When Jesus Preached from the Cross
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Because of the physical rigors of crucifixion you remember that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke only with great difficulty during His final hours on the cross and Scripture records only seven brief sayings from the Savior on the cross, but every one of those seven reveals that Christ remained sovereignly in control of His own death. Each of those sayings is rich with significance. If He only said seven things you can be sure that the seven are profound.

The first was a plea for mercy on behalf of His tormentors. Luke records that shortly after the cross was raised on the hill called Golgotha, while the soldiers were in fact still gambling for the clothes of Jesus, He prayed to God for their forgiveness. Scripture says, "And when they had come to the place called Calvary where they crucified Him, the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left, Jesus then said, 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they do.'" The first thing Jesus said at the cross was an expression of forgiveness. These words were probably spoken while our Lord was actually being nailed to the cross or as soon as the cross was reared up on its end and dropped into its socket. In fact, they may have been spoken just after the ripping, wrenching pain of that three foot drop into the hole in the ground.

It is worthy to note that as soon as the blood of the great sacrifice began to flow, the great high priest began to intercede. While others were mocking Him, just as the taunting and the jeering reached its fever pitch, Christ responded in precisely the opposite way that most men would have responded. Instead of threatening, instead of lashing back, instead of cursing His enemies and instead of calling down the judgment of God upon such an unjust act, He rather prayed to God for the forgiveness of those who unjustly took his pure life.

This priestly intercession, as it were, on behalf of his own killers was done in fulfillment of the Old Testament. Isaiah53:12, "He poured out his soul unto death and He was numbered with the transgressors and He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

Frankly, the whole meaning of the cross is summed up in that intercession. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved; Jesus didn't call down a thunderous blast of divine judgment against men acting so wickedly against Him, and that's because He was on a mission of mercy, He was on a mission of redemption and the salvation of sinners was in His heart, that's why He was dying. He was dying to provide the forgiveness of sins even for those who took His life. Even at the very height of the most heinous crime ever committed in

the history of the world He felt compassion and expressed the desire for forgiveness.

The phrase, "For they do not know what they do," is an important phrase. It doesn't suggest that they were unaware of the evil of what they were doing. Anybody knew that that was an evil thing to do to anyone, it was a horrific torturous way to treat a human being, they knew that. They were aware of their cruelty. They were aware of their sinning. They were aware of their hatred.

When Jesus said, "They do not know what they do," He didn't mean they didn't know they were committing a crime, He didn't mean that they didn't know there were no legitimate charges against Him, there were none and everybody knew there were none. Pilot himself had said, I find no fault in this man. The Jewish Sanhedrin had tried to trump up false charges unsuccessfully by bribing false witnesses. The soldiers knew, the crowd knew that this was a grave injustice. The very taunting spectators at Calvary had heard Jesus teach and had seen His life and His miracles.

There was no real ignorance of a crime being committed they just didn't understand the enormity of it. They were crucifying not only their own Messiah they were crucifying God the Son. The Apostle Paul said, "Had they known that they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." Jesus prayed that they be forgiven. How was that prayer answered? It was answered immediately in the salvation of one of the thieves who was forgiven while he was hanging on the cross. It was answered a little bit after that by the salvation of a centurion who was there to provide security and to carry out the wishes of Rome in this execution. But he began to realize who it was that was hanging there and embraced Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

The prayer for forgiveness was answered not long after this at the Day of Pentecost, a little over a month later when 3,000 people in the City of Jerusalem embraced Jesus Christ, the one who had been crucified as the living resurrected Lord. It was answered even later then that according to the 6 th chapter of Acts when a great number of the temple priests confessed Jesus as Lord and they had been participants in the execution.

His prayer was that when any who participated in that execution realized the enormity of what was done that God would be merciful in spite of this crime of all crimes and forgive them and His prayer was consistent with the will of God and God the Father who loves His Son with a perfect love does not hold the murder of His own beloved Son against anyone who repents and asks forgiveness.

It's so important that Jesus said that, so important. Because the sin was so beyond heinous that if witnesses had not actually heard Jesus pray for the forgiveness of His killers it would be normal to assume that they had committed the unpardonable offense against Christ and against God. Jesus makes it clear that God is eager to forgive sinners, even those that committed the worst crime ever.

