

Cross Words -

The Cries of Jesus from the Cross

A Series of Talks for Easter

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Cross Words

1 – Full and Free Forgiveness

Luke 23 Verses 26 to 34

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

The writer and novelist and social critic Charles Dickens said “I commit my soul to the mercy of God.”

The scientist Michael Faraday said “I’m going to be with Christ.”

The preacher John Wesley said “God is with me.”

The evangelist D.L. Moody said “earth receding, heaven opening, God is calling.”

That’s what they said in the face of death.

The greatest person who ever lived also spoke in the face of death; in fact He spoke seven times, the seven sayings from the cross.

Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing; assuredly I say to you today you will be with me in Paradise; woman behold you son and son behold your mother; My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? I thirst; it is finished, and finally, into Your hand I commit My spirit

We could call these the cross words of Jesus.

The first of these cross words is recorded in Luke 23:34. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

We’ll call this full and free forgiveness.

To begin with: Full and free forgiveness, the place. Verse 33 tells us He came to a place called Calvary and they crucified Him and that’s when He cried Father forgive them.

Calvary or in Hebrew Golgotha means place of a skull or skull hill. It's situated just outside Jerusalem quarter of a mile from the Damascus gate. It's where they regularly executed criminals and terrorists. Enemies of Rome put to death there for all to see and fear.

And that's where Jesus hangs between two thieves. One on the right and the other on the left and Jesus is the man in the middle.

Full and free forgiveness, the place. Next, full and free forgiveness, the pain.

Again in verse 33, they crucified Him.

No Roman was ever crucified it was too painful and too shameful.

Josephus, the Jewish historian said, "it was the most wretched of deaths."

You remember that Jesus has been arrested and mocked, He's been beaten and crowned with thorns, verbally, publically, mentally, emotionally, illegally, physically abused.

His face is unrecognisable. The Bible says it has been marred more than any man's. His back is torn; it's like a ploughed field. His hands and feet have been pierced with nails, 6 inch metal spikes. His side is bleeding; His bones are out of joint as He endures one of the most horrific forms of death anyone could suffer.

Full and free forgiveness, the pain. And then full and free forgiveness, prayer.

You'd expect Him to cry out for vengeance. To scream for justice.

Usually when someone was crucified they would curse their captors.

But Jesus doesn't cry for vengeance, nor does He scream for justice. He doesn't curse His captors. Instead He prays. He prays for their forgiveness.

You remember when He preached the Sermon on the Mount, He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth." And then later on He said

this, “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you.”

Well Jesus practices what He preaches. That’s exactly what He’s doing here. He’s praying for His persecutors. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Full and free forgiveness, the prayer. Next, full and free forgiveness, the pattern.

In his Gospel, Dr Luke records no less than nine prayers of Jesus.

When He’s baptised, He prays. Before choosing His disciples, He prays. At His transfiguration, He prays. When the pressure’s on, Jesus prays. When He’s under attack, early in the morning, late at night, all night on occasions, Jesus prays. In public, in private, in the garden of Gethsemane, and here on the cross, Jesus prays.

In fact His disciples watched Him and heard Him pray so often that one day they came to Him, in Luke Gospel, chapter 11 and said “Lord teach us to pray.” Why? Because they realised He was expert when it came to prayer. No one prayed like Him.

And of course, what He does in life He now does in death. He prays

Full and free forgiveness, the pattern. What about the plan?

This cry from the cross takes us right to the very core of the entire Gospel message. The Gospel is all about forgiveness. We can be forgiven. We don’t deserve to be, in fact we deserve the exact opposite.

But the good news, the great news of Jesus Christ is this: our sin, your sin, my sin can be forgiven through His death and by His cross. And only through His death, and only by His cross. Full and free forgiveness, the plan.

Lastly, full and free forgiveness, the principle.

Over in First Peter, chapter 2, verse 21 Peter says this about the cross: “He suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.” You see, Jesus suffered a substitutionary death. He died, he suffered in our place. But, according to Peter in that

verse, His death was also an exemplary death. In other words, in His death, in His dying, in His suffering, He shows us how to live.

