloodstained Calvary.

Refrain

Onward I go, nor doubt nor fear,
Happy with Christ my Savior near,
Trusting that I some day shall see,
Jesus my friend of Calvary.

Refrain

I know this, dear friends, if we'll remember Calvary, we can forget a lot of other things. We can forget every doubt, every fear. We can turn from every temptation. We can never question God's love, as long as we look to the cross.

Onward I go, nor doubt, nor fear,
Happy with Christ, my Savior, near.
For I remember Calvary.

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