Christ's second utterance from the cross marks the first glorious fulfillment for the answer to His prayer for the forgiveness of those who participated in His death. Hours of agony passed on the cross, thieves were crucified as the text says, "On each side of Him, and they began mocking Jesus and as the hours went on one of them began to see a change of heart," a tremendous miracle was taking place in the heart of one of those thieves. Jesus was well known in the land of Israel, certainly the thief had known the reputation of Jesus, perhaps had even seen His miracles, heard His claims, this thoroughly degenerate career criminal devoted to thievery and mayhem, this I suppose you would say in the modern vernacular, bad to the bone kind of wickedness that pervaded the life of this man, began to grip his soul and in his dying moments he became penitent over his life. He became convinced that Jesus was the Savior that Jesus was who He claimed to be, he makes the statement this man has done nothing wrong and he says we're here because we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. This man hasn't done anything wrong, he declares the innocence of Jesus, he declares his own guilt and than he turns to Jesus confessing Him as Lord. He says to Him, "Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

Then Jesus uttered His second statement from the cross, "As surely I say to you, today You will be with Me in paradise." No sinner was ever given more explicit assurance of salvation then to hear it from the mouth of Jesus. No sinner had less opportunity to gain salvation by any works, he couldn't have done any, he couldn't have completed a single religious ceremony, he couldn't have engaged in a single good deed. He certainly could not have undone a life of crime and wickedness. He received immediate, unconditional entrance into the Kingdom of the Son of God, this is justification by faith. Faith is all the Lord asked, not works, and He embraced and that very day he was welcomed into the paradise of God. He could do nothing to merit his salvation but that's all right because neither can you and neither can I.

Nothing we do is meritorious. He had no hope of earning Christ's favor. His request was a desperate, last ditch, end of the rope plea for a mercy he knew he didn't deserve. He was like the public in beating in chest who wouldn't even lift up his eyes to Heaven for fear that God might look in his face and he would be consumed for his sin and cried out, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner."

Jesus words to this dying thief conveyed to Him an unqualified promise of complete forgiveness and entrance into Heaven based upon nothing he had done but only upon his desperate penitence and affirmation that Jesus was the Lord. That was all Christ needed to say and that was all He said. Isn't it an amazing to think about? The Savior beside the thief was bearing the judgment of God for that thief's sins right beside Him and Christ transferred His righteousness to that thief whose sins had been transferred to Him and today they're together and they have been since then in paradise.

The pain of watching Jesus die must have been agonizing for Jesus loved ones, but no more agonizing then for Mary his mother, his earthly mother. In fact, it was years before His birth, years before I should say at his birth that the elderly Simian, you remember, met Mary when she brought

Jesus to the temple to be dedicated as a baby. Simian said to her, "Behold this child is destined for the fall and the rise of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against." Then Simian said this to her, "Yes a sword will pierce through your own soul also."

This was a prophecy of Mary's pain, of Mary's suffering, and here it was. As Mary stood at the foot of the cross the sword that had been promised so long ago was now through her heart. She knew Jesus better then anybody on the earth, she knew his utter perfection. A mother knows a child like no one knows a child and she watched her son being treated with contempt and hatred, spit upon, crushed with a crown of thorns, beaten, whipped, mocked, abused, she saw him as a bleeding emaciated form hanging helplessly on the cross of wood by the wounds of the nails driven through his flesh. She watched his agony, she watched his sorrow, she watched his pain, and the sword went through her heart.

But she didn't shriek, she didn't crumple in hysteria, she didn't run in terror, she didn't fall into a faint at the horrible sight, she stood there as a model of confidence and courage. Certainly trust in the unfolding purpose of God, which at that point must not have seemed too hopeful. From the cross Jesus looked down and He saw her standing there and grieving and His third saying from the cross reflects the tender love of a son for his mother.

