

## **Words From the Cross**

**Luke 23:32-49**

By [Dr. James M. Baird](#)

Let's take our Bibles and open to the Gospel of Luke, the 23rd chapter of the Gospel of Luke. And as you are opening your Bibles, I'm sure that we all remember that atop the steeple of this church is the symbol of Christianity all over the world. And it raises this question: What is the meaning of the cross? If you were to be asked, "What does the cross mean?" It raises this question, "What does it mean to believe in the Christ of the cross?" It makes sense to me that we would find insight into those questions by examining what Christ said on the cross. Christ was nailed to the cross at 9:00 in the morning; He remained on the cross until 3:00 in the afternoon. In that period of 6 hours, He spoke seven times: they are called "the seven sayings of the cross"; they comprise just 53 English words. And I suggest to you the dying words of Christ from the cross have tremendous insight into what Christianity is, into what Jesus Christ is, into what it means to be a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. God give us understanding on this Good Friday evening. We turn to the Gospel of Luke, the 23rd chapter, and begin to read in the 32nd verse. None of the gospels have all of the sayings of Christ from the cross; this is perhaps the most complete account. We hear the word of God, verse 32:

### **Luke 23:32-49:**

32 And there were also two others, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death. 33 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. 34 Then said Jesus, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God." 36 And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, 37 And saying, "If thou be the king of the Jews, save Thyself." 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, "If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." 42 And he said unto

Jesus, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." 43 And Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." 44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 46 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. 47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous man." 48 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. 49 And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

### **I. Saying #1: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."**

Now again I suggest to you that we examine these sayings of the cross. And the first saying is when Christ was nailed to the cross, and the cross was placed in its hole and then was raised up, and the pain first came, also came the first words. The first words of Jesus Christ were, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Now it is not surprising that the Lord Jesus Christ prays, and in a sense it is not surprising what He prays, "Father, forgive them." On another mount...you see, Calvary was literally a mount outside the city walls of Jerusalem. On another mount in Galilee—we call it "the Sermon on the Mount"—and he had said to them, "Pray for those that spitefully use you and abuse you." He who had preached now practiced. And He looked upon those who crucified Him and He says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." "They know not what they do." What does that mean? I suggest to you that it means this: They knew what He claimed (there was a superscription above His head, "King of the Jews," in three languages); they knew what He was claiming (that He was their Messiah); they claimed, "You are a blasphemer." He says to the Father, 'Not that they are ignorant of My claims and of the rejection of Me as their Messiah; they know not what they do when they crucify Me and reject Me. They have no idea what it means.' And men to this day have no idea what it means. For there is One and One alone who introduces to men's hearts forgiveness. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me." He is the One who not only offers forgiveness at the hand of God, but the Spirit of Jesus Christ entering into our hearts offers forgiveness one to another. "They know not what they do." And so men would reject Him on this day saying, "It's alright if it works for you." They know not what they do when they reject Jesus Christ. He begins on the cross and He prays...Do you know what? This is Christianity. God heard that prayer, and within a matter of a month, thousands of those who crucified Him came in humble faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, thousands upon thousands. God heard that prayer and God forgave them. Christianity in the cross is forgiveness. There is so little of it in this world and it comes from Him.

## **II. Saying #2: “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”**

There is the second saying, and the second saying is in effect an answer to a prayer. The second saying from the cross is...there is a man who has said something to Him, and He says, “Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise.” Now this is the background of that saying: When Christ presents Himself as that Messiah, they mock and deride Him; not only by that sign above His head put there by Pilate, but also by the fact that pressed upon His head was a crown of thorns—thick, big thorns and pressed in. And they gave Him a robe which they would strip off Him. And for the side of the King, the scepter, they had a reed. They mocked Him, and the final mocking was when they put Him on the cross they hung Him between two criminals. And as He was before the two criminals, the crowd that was gathered before Him began to say, ‘If thou be the Christ, come on down. You saved others; you save Yourself. You come down; then maybe we’ll believe You.’ The crowd begins to take up that chant—men can be cruel. The nature of man is not sweet and light and sugar. As they railed upon Christ, one of the thieves takes it up also and turns to Christ and says, ‘If you really are the Christ, the Messiah, save Yourself. Come down from the cross, and save us.’ And he takes up the chant. So He’s got the crowd before Him, and He’s got one on His side chanting the same thing.