And so, in a real sense, we're to live the way He died.

And what do we discover? Well, He died forgiving those who sinned against Him. And that's how we're to live. We're to live forgiving those who sin against us.

On one occasion, Peter said to Jesus, "how many times should I forgive? Seven times?" And Peter thought Jesus would say to him, 'No, Peter that's far too much, don't go overboard.' But Jesus didn't say that. Rather He said "I don't say to you seven times, but I say to you seventy times seven." In other words, keep on forgiving and forgiving and forgiving and forgiving!

In the book of Acts, chapter 7, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, he's been stoned, they're throwing rocks on him, crushing out his life, he knelt down and he prays, 'Lord don't charge them with this sin', and he fell asleep.

Where did Stephen learn that from? Of course, right here from the dying example of Jesus.

So this is the first cry from the cross. The first cross word. "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Full and free forgiveness, the place, the pain, the prayer, the pattern, the plan and the principle.

Can I ask you? Does this move you? Are you impacted? Or have you become too familiar with it all. If so ask God melt your heart stir your soul and give you a fresh appreciation of all that Jesus has done for you. Does this move you?

Does this motivate you, to change, to live differently and instead of holding onto grudges and anger and frustrations, to start to forgive.

Does this move you, does this motivate you?

And does this make you, want to pray for your enemies, to pray for those who annoy you, those who hate you, those who hurt you, and to never stop praying for them.

So full and free forgiveness. As He died He cried seven times. The seven sayings of Jesus from the cross. His cross words. His first word “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Cross Words

2 – Saved by the Skin of His Teeth

Luke 23 Verse 42

“Assuredly I say to you, today you’ll be with me in Paradise.”

He wrote hundreds hymns, God Moves in a Mysterious Way, Oh! For a Closer Walk with God!

William Cowper also wrote:

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.
The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.

Luke chapter 23 records the story of the conversion of the dying thief.

As Jesus died He cried. He cried seven times. The seven sayings from the cross. We’re calling them His cross words.

The last time: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. This time: Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

Jesus is speaking to a thief. And we shouldn’t be surprised by that. All through His life, He mixed and mingled with undesirables.

You remember it was said of Jesus, He’s the friend of sinners. This man eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners. In fact, He said of Himself, I came not to call the righteous, but I came to call sinners.

And now He dies beside a sinner. He dies beside a thief. In fact He dies between two thieves.

Of course this is a confirmation of a 700 year old prophecy.

Isaiah said, seven centuries before, that He would be numbered with the transgressors. And He was. (KJV)

And it's to one of these transgressors, one of these criminals, that Jesus speaks in Luke 23:43: "Assuredly I say to you, today you'll be with me in Paradise."

We'll call this 'saved by the skin of his teeth', and I want you to notice three things.

Firstly, there's a request. Luke 23:42 "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

It's a request for salvation.

The person who made this request was a depraved man, a murderer. Human life meant nothing to him. Hate filled his heart. Blood stained his hands.

He was also a thief. Everyone's property was there for the taking. He lived by the eleventh commandment, thou shall not be caught.

And three hours earlier, along with his friend, he'd poured out his contempt for Jesus. "If You're really God's Son come down from the cross! And save Yourself and save us!"

A depraved man, and a dying man; soon he will go from here to eternity. Just a few hours left to live. He's been on death row for some time and now at long last he's receiving his punishment. Death by crucifixion.

By nightfall they'll bring him down from the cross and bury his body in a paupers grave. No-one will- mourn him. No-one will weep for him. No-one will be sad to see him go. Forgotten forever.

A depraved man; a dying man; but, thankfully, also a discerning man. For as he hangs on the cross he fears God. And the Bible tells us, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

And so he turns to his companion in crime and says: "Don't you fear God, seeing we're under the same condemnation? (verse 41) "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong, this Man has done nothing amiss". (NKJ)

His eyes have been opened. He's aware that he's a sinner. And what's more he knows that there beside him is the sinless Saviour, the sinless Lord of glory, and a King with a Kingdom.