John records, when Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by he said to His mother, "Woman behold Your Son." Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother," and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. When Jesus said, "Behold your son," He was not saying look at me, He no doubt moved His head at John who was standing there, the Apostle John, the Beloved Apostle. He was saying, Mary I'm giving you a new son to care for you, to provide for you, to protect you. He was delegating to John the responsibility to care for Mary.

Although he was there dying in the most excruciating kind of anguish physically, and even more then that the excruciating wait of the judgment of God upon the sinless as if He had committed all the sins of all of the people who ever believed, there He was in all that excruciating anguish, always the King of Love, selflessly turning aside to care for the earthly needs of those who stood at the foot of the cross for whom He felt responsible.

Notice He said to her, "Woman," nowhere in the Scripture is it ever recorded that Jesus called Mary "mother." She was His earthly mother; He never called her mother, he always called her woman. It was as if He was underscoring the fact that He was to Mary much more then a Son and the relationship that mattered between them was not the relationship between a mother and a son, but between a sinner and a Savior. He was her Savior and she said that in her magnificant.

Mary was no sinless co-redemptrix. She was as dependent on divine grace as the thief was. The thief had no opportunity to merit salvation. Mary had plenty of opportunity and though she was blessed

among women and no doubt as noble as a godly young Hebrew girl could be, she needed forgiveness just like the thief. No one is good enough. Christ Himself rebuked those who wanted to elevate Mary to a place of extraordinary veneration. A certain woman said to him one day, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which nursed you," and Jesus answered this way, "More then that blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it."

In other words, He was saying much more important then any relationship on a physical level is the relationship on the spiritual level. Mary was blessed because she was obedient to the Word of God the same as any other believer. The question has been asked through the years, why wouldn't Jesus commit Mary to her other children? Mary had a number of children with Joseph. Jesus had no earthly father you remember. The Spirit of God came upon Mary before they were actually consummated in marriage, she and Joseph, and He was born when Mary was a virgin and the miraculous parthenogenesis, but later Joseph and Mary had a number of children. They are named in the Bible James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, at least four brothers, why didn't He commit her to them?

Well the obvious answer is in John chapter 7, verse 5, it says, "His brothers did not believe in Him." They didn't believe in Him. Well eventually they did after the resurrection, but at this time they didn't believe in Him and so He commits his mother into the care of one who does, the beloved Apostle John. By the way, when you get into the books of Acts and its Pentecost and the believers are assembled in that group for prayer in the upper room it says, "They were all there in one accord and prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers." So after the resurrection they came to faith but here they have not yet believed and here is the King of love again caring for His mother.

Christ's fourth saying from the cross is by far the richest in terms of mystery and meaning. Matthew records that Jesus said this, "*Eloi, Eloi lema sabachthani*," this was after the sixth hour until the ninth hour, darkness over all the land and it's the ninth hour and Jesus cries out with a loud voice, it's 3:00 in the afternoon, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" the fourth saying. It's a fulfillment of Psalm 22:1 which says, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?"

The prophet saw the Messiah hanging there and there He was, and He said what the prophet said He would say. What does he mean by this? Well we'll never be able to plumb the full depths of it, but as Christ was hanging there bearing the sins of the whole world, dying as a substitute for sinners, to Him was imputed all the guilt of their sins and He was suffering the punishment of the wrath of God for all the sins of all who would ever believe. God is literally pouring out divine wrath on Christ and in that sense, He is forsaken by God. In some mysterious way during those awful hours on the cross, as the Father pours out the full fury of His wrath against sin on His own beloved Son, the Son feels forsaken.

By the way, beloved, that is the true meaning of the cross. What was happening on the cross? God was punishing His own Son for our sins, and in that sense He was forsaken by God. They had the

purest and most inexplicably divine relationship of oneness that exists eternally within the trinity. Never had their been a split second of separation or even disagreement, or alienation, or offense or anything else that's so much a part of human relationships.

Now, all of a sudden, God is furious with him. God is so furious with Him that He lets loose all the forces of divine judgment on His head. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our inequities, the chastisement from God for our peace with God was on Him and by His strife's we are healed." He suffered the just suffering for the unjust.