At that time, the other criminal leans across as far out as he can and looks at the other thief and in effect says, ‘Be quiet! You’re a criminal. We are here rightly so, but this man hath done nothing amiss.’ Obviously this man has heard (as did the multitude) the preaching and the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. After he has reprimanded the other thief, he then turns his eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ and he says to Him, “Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom, remember me.” It’s a request. It’s a prayer. The Lord Jesus Christ utters the second saying, “Verily, verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise.” This is Christianity; this is the cross: a man who is a sinner who, in the midst of many things wrong in his life says, not ‘if You have a kingdom’ but ‘when’—a statement of faith, a belief—‘when Thou comest into Thy kingdom, just please remember me.’ Christianity is Jesus Christ making a promise to him, and the promise is this: “Today [as we die]...Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise, in heaven. Christianity is the grace of God when a man prays, “Remember me.” Have you ever prayed like that? Have you ever asked Jesus Christ, “Remember me”? Have you heard Him say, “In paradise with Me”? Christianity is, “I’m gonna see my mother again, and I’m gonna see my father. And I’m gonna see my grandparents that I never saw in the flesh. I’m gonna see them.” Christianity is that I’m going to live past the grave...in paradise.

## **III. Saying #3: “Woman, behold thy son!” & “Son, behold thy mother.”**

The third saying that comes from the cross comes as One who is a lover. The Lord Jesus Christ that comes to the earth is not presented as a great king; He's presented as a baby in a manger. He is born unto a woman. As He hangs on that cross, His mother is there. Many were not there who should've been there, but she was there. From the cross He looks down and He sees His mother, Mary, and she is there at the foot of the cross.

By the way, interestingly enough, Christianity somehow has gone forward with the great power of the lives of women. Of the disciples apparently only one was at the cross, but the women were there. He looks upon His mother in the midst of all the pain. Christianity from the cross is this: Family, family. God begins in the book of Genesis with a family, a husband and a wife. When God is born into this world, He's born into a family. When He dies on the cross, He looks upon His mother that He will no longer be able to care for in the flesh, and He says unto her, "Woman," and the word in the Greek is a term of endearment. "Beloved lady, woman, behold thy son!" And I'm sure he casts His eyes from His mother to the apostle John, and then looking at John He says, "Son, behold thy mother." Be unto Mary as a son. What a message down through history and for our day.

You know what Christianity is? A love for your mother, a love for your father, a love for your wife, a love for your husband, a love for your children, and for children to love their mother, and for children to love their brother and their sister and to care for them. But the Spirit of Christ that is in the believer's heart says, "Mother, father, my sister, my brother." By the way, there was one other person there that would've gladly, gladly ministered unto Mary, but he could not, for you see he also was nailed to that cross. That was the one that had just been promised, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." Don't you know? If I could, what I would do. Let me ask you, You're not chained. Do you have the opportunity for your mother, for your father? Do you have the opportunity tonight for your family, for your sons and for your daughters? You're not chained, and Christ is alive in our hearts. Do not I do something for my family? That's Christianity; that's Jesus Christ; that's the cross.

#### **IV. Saying #4: "Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani?"**

The fourth saying from the cross is perhaps the most sublime, the deepest, the hardest to grasp. It occurred like this: After three hours on the cross and much carnival attitude, unbelievable hardness of heart, suddenly when it looked like God was no longer interested, and the devil had had his day...suddenly at high noon, blackness comes on the face of the earth and suddenly everybody knew, 'This is not a circus anymore. Something is occurring here.' And the darkness stayed so that men could not see except dimly for three hours. At the end of those three hours, in the darkness, suddenly a voice cries out (they knew whose voice that was), "Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why has

Thou forsaken Me?" "Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani?" What does that mean in terms of Christianity and of a loving God who cares?