And needless to say, everything militated against him saying that. Jesus doesn't look like a King. He doesn't look as if He's in charge of anything. His crown of thorns. His throne is a tree. Some Lord, some King. BUT something has dawned upon this man's mind and he sees Jesus for who He is.

And what's more he also realised that his only hope is in Jesus. His only hope is in the One hanging right there beside him.

What an amazing change. His mockery became a prayer for mercy.

And in desperation he puts himself into the hands of Jesus and requests salvation. "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

There's a Request. And secondly, there's a response.

Verse 43. And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (NKJ)

A God response: "I say to you". Jesus often used that phrase "I say to you".

In chapter 4 of Luke's Gospel, He's in the synagogue. He reads a Messianic prophecy. He shuts the book and then He says this: "I say to you, today the scripture is fulfilled in your midst."

Later on a boy dies and Jesus touches his coffin and He says "I say to you arise", and the twelve year old boy comes back to life again.

Of course, the Rabbis, whenever they preached, or should I say whenever they rambled, they would say: "So and so said." The Prophets of the Old Testament, they said: "Thus sayeth the Lord."

But when Jesus preached He didn't say "So and so said". He didn't even say "Thus says the Lord."

He said "I say to you". He didn't claim the authority of another. He had His own authority.

And here on the cross He has as much authority as He ever had. You would think He was God or something. And that's the point.

A God response. And a gracious response. Assuredly, I say to you, today you'll be with Me in paradise. (NKJ)

Free, unmerited, undeserved salvation, based on the pure grace of God.

No time for resolutions, no time for rites and rituals, no time for religion; just time to cry: "Lord save me!" Just time to believe.

We would give up on such a man. We would say "he's too bad, too wicked, too far gone!" But he wasn't! He's saved instantly, just like that!

A God response; a gracious response, and his response was also glorious! Jesus said: "Today, you'll be with Me in paradise." (NKJ)

Jesus gives this thief the promise of being with Him in paradise.

First of all, a request; secondly, a response, and finally, a regret.

There was another man that day. He never heard such a promise, and instead he was lost.

Some questions. The first question is this: What about the call, the call to come to Christ, to acknowledge Him as Lord; to bow to Him as your King. Like this first thief, come to Christ just as you are. And receive the promise of eternal life. Do you hear the call?

What about the comfort that heaven is real; that salvation is sure, and grace is free.
Unearned, undeserved.

And what about the challenge. In 1 Peter, Peter tells us that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. Jesus died showing us how to live. And how did He die? He died reaching out to the lost.

And that's how we are to live, reaching out to the lost. We're to be missionaries, evangelists.

As Jesus died He cried. He cried seven times. His cross words. His second cry "Assuredly, I say to you today, you'll be with me in paradise.

Cross Words

3 – A Sensitive Son and a Mourning Mum

John 19 Verses 16 to 27

"Woman, behold your son!" and son, "Behold your mother!"

According to the Guinness Book of Records, the longest last will and testament ever written was made up of 4 enormous volumes, containing 95 thousand 9 hundred and 40 words. That was the longest last will and testament. The shortest had only three words, "All for mum."

In John chapter 19 Jesus gives His mother His last will and testament.

As He dies, He cries. Seven times. The seven sayings from the cross. His cross words.

The first word: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. His second word: Today you will be with Me in paradise. His third cry, His third saying, His third word: : "Woman, behold your son!" and son, "Behold your mother!" (NKJ)

Imagine the scene. The priests and the scribes and the religious leaders are all shouting: "He saved others and now He can't even save Himself. If You're really the King of Israel, come on down from the cross and then we might just believe You".

And yet in the middle of all this commotion, in the middle of all this noise, our attention is drawn to three main characters. The spot light falls on Mary, John and Jesus.

Let's read what it says in John chapter 19 (verses 26 and 27). When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!". And then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

To begin with: the dignity of Mary.

Put yourself in her shoes. Here she is standing at the cross; heartbroken, shattered, sad, full of grief, she's in deep mourning.

And yet she's quiet and composed and still and solemn. Isn't that something.

