

The Lamb's Last Words

The Passion of Christ – Part IX

John 19:25-30

Introduction

There is something very solemn about a person's last words. In the face of death, what a person truly thinks and is tends to come to the surface.

- Voltaire, the noted French infidel who had attempted, with his writings, to destroy the credibility of Christianity, said to his doctor, "I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth, if you will give me six more months of life."
- Thomas Hobbes, the skeptic who crusaded against Christianity in England and influenced much of the social and civil life of that country, cried out, "If I had the whole world, I would give it to live one day. I am about to take a leap into the dark."
- P. T. Barnum, of Barnum and Bailey, as he was dying, said these last words, "What were today's receipts?"
- John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said, "The best of all is, God is with us."
- Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, as his last words, "Jesus died for me."

Last words revealed the true nature of all of these men!

Today, I want to study with you the last words of the Lamb from the cross. They reveal who He is and why He hung upon a tree.

Christ is nailed to the cross at approximately 9:00 a.m. our time. The first three hours are spent in the sunlight of day. He will make his first three statements during this period of time.

Then comes the strange, miraculous, mysterious darkness and, for the next three hours, He hangs in silence. The silence is finally shattered with His heart rending cry, in Aramaic, ". . . 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'"

A little later, His words are, "I am thirsty," then, "It is finished," and, last of all, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

History records what we would expect – the typical individual who was crucified would alternate with raging and cursing, pleading and begging, and cursing again. By the time of Christ, some thirty thousand men had already been crucified by the Romans in Palestine alone.

Jesus Christ was different, however. He had lived for this moment – and everything He said had incredible significance.

I do not intend to cover everything – that would be impossible to do in several sermons – but I will discuss all seven of Jesus' last statements.

The First Words

The first words are,

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.

Luke's gospel, in chapter 23, verse 34, uses a tense that indicates this phrase was repeated over and over again.

You can imagine them nailing His wrists to the cross. He screams in pain, and then says, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

The record of Scripture tells us the soldiers mocked Him, the religious leaders jeered at Him, and both criminals, on either side, cursed Him. What was His response?! "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

He is acting as High Priest, interceding for sinful man. Sinful man, who because of the hardness of his heart, could not see that He truly was the Lamb of God.

When Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh were married, in 1947, many of the streets and parks of London were crowded with people, including royalty from all over the world. King Faisal II, the twelve year old King of Iraq, was there as well,

but was not dressed in his finery. He was really more interested in the prancing horses. When he pushed his way through the line of policemen to get a better view of the stallions, he was handled roughly. The next day, an apology was printed in the newspapers, saying, “King Faisal, we didn’t know who you were.”

The Second Words

The second statement is found in Luke, chapter 23, verses 39 through 43.

We will start at verses 39 through 41.

And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

This is an amazing statement! He:

- admitted his guilt, in verse 41a, “. . . And we indeed justly . . .”,
- admitted he deserved punishment,
- declared, in the presence of all the accusers, that Christ was absolutely innocent!

What courage!

And think, for a moment, how little this criminal knew about Jesus Christ. There are many people who have said to me, “Well, I’d like to trust Him, if I could just understand more about it.”

But look at what he says to Jesus, in verse 42, and at Jesus’ response in verse 43.

And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when you come in Your kingdom!” And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

What an incredible statement! This thief is promised heaven!

Realize that the first man that God created became a thief. Adam took from the tree that did not belong to him and was cast out of Paradise. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, who will recreate and transform mankind, now turns to a thief and says, “You’re welcome to My Paradise.”

Think of it – this thief was despicable; he was a sinner. But, he becomes an unbelievable lesson in

soteriology – the doctrine of salvation. He could not earn salvation; he could not do penance for his sins; he could not join a church; he could not be baptized by water; he could not do good deeds – the only thing he could do was receive the gift of salvation that Jesus had just promised him.

And, by the way, Jesus said, “. . . today . . .”.

Following death, you enter either heaven or hell, not purgatory, where you, slowly, by degrees, earn your way into Paradise – Jesus said, “. . . today . . .”!

Now, perhaps you are saying, “Hey, I’ll just wait until I’m much older before I get saved. I’ll postpone until the last opportunity.”

The truth is, this dying man was not saved at the last opportunity he had – he was saved at the first opportunity he had!

The Third Words

The third statement is recorded in John, chapter 19. Turn back to that chapter.

There were four women at the cross, including Mary, Jesus’ mother. Look at verses 26 and 27.

When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, you son.” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

Now the Roman church will, in their continued efforts to deify Mary, say that Jesus gave John the apostle to Mary, thus making her the patroness over him and all of the apostles, as well as every believer hence. The truth is, Jesus did the exact opposite, for verse 27b tells us, “. . . from that [very] hour the disciple took her into his own household.”

What Jesus is doing is taking care of his earthly responsibility to see that His mother is cared for. This is His last will and testament.

I read that the longest will ever probated was made up of four big volumes. There were over 95,000 words in it! The shortest will on record is recorded in Great Britain and has only three words.

