

## THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST

### Sermon for Good Friday 2019

**Luke 23:34; Luke 23:43; John 19:26-27; Matthew 27:46; John 19:28; John 19:30; Luke 23:46**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the collection of the seven last words of Christ, taken from the Gospels:

**“Father, forgive them! For they do not know what they are doing.”** Luke 23:34

**“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”** Luke 23:43

**“Woman, there is your son.” “There is your mother.”** John 19:26-27

**“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”** which means, **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** Matthew 27:46

**“I thirst.”** John 19:28

**“It is finished!”** John 19:30

**“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”** Luke 23:46

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Now hanging on the cross, bleeding and naked and in complete agony and humiliation - surely no one wants to take Jesus' place.

Earlier, as the crowds jeered at Him, Jesus was subjected to a horrific beating, before being made to carry His own cross until Simon from Cyrene was forced to take over.<sup>1</sup> Now, being held to the cross with nails and gasping for breath, Jesus manages seven last words before He breathes His last.

Perhaps the greatest travesty of Jesus' crucifixion is that while He is executed as a criminal, He isn't guilty of anything at all. He has done nothing wrong - even Pilate had to admit that.<sup>2</sup> Still, He has to die. Why? Jesus has to die for sin, but not His own. Whose, then? We heard it before from Isaiah, *“<sup>4</sup> Surely, He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed. <sup>6</sup> We have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,”* (Is. 53:4-6).

Jesus bears all our griefs and sorrows and sins and iniquities. He is afflicted for our sins - the ones that still trouble us, keeping us up at night, as well as the ones we commit without any thought whatsoever to the consequences. He bears our infirmities to the cross: Sin brings death, and so He suffers the destruction of His health and body as part of the wages of sin. He is not hanging there suffering for Himself, but for us.

What shall we say about all this, then?

Many have different ideas of what to say. In our ever increasingly wicked society, many think that we shouldn't say anything because any talk of death and bloodshed are too disturbing. However, to remain quiet is to deny the truth that each one of us must endure death, and to turn our back on the crucified One is to *reject* our only hope for life.

Others will say that Christ's death should have no great effect on us whatsoever - His death is just one unjust death among many, and all this talk about Him bearing our sins is nothing more than a tool used by the church to subdue us or to make us feel bad about ourselves. So, don't say anything and don't bother going to church. However, if that's the case, then we are still lost in our sins.

Still, others will go the opposite way, pointing to the cross and using it to drive people into the ground with shame. *“He suffers there because of you! It's all your fault! Now, finally, maybe you'll clean up your act and be a better person!”* If that's the case, then we had better say that from now on we shall all strive to do better. However, if that's

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26

<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:14

the case, then it means God subjected His Son to death only as an example - to guilt us into being better; He punished His Son *to make us feel bad*.

So, as we look at the cross, what shall we say?

We must listen to what Jesus says. We must listen to this dying Man's last words, listening to what He has to say from the cross. See how great His desire is to speak! Sinful man has nailed His hands and feet so that He cannot move to touch and heal. Jesus is offered wine mixed with gall in order to ease the pain but refuses the anaesthetic so that He may speak to you.<sup>3</sup>

Hear the Son of God as first He says: **“Father, forgive them! For they do not know what they are doing.”**

How wonderful is this prayer! One could use Jesus' death as the ultimate indictment of mankind: First, sinful man rebelled against God in the Garden - and now they kill His Son. This proves that man deserves destruction! However, Christ does not die to seal our fate and condemn us. Even as He is lifted up, He announces that He dies so that we may be forgiven.

Jesus speaks a second time, this time to the penitent criminal, and promises, **“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”**

We must cling to these words, for when death draws near, the devil will try to haunt us with memories of sin and questions of worthiness: *“Have I been good enough that God will save me?”* Therefore, remember these words spoken to that criminal, to a man who had wasted his life preying upon others, and now had no time left to make up for it. Although he did not deserve it, Jesus delivers him with a word of absolution. So, on our own deathbed, He says to us, *“You do not have salvation because of you, but because of Me. Because I have died, Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

Jesus speaks a third time, this time to His mother Mary and His disciple, John. He says to Mary, **“Woman, there is your son,”** and to John, He says, **“There is your mother.”**

Here we find wonderful comfort. Even as His weight pulls upon the nails that hold His hands to the beam and His scourged back rubs raw on the post, Jesus cares for His mother. Even then, He is still at work to keep the commandments. We have no hope of salvation by our keeping of God's Law, for we have not kept it perfectly; but we do have hope of salvation because Jesus has kept the Law perfectly for us - even as His blood is shed.