Let's just pause a second. Let's engage ourselves in a little time of prayer. Let's just pray. Our God and Father, we pray now for one another and pray for strength and healing, pray for well-being spiritually and physically for all here and for all who especially need Thee, for peace in our hearts. And even now we pray for physical healing, physical healing, and we thank You. In the name of Jesus' Christ we pray. Amen.

Now Christ on the cross prays "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" – "What does that mean?" Let me suggest that it means not what some have interpreted it to mean, that we are talking about Christ literally being forsaken by His Father. There are some who have said, 'His friends had forgotten, Judas had forgotten, His people had turned against Him and forgotten, even God the Father had forgotten.' I suggest to you that that is not the proper interpretation. I suggest to you that He did not feel as though He were forsaken. I suggest to you that He was forsaken and there is an enormous difference. Isaiah said that all we like sheep have gone astray and the Lord would lay on Him the iniquity of us all. He who knew no sin became sin. In the Garden of Eden He prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass." Nevertheless, when He quoted, He quoted from the 22nd Psalm. We read from the 23rd Psalm tonight about the Shepherd who is my heavenly Father, but the 22nd Psalm is the Psalm that begins, "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken me?" He literally was forsaken of God, separated from God. We proclaim it on Sunday when we use the Apostles' Creed saying, "He descended into Hell." I suggest to you that on that cross, He descended into Hell; that everything in terms of sin was rested and laid upon Him. And He descended and was separated from the Father: that's what Hell is.

Now here is the good news. You'll never have to say, "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" because our sins were dealt with by God on the cross through the Lord Jesus Christ, and He went to Hell so that I would never have to go to Hell, so that I would never have to say, "Why am I forsaken of Thee?" He says unto me, "I'll never leave you. I will never forsake you" because Christ made an atonement on the cross so that I could be with Him forever. That's the gospel, that is the greatest message that man has ever heard: that Christ took upon Himself that which belongs to me that I can be with God forever.

#### **V. Fifth Saying: "I thirst."**

Out of that darkness there comes the fifth saying from the cross, and the fifth saying from the cross is one that is emphasized all through the Scripture. In the darkness they hear the voice say, "I thirst. I thirst." There are some who would give Him vinegar and He rejects it; vinegar would be a pain repellent. The cross was an instrument of extreme torture. The suffering of Jesus Christ, the suffering

of the cross is probably the most torturous instrument that man has ever invented. Interestingly enough, it is the cross that becomes the symbol of Christianity because of that One who died on that cross. He was nailed by the feet and by the arms. One literally suffocated, and the only way that one kept from suffocating was by pushing up on the nails in their feet to get a breath of air and falling back, doing that over and over and over again. And He cries out finally, "I thirst."

I was once with a minister and he told me this story. He said, "At the age of 29, in the ministry, my beloved wife died suddenly. And in that period of time, many men came to me and extended love to me and said to me 'John, we love you. God loves you. I know what you're going through.'" And he said, "I appreciated it and I appreciated it." There came a man and he said, "John, God loves you. I know what you're going through. God will see you through it." And he said, "I reached out and I grabbed him, and I held him to my chest and squeezed him for all life because six months previous, at about the same age, his wife had dropped dead. He knew what I was going through, these others really didn't." When Marie Antoinette, as queen of France, was told that the people were starving to death and there was no bread, she simply said, not understanding how anybody could be without, "Give them cake." She had no idea.

There are people who have no idea of what some go through. Our Savior was not only truly God; He was truly man and when He said, "I thirst," He was saying, 'I'm a man.' The second chapter of Hebrews ends by saying, "He is a true high priest because He understands what we have gone through, and He alone is able to offer comfort because He suffered as we do." If there is a man here tonight, or a woman, and you are saying to yourself, "I am hurting," there's not a thing actually that you go through that He did not go through. Are you in physical pain? Have you been rejected? Have you been misunderstood? Do you understand what loneliness is? Anything that you are going through tonight He is able to comfort you, not because He is God from afar, because He went through the same thing Himself. That's Christianity: a God to whom you never have to explain anything to Him. A God who says, "I thirst."