Well, Jesus did not have any earthly possessions to give to anybody. The soldiers were, at that very moment, gambling for His clothing. The record of Scripture is silent where Joseph is concerned. We believe he had already died. The half brothers and sisters of Jesus did not even believe and they allowed

Mary to go through this agony without their support. So Jesus leaves the responsibility of caring for Mary up to John, the apostle He dearly loved.

After this statement, there will fall, across the land, darkness. For three hours, according to Matthew, chapter 27, verse 45, the light of the sun will somehow be blotted out, even though it is early afternoon.

We have every reason to believe that this darkness covered the entire world. The Greek word for “land” is “ge,” which has also been translated “earth”. It is interesting that in extra-biblical literature, there are references to a worldwide darkness on this day.

Three reasons for the three hours of darkness

More importantly, the purpose of the darkness was at least three-fold. It is never clearly spelled out in Scripture, but here are some suggestions:

A judgment

- The rabbis had long taught that the darkening of the sun was a judgment of God on the world for an unusually terrible sin. Can you imagine that God was using this now as an object lesson that humanity had just committed the most terrible crime of all time?

A symbol of mourning

- Darkness was also understood as a symbol of mourning. Amos wrote, in chapter 8, verses 9b and 10b,

. . . I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight. . . . I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son . . .

Imagine, the cross is draped in the mourning shroud of darkness.

A Passover symbol

- Darkness must also be understood in the context of the Passover. The Jews are celebrating the Passover – a time when Israel escaped from Egypt. You may remember the many plagues God sent on the Pharaoh. The ninth plague was a great darkness over the

land. For three days, Egypt was in darkness. It was darkness that preceded the killing of the Passover lamb, as each Israelite took a lamb, killed it, and sprinkled its blood on the doorways of their homes. The death angel was coming, and wherever there was the blood of the lamb, the death angel passed over that home and the firstborn was allowed to live.

The final Passover Lamb is about to die, so darkness covers the land, not for three days, but for three hours. During this time, the Lamb has become vile sin. He, who knew no sin, is experiencing the wrath of God the Father and the infinite penalty for sin.

The Fourth Words

Suddenly, Matthew recorded, in chapter 27, verse 46, that in the darkness,

. . . Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Jesus, the man, is experiencing a loss of intimacy that He had never known. Sin isolates; sin separates; sin is lonely agony!

One writer put it this way,

Jesus had never known a time when He was not His Father’s delight. Fellowship had never before been broken. But now it had.

Something else should be noted. The term “forsaken” is the same word Paul used when referring to Demas, who had deserted him. Why had the Father forsaken, or deserted, His Son? Because at that period of time, when Jesus took our sins upon Himself and paid the price of death on our behalf, God, who is holy, could not sustain fellowship with His Son. The full, crushing weight of sin, He bore alone.

Why? He was forsaken by the Father, so that we might never be forsaken by the Father. He went through darkness, so that we might live in the light. He went through isolation, so that we would never be alone. He suffered hell, so that we could enjoy heaven forever!!!!

The Fifth Words

The Lamb makes a fifth statement in verse 28 of John, chapter 19.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I am thirsty."

Jesus was offered something to drink twice during crucifixion.

The first time was from the godly women who had mixed gall with new wine – a drink that would work as an anesthetic. He refused it.

Then, as He cried out in thirst, John, chapter 19, verse 29, states,

A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth.

Sour wine was, by the way, the cheapest drink anywhere. A hyssop branch was around eighteen inches long. They used that not so they could reach Jesus' mouth, but in order to keep their hands away from his blood dripping face and blood drenched body.

Jesus began His ministry hungry in the wilderness – He ends His ministry thirsty! He, the One who had earlier, in John, chapter 7, verse 37b, said,

. . . If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

And, in John, chapter 4, verse 14a, said,

. . . whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst . . .

He could make that possible because He would very soon experience thirst from this slow torturous death.

Because Jesus experienced thirst, you and I will, one day, enjoy a place where thirst does not exist. Revelation, chapter 7, verse 16a, tells us,

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more . . .

The last invitation in the Bible, in Revelation, chapter 22, verse 17, invites all who thirst to come and take the water of life freely, saying,

. . . let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Warren Wiersbe was having dinner one evening with a friend. As so often happens in restaurants, the waitress came and asked, "Would you like something to drink from the bar?"

Wiersbe's friend very tenderly said, "Ma'am, over twenty years ago I took a drink, and I haven't been thirsty since."

Then he went on to tell her about the Lord Jesus who satisfied all thirst.

The question is not, "Do you have a thirst for spiritual reality?" because you do, the question is, "Have you come to the Lamb who invites you to drink from His well of living water?"

The Seventh Words

In a matter of moments, as recorded in Luke, chapter 23, verse 46b, Jesus will utter His last statement,

. . . Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.

The Sixth Words

But first, He shouts one Greek word, according to John, chapter 19, verse 30.

When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.