Near the end, He speaks a fourth time: **“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”** which means, **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”**

After standing in the presence of His Father from eternity, Jesus is now abandoned by His Father and suffers hell on that cross. It is a horrific suffering, so why does God forsake His Son? So that He will not forsake us. Jesus suffers that abandonment for us and our sin. Because He has been forsaken at the cross, the risen Son now promises, *“I shall never leave you or forsake you,”* (Heb. 13:5).

Again, He speaks a short fifth word: **“I thirst.”**

This goes well with the fourth word we just heard. The Saviour has come to give life; and time and time again within Scripture, that life is described as living water which refreshes forever.<sup>4</sup> At the cross, the Lord has taken the sinner's place in judgment and death; therefore He has no life left, and so He thirsts for living water. Again, why does He thirst? He is thirsting in our place, forsaken by God so that we may be delivered.

Through the first five words, the Lord Jesus declares that He is on that cross in our place for the forgiveness of sins. Yet while He is suffering our judgment and dying our death, these are not His last words. His sixth word is one of great comfort. He says, **“It is finished!”**

What is finished? Nothing more than the plan of redemption, the full payment for our sin. Christ has paid that in full for the sins of the world, and He will not suffer for it anymore, ever again. Neither will we, for when Jesus announces, **“It is finished,”** He declares to us that there is no more work to be done. It is not left to us to do half the job, to earn

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23

<sup>4</sup> cf. Is. 35:6; John 4:10

this forgiveness by our own efforts and merit. Rather, salvation is a gift of God, not of works; therefore we can be sure that we are delivered.

He speaks one last time as He breathes His last: **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”**

We must treasure these words. The Son was forsaken by His Father, but no longer. As He dies, He is once again in His Father’s care. He dies with the glad confidence, *“I shall not die, but live, and I shall proclaim what the LORD has done,”* (Ps. 118:17). Risen again, He declares these works to us so that we may know of our salvation.

That’s what He says while He is bleeding and dying on the cross. He does not call down curses upon us from heaven, nor does He want His death to make us collapse in despair at our sin. So, what shall we say?

How about this: *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”* (1 Cor. 15:57). Thanks be to God for the Sacrifice of His Son! This cross is our redemption - it is Gospel, not Law. By His death, our Lord has mercy upon us. By His death, He delivers us. By His cross and passion, He redeems the world. For all this, we say, *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”*

Furthermore, not wanting this great Sacrifice to go to waste, we pray, *“For Jesus’ sake, forgive us our sins.”* We must not run away from Golgotha because death is emotionally upsetting. You and I shall each face our own death eventually, so face this one now - for Jesus’ death is our life. At the cross, He fulfils the prophecy made through Hosea, *“I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol. I shall redeem them from death. Death, where are your stings? Sheol, where is your destruction?”* (13:14). Jesus’ death is our comfort in death, for He is the firstfruits of the resurrection. If He is the firstfruits, then there are more to follow. As Christ is risen from the dead, so He will raise us from the dead.

Do not leave this hill with an uncaring heart, as if Christ’s death is a prop for the guilt that you only perceive. No, this death is redemption from sin and guilt that we actually have that would consign us to God’s judgment forever. The guilt we have is real; but so is the forgiveness that Christ wins here, and *“the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin,”* (1 John 1:7).

Do not leave this hill thinking that Jesus died to motivate us to do better. That was not His purpose; instead, He died because we could not be obedient as God commanded. Instead, rejoice that, on account of His death, Christ has forgiven us all of our sins, and, because we are forgiven, good works will follow.

Finally, do not leave this hill with only mourning and sadness. Christ does not die there to leave us in grief, but to deliver us into God’s presence and the fullness of joy. Calvary is hardly a happy sight, but we know by now that the greatest joys that God gives are often masked in a shadow of pain and sorrow. The cross of Jesus brings life for all who believe, but that life is gained through His suffering and death. So also, the death of a Christian means deliverance from affliction to eternal life, yet we are left with grief until we are delivered.

There is no doubt: Golgotha is an ugly hill on a darkened day with an innocent Man crucified. Thus, we have a solemn celebration today. However, do not mistake that solemnity for despair. As we peer at our Saviour on the cross, what more can we say but *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”* His dying on the cross means that all our sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY

O God the Father Almighty, we praise You for Your eternal wisdom and mercy, in which You ordained that Your Son should be the sacrifice for our sin. We praise You that, by His being lifted up on the cross, He draws all people to Himself, taking away their iniquity, and granting them peace.

