

The Word of Forgiveness

Luke 23:33-34

Last words are often long remembered. For those we love last words are always treasured. Often they are a distillation of their life. From the pulpit of Calvary, upon the Cross Christ spoke seven times. In each instance an ocean of redemptive truth is distilled into a drop of divine speech. Please turn with me to Christ's last words from the Hill called Calvary, from a cross of wood where mankind murdered his Maker! Luke 23:33-34 record the first of these words.

The Cross, that ignominious monument to mankind's hatred, was transformed into the most powerful pulpit of the world by Christ's as he declares the Seven Dying Words of Life.

Remember that long, dark pathway to the Cross? It started in the night watches in Gethsemane. Then through the dark came the flash of the light of the torches piercing groanings and bloody sweat of Christ's prayers.

That cold and wicked kiss of the traitor and the hasty arrest.

Still in the darkness of night, the illegal and contrived arraignment before the high priests, followed by the hours of waiting, and of tension.

Then the appearances of Jesus in the morning before the high priests and the council.

Following this Jesus is ignominiously dragged to the palace of the Roman governor where that strange interview transpired between Jesus and Pilate, withdrawn from the rabble into some quiet apartment.

Across the old city Christ journeys from the house of Pilate to the palace of Herod. At last, the first and final meeting with Herod, the corrupt, the depraved, Herod who had so often sought an interview with Him, and had never obtained it until that last hour, Herod who never heard the voice of Jesus, for to his curiosity Christ vouchsafed no single word.

Then began Christ's rough handling at the hatred of Herod's brutal soldiery until the journey back to Pilate.

The awful scenes through which Pilate strove to save Him, while priests and people clamoured for His blood.

The scourging.

The pathway to the Cross.

The crucifixion.

Hours into which eternities were compressed! Through all in silence He endured the Cross, despising the shame; in silence, with no word of complaint and no word expressive of pain, Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (NIV)

Remember Christ had been acquitted by the highest court of appeal but He is still subjected to the cruelest of punishment.

- Seized by calloused Roman soldiers
- rudely stripped
- harshly pushed onto a rough and filthy wooden beam
- cruelly pierced by Roman spikes
- raised aloft to be seen by all on an instrument of horror and torture

But in the midst of all that there is a stir, the prisoner held by spikes, thorns and bleeding wound is about to speak to His cruel tormentors. His lips begin to move . . .

Historians have recorded the words of some of the other 30,000 who were crucified in Roman Palestine. David Smith says "it was usual for the victims of that dreaded doom, frenzied by pain, to shriek, entreat, spit and curse the spectators." But listen to the first words from the lips of Jesus. Does He -

Plead His innocence?

Condemn their Ignorance?

Promise God's Vengeance?

Hurl Vicious Threats?

Beg them for Mercy?

This morning let's turn there and listen to Jesus speaking from the Cross. Luke 23 records this

No, He just continues that habit of a lifetime, HE PRAYS! The first word from the cross is Luke 23:33-34 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals -- one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (NIV) Jesus spoke His first word from the Cross as a prayer. That First word from the Cross is the word of Forgiveness. In Matthew Jesus promises at the Lord's Table this forgiveness. Matthew 26:28 "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (NKJV)

The Word of Forgiveness "Father forgive them" showing His pity toward sinners. Jesus' first word from the Cross was a prayer. It was prophesied:

✓ Isaiah 53:12 *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because 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.*

It was just like He taught. Jesus first prayed for His enemies like He had taught in the Sermon on the mount now He does

✓ Matthew 5:44 *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*

And this was no small prayer, as the tenses point out He kept saying! Forgiveness has two parts: it must be accepted as well as bestowed. Jesus made it available to all but this offer was not availed except by the few! So Jesus was praying for His enemies, for sinful humanity as a Faithful High priest!

NOT FOR HIMSELF BUT FOR OTHERS HE PRAYS!

To the end of His life, at the hour of death His life long communion with God continues.

- No longer can He touch the sick and infirm to heal them, He is NAILED!
- No longer can He open those sightless eyes to see His truth, He is DYING!
- No longer can He multiply loaves and fish to picture eternal food, He is ALONE!

So what does He do? He speaks a Word of Forgiveness. For a moment listen to the heart of Charles Wesley reflected in the hymn Arise my soul arise.

Arise my soul arise,
Shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice,
In my behalf appears;
Before the throne my surety stand,
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above,
For me to intercede;
His all redeeming love,
His precious blood to plead;
His blood atoned for all our race,
and sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me;
Forgive him, O, forgive they cry,
Nor let that ransomed sinner die.

The Father hears Him pray,
His dear anointed One;
He can not turn away,
The presence of His Son;
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And Father, Abba Father, cry.