## **VI. Saying #6: "It is finished."**

The sixth thing from the cross comes soon after that, and in the sixth thing, He says, "It is finished. It is finished." We are right at the end now. I'm reading a book about Gypsy Smith. His son has preached here in Jackson. Gypsy Smith was a powerful man of God. He tells the story that during a week of meetings, there was a young man in the back of the church every night, every night refusing the things of God. And the last night, He went out the back door to cool off, because he was literally bathed in perspiration even though it was winter and it was in New York City. Everybody left; the back door opened; and the young man came forward, that same young man, and he said to Gypsy Smith, "What must I do to

be saved? How can I be saved? What must I do?" And Gypsy Smith said, "It's too late." And the man said, "Why? Because the meeting is over?" He said, "No, you're 2,000 years too late. It has been done for you. Receive it."

One of the greatest missionaries of all times, Hudson Taylor, had a nominal Christian life until he picked up a pamphlet that was entitled, *The Finished Work of Jesus Christ*. What Christ did on the cross finishes what is necessary for me to be right with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit forever. It is finished. Christianity is confidence. Christianity is assurance. Christianity is a positive attitude towards life and towards God. Nobody has it because only He could say, "It's finished." That's the cross; that's Christianity.

### **VII. Saying #7: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."**

And the last words that came from His lips on the cross, "Into Thy hand I commend My spirit." He died like He lived and most men do. "Into Thy hand I commend My spirit." And He gave up the spirit and He died. Men lived on the cross sometimes 24 hours, sometimes 1 to 3 days, in agony. He lived 6 hours. He was not so much crucified but at the end of that time, He gave up His life. That's why they put the spear in His side and that's why they wanted to break the legs; you see, once they broke the legs he could no longer rise to get a breath of air. And when they went to break the bones of His legs—as the Old Testament said, 'They'll never break a bone'—they saw in utter surprise that He was already dead. He gave up His life; His choice.

A famous artist came to a university, to a college such as we have in this city. He stayed with one of the faculty members of the art department. The faculty member, a young man, had a beloved and loving little child; and the famous man was enchanted with this child, overwhelmed by this child, and while everybody fell all over the artist, the little child wouldn't give him the time of day. He noticed the child playing with a little toy that was bought out of a 10 cent store, a little fan, and he said to the child, "Give me the fan that I may paint a picture for you on your fan." And the little child cooling herself, said...which by the way would have made that fan priceless...cooling herself said, "No, you might ruin it." That's what we do with our lives. When God says, "Give me your life." And we are prone to say, instead of it becoming priceless, "No, I believe I'll keep it myself." Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow Me. He who will keep His life will lose it." The life that he has for us... 'He that will give his life will find the life that I have for you.' He gave up the spirit: "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit." That's Christianity; that's the cross: I give you my life. Have you done that? That's Christianity; that's Christ. I give you my life. I am weak but as best I can, I give you my life.

Let's pray together. And while we are before Him and at ease in a house of prayer, and all have come on this special day, may I suggest in the spirit of

prayer two great principles that make this day Good Friday? I come to the Christ of the cross. He's alive. This is Friday but Sunday is coming. He's alive. I come to Him. I come to Christ and all that cross means about forgiveness and family and about eternal life and the giving of myself. Let us think and pray before Him. And can it be that we would come to Christ, the Christ of the cross who is alive and who will do these things in us? Jesus, I come by faith.

And the second great principle, I come not only to the Christ of the cross, I come to the cross to follow Him. And I say unto Thee, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." "Yea, I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

And now our heavenly Father, we come to Thee as the great sovereign and loving God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We come to Thee in the name of Christ and we come to Thee believing that it is the power of God, the Holy Spirit, who moves in us, brings us to Christ, leads us even in prayer. We thank Thee for this night, a solemn night, a night of great reflection, a night that could have killed the world except for Sunday. And we are amazed that Christ our Savior should love us so much and do so much, and we praise Thee and we thank Thee and ask that Thy holy benediction would on this night be upon these Thy people, believing hearts, for it is now unto the Lord Jesus Christ who is able to keep you from falling. It is now unto the Lord Jesus Christ who is able at your death to present you sinless before His throne of grace in Heaven with exceeding great joy. To the only wise God who is our Savior, unto Him in our hearts let there be glory and majesty; let there be dominion and power both now and forevermore. Amen.

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