In this holy hour we thank and praise You for His sacrificial love, for His perfect obedience, for His patience in suffering, for His willingness to endure even the cross, and for His submission to death.

Help us to see, in the darkness that accompanied His dying, in the shaking of the earth, and in the splitting of the rocks, how great an evil was done by sinful people, how great a life was ended, and how great a death was inflicted. But through the tearing open of the veil of the Temple, and the opening of the graves of the saints, show us our sure entrance into the heavenly Holy of holies.

We thank You, O Father, for all that Jesus Your Son, our Lord, has done, for all that He has suffered, for all that He has given us, and for all that He has promised us.. We bow in adoration, and offer our prayers from the depths of grateful hearts. We join with the angels and with all Your redeemed people of every race, tribe, nation, and language in raising our song of thanksgiving: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise for ever.”

As we remember our Saviour’s passion, grant that we may treasure the things that belong to our salvation. As we remember His suffering, make us ready to pass through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God. As we remember His wounds, equip us to cope with every painful struggle. As we remember His crucifixion, teach us to crucify our worthless passions and desires. As we remember His death, help us to be ready to place our spirit in Your hands. As we remember His burial, help us to remember that He has transformed the graves of all His believers.

We rejoice, O Father, that we have received Your mercy and seen Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Give us Your continuing grace through Him who died and rose again for us, and who reigns as the Lamb on the throne for ever and ever. Amen.

### GOOD FRIDAY

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

<sup>13</sup> “Look! My Servant will be successful. He will be high, be lifted up and be highly exalted. <sup>14</sup> As there have been many who have been horrified because of You, — since His appearance has been more disfigured than any other man and His form more than any other human being, — <sup>15</sup> so He will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For they will see what they had not been told and will understand what they had not heard.”

<sup>53:1</sup> Who has believed our Message? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> He grew up before Him like a young shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him. He had nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we thought of Him as nothing. <sup>4</sup> Surely, He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed. <sup>6</sup> We have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> Although He was oppressed and afflicted, He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and, as a ewe is silent before those who shear off her wool, so He did not open His mouth. <sup>8</sup> He was taken away through oppression and without justice. As for His generation, who considered that He was cut off from the land of

the living? Because of the rebellion of my people He was struck down. <sup>9</sup> He assigned His grave with wicked people but was with a rich man in His death, although He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth. <sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it was the will of the LORD to crush Him with suffering. When You make His life a sacrifice for guilt, He will see His offspring. He will have a long life, and the will of the LORD will be successful in His hand. <sup>11</sup> Because of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied.

“Through His knowledge, My righteous Servant will justify many and bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, I shall divide Him a portion among great people, and He will divide the plunder with strong people, because He poured out His life to death and was numbered with wrongdoers. Nevertheless, He has carried the sin of many people and intercedes for the wrongdoers.”

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us cling to what we confess! <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it! ...

<sup>5:7</sup> During His days in the human nature, Jesus offered prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to the One who could save Him from death; and, because He feared God, He was heard. <sup>8</sup> Although Jesus is the Son, He learned obedience from the things that He suffered. <sup>9</sup> When He was perfected, He also became the Source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, <sup>10</sup> after He

had been proclaimed by God to be the High Priest, “just like Melchizedek.”

John 19:17-30

<sup>17</sup> Jesus went out, carrying His own cross, to the place that was called “the Place of the Skull,” which is called “Golgotha” in Aramaic. <sup>18</sup> There they crucified Him with two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle.

<sup>19</sup> Pilate also wrote a notice and put it on the cross. It read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, many Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The notice had been written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the High Priests of the Jews told Pilate, “Do not write: ‘The King of the Jews,’ but: ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews!’”

<sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

<sup>23</sup> When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His outer garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, and the undergarment. The undergarment was without a seam, woven from the top in one piece. <sup>24</sup> Therefore, they said to one another, “Let us not tear it but let us throw dice for it, to decide who will get it!”

This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled that says: “They divided My outer garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.”

So, that is what the soldiers did.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus’ mother, His mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing near the cross of Jesus.

<sup>26</sup> Therefore, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, there is your son.” <sup>27</sup> Then He said to the disciple, “There is your mother.”

From that time on, this disciple took her into his own home.

<sup>28</sup> After this, knowing that everything had now been finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

<sup>29</sup> A jar full of sour wine had been placed there. So, they put a sponge full of the sour wine on hyssop and lifted it to His mouth.

<sup>30</sup> When Jesus had taken the sour wine, He said, “It is finished.”

Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.