What did the angel say in Luke chapter 1 verse 28? "You're highly favoured and blessed among women." (NKJ)

The most privileged lady in all the world. She'll conceive within her womb the Son of God.

And yet, along with that great privilege comes great pain.

You remember Simeon prayed for the baby Jesus. And then he looked Mary straight in the eye and made this staggering prediction: "A sword shall pierce your soul also". (Luke 2:35 NKJ)

And that prediction came true. For thirty three years Mary knew nothing but pain and sorrow. And now Mary's watching her son die the most horrific death imaginable. And, don't forget, Mary knew He was completely innocent of every charge. He was guiltless of any crime.

The face she kissed a thousand times is now contorted with pain. The blood she wiped from His childhood cuts is now flowing from His side. The hands she held, the feet she guided to take their first steps, are now nailed to a cross.

She's grief stricken, but still she doesn't run; she isn't hysterical, she isn't out of control. She stands there with quiet and calm and solemn dignity.

The Dignity of Mary.

And then the deity of Jesus. The theme, of course, of John's Gospel deity of Christ.

He's not just good or godly or Godlike, but truly and really God. And on the cross we see His deity coming to the fore again and again. And now, as God, He gives some orders, some commands, some instructions: "Woman, behold your son!" and son, "Behold your mother!"

Of course, to us, 'woman' sounds hard and harsh. But it wasn't hard or harsh in the east. A better translation might be, "Lady. My dear lady. Madam." Jesus is in so much pain and yet He shows great courtesy. He's polite. "Woman! Madam! My dear lady!"

Notice please, He didn't set her apart as one to be worshipped. No, He simply said "Madam! Woman! Lady!"

You see, Jesus knew that Mary was a sinner. And what's more, Mary knew she was a sinner like everyone else. That's why she called Jesus, in Luke chapter 1: "My Saviour". (NKJ)

Just think for a moment. Every time Mary went to the door of that house in Nazareth and called out, "Jesus! Jesus!" What was she saying? She was saying she was acknowledging Him to be the Saviour of sinners. To be her Saviour. And so Jesus entrusts her to the care of John. In referring to her as, "Woman", He was also protecting her. The Soldiers, who'd just unleashed their hatred on Him, would've turned on her, if they'd known who she was. How thoughtful, how wonderful.

So, the Dignity of Mary and the Deity of Jesus.

And that brings us to the discovery of John.

He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" And then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. (NKJ)

Remember who John is. He's the youngest of all the disciples. He's just a teenager. Along with his brother, John worked in his father's fishing business. And then it happened. Jesus arrived on the scene and John's life was never the same again. He left everything and followed Christ.

But not only was he one of the twelve, he was one of the three. Peter, James and John saw what no-one else ever saw. And here he is, standing in at the cross. And Jesus speaks to him.

Earlier, John run away with the rest. He'd deserted. He disowned His Master.

And yet, even although John run away, he couldn't stay away.

When John writes his Gospel, it's no wonder he calls himself: "the disciple, Jesus loved"

He was so grateful, so thankful, that Christ didn't cast him off. That Jesus didn't throw him to the side or toss him onto the scrap heap.

And now we find Jesus gives him a work to do: "Look after my mother!"

The dignity of Mary, the deity of Jesus and the discovery of John.

Now, how does this apply to you, to me, to us.

Well, there's an exhortation to us to trust Jesus. To trust Jesus like Mary. That's what she's doing. She's looking to Jesus; not as her son but as her Saviour. And if she needed to do that, if she needed a Saviour, so do we.

And there's also an encouragement in times of extreme pain and trauma and horror, the grace that strengthened and sustained Mary is sufficient for us. And what's more like John, when we flee and fall and fail, remember failure isn't final; and when we repent and return there's still a work for us to do for Him.

An encouragement; an exhortation; and an example. Again, Peter said in 1 Peter that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. In His death Jesus shows us how to live. We're to live the way He died; and how did He die? Well even when He was weighed down by the heavy burden of our sin, as our sin bearer, enduring unparalleled agony, still all His sympathy is directed towards someone else.