Back to our text in Luke 23:33-34 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals -- one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (NIV) and see with me four components of Christ's word of forgiveness.

First He said, "FATHER" this is Christ **AFFIRMING HIS RELATIONSHIP**. Nothing on earth could rob Him of His sonship. Nothing on earth can take it from us either! Crush His body, torture all you want, His faith was secure. So we are more than conquerors even to death, by Christ. His relationship was with the Father and no circumstance could change that. We must never let circumstances rob us of our joy!

Second, He said "FORGIVE THEM" this was Christ **ASKING**. Isaiah prophesied this 600 years before the Cross in 53:12. Jesus taught this as the way of life for His Kingdom children in Matthew 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (NIV). The tense of the greek verb speaks of repeated request. "Jesus **kept** saying, Father forgive them". Thirdly, He said "FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO" this is Christ APPORTIONING. He is limiting the forgiveness. Why? Because - Satan knew what he was doing Judas did too Pilate coldly calculated what was best for himself, making the wrong choice willfully Sanhedrin [or all but two] wanted to put out the light of the world. But those unaware of the enormity of their crimes, He offers a word of forgiveness. This made it available but so few availed themselves of it.

Finally we see God answering in three beautiful portraits of His forgiving grace:

- ✓ **THE CENTURION** Luke 23:47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." (NIV)
- ✓ **THE 3,000 AT PENTECOST** were not a response to an eloquent Peter but to a praying Christ! Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (NIV)

- ✓ **THE GREAT NUMBER OF PRIESTS** were very likely present that day in unbelief. Acts 6:7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (NIV)

So Christ spoke His first word from the Cross. It was the word of forgiveness. God answered beautifully then. He is still answering by forgiving sinners like you and me and then inviting us Matthew 26:28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (NIV)

The first three words are direct toward people the last four toward God.

THE SEVEN WORDS

1. **THE WORD OF FORGIVENESS** "Father forgive them" showing His pity toward sinners. Luke 23:33-34 *And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.* Jesus' first word from the Cross was a prayer. Isaiah 53:12 *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because 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.* Jesus first prayed for As Jesus had taught in the Sermon on the mount now He does Matthew 5:44 *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,* and as the tenses point out He kept saying! Forgiveness has two parts: it must be accepted as well as bestowed. Jesus made it available to all but this offer was not availed except by the few! So Jesus was praying for His enemies, for sinful humanity as a Faithful High priest!
2. **THE WORD OF ASSURANCE** "Today" as King of Glory toward a seeking believer showing His Power toward saints. Jesus comforts the penitent. Luke 23:43 *And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*
 - ✓ It is amazing how clearly God spotlights the spotless character of His Son. Pilate said "find no fault", Judas said "Betrayed innocent blood", Pilate's wife said "nothing to do with this just man" and now the thief "done nothing amiss"! Jesus was the spotless lamb who died for us spotted sinners.
 - ✓ Note also how clearly this thief could see. In death he saw life in Jesus; in his personal ruin he saw majesty in Jesus; in his hour of shame he saw glory in Jesus; in his moment of defeat, he saw victory in Jesus; and in his moment of slavery he saw the royalty of Jesus!
3. **THE WORD OF DEVOTION** "Woman" as Jesus demonstrates His provision for those He loves. John 19:26-27 *When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!"27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*
4. **THE WORD OF ANGUISH** "My God" as He expresses His spiritual anguish bearing sin. Mark 15:34 *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi,*

Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

5. **THE WORD OF AGONY** "I Thirst" as He reminds us of His painful agony borne for us. This is the shortest utterance dipso in Greek. John 19:28 *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"*
6. **THE WORD OF TRIUMPH** "It is Finished" as He declares His triumph over sin. He finished spiritually all the work of redemption. John 19:30 *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*
7. **THE WORD OF CONFIDENCE** "Father" as He declares His triumph over death! He finished physically all the work of redemption. Luke 23:46 *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.*

This Easter morning Jesus speaks from the Hill called Calvary. His words ring out loud and clear: forgiven, secured, cared for, suffering, fulfilling, triumphing and resting!

HE SPOKE A WORD OF FORGIVENESS so we can know we are forgiven.

HE SPOKE A WORD OF ASSURANCE so we can know we are heaven bound.

HE SPOKE A WORD OF DEVOTION so we can know we are not going alone.

HE SPOKE A WORD OF ANGUISH so we can know He feels our pains.

HE SPOKE A WORD OF AGONY so we can know He will never leave or forsake us.

HE SPOKE A WORD OF TRIUMPH so we can know that our salvation is secured and finished.

HE SPOKE A WORD OF CONFIDENCE so we can know we are accepted into the beloved!