"It is finished!" – is one Greek word, "tetelestai!" The gospel records that this word was shouted!

Pink writes,

This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr; it was not an expression of satisfaction that the termination of his sufferings was now reached; it was not the last gasp of a worn-out life. No, this was the declaration on the part of the Divine Redeemer that all for which He came from heaven to earth to do, was now done; that all that was needed to reveal the full character of God had now been accomplished; that all that was required by the law before sinners could be saved had now been performed; that the full price of our redemption was now paid. To be sure, as Jesus spoke these words, He was not yet dead. But His death was only moments away and He speaks anticipatively of the work now done.

"Tetelestai!" – or literally, "It has been and it forever will be finished."

At age thirty three, most people are saying, "I'm just starting!"

Jesus said, "I've finished."

Notice that Jesus said, “It is finished!” not, “I am finished!” – for while He was finishing the work of atonement, He was beginning the new dispensation of grace!

Now the word, “tetelestai,” is foreign to our ears and our culture, but it was a common word in the day of Christ. It was used by:

- Servants.

A master would tell his servant to fulfill a task and then, when the servant had completed the job, he would come back and say, “tetelestai,” or “I’ve finished the task you gave me to do.”

Philippians, chapter 2, tells us that Christ came as a servant, not a sovereign – He performed the work the trinity had assigned for Him to do – and He finished it.

- Artists also.

When a Greek painter, or sculptor, completed his work, he would step back and say, “tetelestai,” – or “it is finished . . . the picture is completed!”

When Jesus Christ came, He completed the picture of God’s revelation. You may remember the two travelers on the Emmaus road. Jesus slipped into their company and, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, the Lord Jesus went through the Old Testament Scripture and explained the total picture. Calvary completed the picture! The canvass upon which God painted redemption’s scenes is now finished.

- Merchants as well.

To them, the word meant, “the debt is fully paid.” If you had purchased something, the merchant would take your money and then, would give you a receipt. That receipt would have written on it, “tetelestai,” or “you are the owner of the product; you’ve paid the price for it.”

You and I are in debt before God – the law is demanding payment. Paul tells us, in Romans, chapter 6, verse 23a, that the payment, or the wages, for sin is death. Jesus will make the payment and satisfy the price God demands for sin.

“It is finished” – the masterpiece has been painted, salvation has been purchased, so it can now be offered as a gift to you.

One writer said, “The great word of the gospel is not ‘do’ but ‘done’!”

All the other religions in the world will tell you that, if you will find eternal bliss, you must do something, attain to something, join something, give something, become something.

Alexander Wooten, a generation or two ago, was an interesting evangelist. One day, a man, whom he knew, came to him and, rather sarcastically said, “Wooten, tell me what I have to do to become a Christian.”

Wooten replied, “It’s too late.”

The man sobered up and said, “Wait a minute, what do you mean? Tell me, what do I have to do to become a Christian?”

Wooten said, “No really, it’s too late; it’s already been done.”

That is the message of this cross, ladies and gentlemen, the work of salvation is completed, “It is finished.”

In the Old Testament tabernacle, there were no chairs because the work of the priest was never finished. But Jesus Christ will soon ascend and sit down at the right hand of the Father – the work was finally finished!

What separates those who are saved from those who are not is the simple fact that some have come to the foot of the cross and admitted their helplessness and sinfulness and have received the free gift of eternal life, while others have not. Those who have not will try to work their way to heaven – or they will refuse to admit they need saving at all.

I remember reading a news story that the Associated Press carried from Florida. In rural Lake County, according to police reports, two elderly sisters drove around for two and a half days before their car finally bogged down in a muddy orange grove. The two ladies, one eighty and the other eighty four, had been on a shopping trip in a town that was just twenty miles from their home, where they lived together. Somewhere, on the return trip, however, the driver took a wrong turn. In an attempt to get back on the right road, the ladies, evidently, drove around in circles for over sixty straight hours. During that time, they did not stop to eat, nor even once to ask for help. The police, in attempting to retrace their journey, estimated that the two had traveled over two hundred miles while trying to reach their home, which was only twenty miles away.

Finally, they were discovered by a farmer. The car was hopelessly stuck, one sister was dead from

exposure, and the other was lying under an orange tree in critical condition. When later asked why they did not seek help or ask for directions, the surviving sister said, “Oh, we didn’t want to do that! We’ve always been so independent. We wouldn’t have dreamed of admitting we needed help.”

Did you know that the Bible declares that you are lost without Jesus Christ? Furthermore, you are traveling on a road that is heading for eternal death. But, Jesus Christ came into the world, according to Luke, chapter 19, verse 10, “. . . to seek and to save [those who are] lost” – even you!

When O. Henry, the writer of short stories, was dying, his final words were, “Have someone turn up the lights – I don’t want to go home in the dark.”

You never need to fear that, my friend, for Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has promised to shed abroad in your heart His light if you will believe in Him.

Listen to the words of the dying Lamb, the final Passover Lamb, the One who died, so that, forever, you and I might live!