It was a punishment I don't even know how to explain it. One way to understand it would be this, that a mortal man could spend all eternity in the torments of hell and never begin to exhaust the divine wrath that was heaped on Christ in those few hours. It wasn't the physical pain of crucifixion dreadful as it was, that was the crushing reality, it was the wrath of His Father. I think if you're a child who loves your father and desires to please your father you can grasp what the full fury even on a human level would mean and how it would crush your heart, your tender heart of love and make you feel forsaken. Well multiply that by infinity and you have the torment of being forsaken on the cross. No wonder He said, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" And you could say why, because He was sinless.

The fifth word that Jesus said was just that, a word, "I thirst, I thirst." As the end neared he uttered a final plea for some small physical relief. Earlier he had spit out the vinegar mixed with a pain killer that had been offered to Him because He wanted to feel the full sense of what He was doing. But now when He is at the very end He asks for relief from the horrible, horrible experience of total dehydration. He was given a sponge, that's all, saturated with pure vinegar and they put it on a little bush and put it up to His mouth, almost in a mocking gesture.

Here we see the true humanity of Jesus. God incarnate and yet thirsty and we need to see the true humanity of Jesus on the cross, this is no phantom dying here. This is no hallucination; this is a real man, the God man. John's account of the crucifixion continues, so when Jesus had received the sour wine He said, and here is His sixth statement one word, "Tetelestai, it is finished, it is finished."

The other night we were watching the crucifixion picture at Forest Lawn while the Master's Collegiate players were singing the Brahms Requiem and they show the picture and they dramatize - some of you have been there, they dramatize the account of the cross, voices speak and it's an amazing painting painted by _____, that's bigger then this building and the last thing that was said by the narrator was, "And it was over," and I wanted to jump and say, "No, it was finished! It wasn't just over, it was finished," but I restrained myself.

One of the reasons was I had Gracie on my lap and I couldn't get up. You know what it says in Luke 23:46 that He made this cry with a loud voice, He wasn't even out of strength. The work of redemption was finished and He was triumphant. It was finished and finished is what it is. You can add nothing to the work of Christ, not baptism, not religious ritual, not penance, not any human work whatsoever. There is no supplemental religious ceremony, or human work, or spiritual effort that ever could augment or improve the sufficient finished atonement that Christ accomplished on the cross. It is finished, the atoning work was done, the sacrifice was made, the provision for salvation was complete and it's yours by grace through faith as a gift.

Christ's final saying from the cross, right after, "It is finished," was a prayer that expressed the unqualified submission that had been in His heart from the very beginning. Luke records those final words, "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, having said Tetelestai," He then said, "Father into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this He breathed his last and Christ died as no other man ever died.

In one sense you could say He was murdered by the hands of wicked men, the Bible does say that. In another sense, you could say it was the Father who sent Him to the cross and bruised Him there, putting Him to grief, and it pleased the Father to do that, Scripture says that. But in another sense, no one took His life from Him. He said He made this claim, "No man takes My life from Me, I lay it down by Myself." He gave it up willingly for those He loved, for you and for me, and when He finally expired on the cross it was not with a wrenching struggle against the nails, it was not with a wrenching thrust upward and downward trying to grasp for some air as He was being asphyxiated as His body hanging limp suffocated his lungs. He didn't die displaying some frenzied death throes; His final passage into death like every aspect of the crucifixion drama was a deliberate act of His own sovereign will. John says he bowed His head and He gave up His spirit, quietly and submissively.

When He had finished taking all the wrath of God, He simply yielded up His life and thus Christ calmly and majestically displayed His utter sovereignty to the very end. It seemed to those who loved Him, even many who cared little for Him, a supreme tragedy, but it was the greatest moment of victory in the history of redemption and Christ would make that fact clear in three days when He rose from the dead.

Bow with me in prayer as we prepare to come to His Table. Father, we thank You for the amazing and glorious gift of Your Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. We thank You that we can receive the salvation provided in Him simply by confessing our sin and believing in Christ as our crucified and risen Redeemer. We thank You that You instituted this ordinance, this ceremony, this remembrance so that we would never forget the sacrifice of Christ. As we come now to take of the bread and the cup fill our hearts with gratitude in remembering and joy because of the gift of eternal life, forgiveness in Him.

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