And that's how we're to live! Never so overwhelmed by our own pain that we lose sight of the pain of others. Never so preoccupied with our own hurts that we miss seeing the hurts of those around us!

"Woman, behold your son!" and son, "Behold your mother!"

Cross Words

4 - Abandoned That We Might Be Accepted

Matthew 27 Verses 29 - 46

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

On the 14th August 1941, at precisely ten to one in the afternoon, prisoner Kolbe was killed.

And here's what happened. During the night someone managed to escape from Auschwitz concentration camp; and Adolf Eichmann was mad. So mad that he decided a prisoner had to die; as a deterrent; as an example to the others.

Well, a Polish Sergeant, name of Francis Gavinofski, was singled out. The entire prison came to witness the execution. It was then that Gavinofski fell to his knees and with tears he begged Eichmann for mercy, "Please, my poor wife, my children. I don't want to die!" And that's when prisoner 16670 stepped forward. Max Kolbe. He said: "Sir! Shoot me instead. I'll die in the place of that man who has a wife and children."

Well, when Jesus died, He died in the place of others. He died in the place of sinners. And as He died He cried seven times from the cross. We've called this His cross words.

The fourth cry, the fourth word, the central cry, the central word, is recorded for us in Matthew 27:46 "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (NKJ)

Let me highlight four 4 truths.

To begin with there is a parting here: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?".

The word 'forsaken' is the most tragic, the most horrible word in the English language. He's all alone. Totally alone, forsaken and rejected.

Of course Jesus was forsaken; he was rejected by His own brothers and sisters. They don't accept Him. They don't believe in Him until after the Resurrection.

Forsaken, rejected, also by His own people; His own nation. The Bible says that He came to His own and His own received Him not. They kept Him at arm's length; they pushed Him away; they didn't want to know Him.

Forsaken, rejected, by one of the twelve as well. Judas has betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver.

And what about Peter. Peter denies Him. I don't know the man.

And the rest of the disciples? Jesus actually prophesied when the shepherd is slain the sheep will be scattered.

So Jesus is forsaken. He's deserted. He's abandoned, rejected at every point and turn. Forsaken by His family, His friends, His followers and now forsaken by His Father.

Martin Luther, the reformer, started to fast and pray. And he sat for days thinking and mediating and contemplating this saying. And in the end, he said, "Who can understand this? God forsaken by God! It's incredible."

The Baptist pastor of a bygone day Charles Haddon Spurgeon put it like this, "The records of time, or even the records of eternity, don't contain a sentence more full of anguish. Here we look into the abyss and although we strain our eyes and gaze until sight fails, we'll never see the bottom of this terrible anguish as Christ was forsaken by God!"

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? There's a parting here.

There's a punishment here.

Jesus has been on the cross for six hours. They crucified Him at the third hour. 9 o'clock in the morning. And when it was the sixth hour, that's 12 noon, everything went completely dark, verse 45 says. And listen, it was no ordinary darkness, it was a supernatural darkness. It was midnight in the middle of the day and it stayed dark until the ninth hour, that's three

in the afternoon. From when the sun was at its highest until the sun was at its warmest, it was pitch black.

And so we need to understand this darkness speaks of judgement. Jesus often referred to hell as outer darkness. And so, as the earth's covered in darkness, Jesus is plunged outer darkness, hell's darkness. And He cries.

Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. The Lord is laying on Him the iniquity of us all. He put Him to grief.

Paul says in one of his apistles, "He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". Jesus is the substitute of sinners. He's standing where we should have stood, He's taking what we should have taken, He's enduring what we should have endured. And that's why it's pitch black. The full weight, the full horror of God's wrath unleashed, outpoured on Him.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

There's a parting here. There's a punishment here. Thirdly, there's a prophecy here.

When Jesus made this fourth cry He spoke in Aramaic. "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Those who didn't know Aramaic thought He was calling for Elijah. But He wasn't. He was actually quoting Psalm 22, a Messianic Psalm, a prophetic Psalm. Jesus is in complete command of His senses right to the very end.

He takes that 1000 year old Psalm, it's all about Him, and He cries with a loud voice and fulfils prophecy. Remember all through His life, His conception, His birth, when He was born, where He was born, particularly the twenty four hours leading up to His death, all predicted with pin point accuracy.

And even when He was on the cross lots of things are happening, 'that it might be fulfilled', the Bible says. Crucified between two thieves; they're gambling for His garments. And this cry? It's the very same. Prophecy is being fulfilled.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

A parting here, a punishment here, a prophecy here. And a passion here.

It's all about love for the unlovely; and the unlovable; it's all about love for us.

Jesus is forsaken that we might be forgiven. He's abandoned that we might be accepted. He punished that we might be pardoned. He's separated that we might be saved. He's in hell that we might go at last to heaven. He's in darkness that we might have eternal light and life.

Yes, this cry shows us how much God hates sin, but it also shows us how much God loves sinners.

If you want to know what lengths He went to, what depths He went to, listen to this cry. If you want a demonstration and an explanation of the text 'God is love', listen to this cry.

The crucifixion shows just how far men will go in their sin, but even more than that, it shows how far God has gone, how far Christ has gone, in His love for sinners.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Once again what about the call, to come to Jesus, the sin bearer, the substitute, the Saviour, the rescuer, the one who paid the debt, the one who took your place, the one who endured your punishment and the one who bore your hell.

And what about the comfort? For every true believer there is no more judgement, no more condemnation. We are free. We can say with Paul Jesus Christ soaked up all of heaven's righteous wrath and there's not one drop left now for us. We can breathe a massive sigh of relief. What comfort.

And what about the challenge? Again Peter tells us in First Peter that 'Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.' In other words, we are to live the way He died.

And how did He die? Well, according to this cry, He died understanding the consequences of sin, understanding what sin does, sin cuts us off. And that's how we're to live. We're to understand what sin does and live accordingly.

Cross Words

5

John 19 Verse 28

“I Thirst.”

November the 4th 1942 was one of the turning points in the Second World War. What happened was this, an entire company of German soldiers surrendered without even a single gun being fired. The reason was very simple, they'd run out of water and they just couldn't go on. And so one after another, hardened men spoke of the agony of all agonies, the anguish of thirst.

As He died He cried, 7 cries, 7 sayings from the cross. His cross words.

His fifth saying, His fifth cry is found in John chapter 19, verse 28: “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’” (NKJ)

First of all there is sorrow here.

Jesus hasn't had a drink for 15 hours, since the last supper, in the upper room.

He has sweated profusely in the Garden. He has been scourged repeatedly by professional torturers. He has carried His heavy crossbar at least 2 miles through Jerusalem. He has climbed the hill outside the city wall. His blood is flowing from His wounds. He is completely dehydrated.

His lips swell, His tongue expands, cleaving to His jaws. His mouth is cracked, His eyes are bulging. He can hardly breathe.

The heat, the noise, the commotion, the dust, and worst of all, the burning fire, the flames of Hell, raging around Him as God's wrath is outpoured, as God's wrath is unleashed upon Him. And from the flames, He cries out, just one Greek word “DIP/SAO!, THIRST!, I thirst!”

And please remember, He scooped out the oceans, He formed the rivers, He made the seas, He walked across the waves, He calmed the raging billows, He washed the feet of His disciples, and yet, He thirsts!

If you and I could live a thousand years, and die a thousand deaths, in a thousand, different agonising ways, it would be nothing compared to the agony and the grief of Christ on the cross. Nothing. There's sorrow here.

Secondly, there is scripture here. His Grief in suffering and His Grasp of Scripture.

Look at it carefully John 19:28: Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (NKJ)

Everything that happened to Jesus was predicted, not just hundreds, but in some cases thousands of years before He actually came and He fulfilled every single one.

He's the seed of the woman, He's of the lineage of Shem, He's a descendant of Abraham, He's of the line of Isaac, He's of the loins of Jacob, of the tribe of Judah, from the family of Jesse, from the house of David.

Born of a virgin, in Bethlehem, dedicated in the temple.

He was taken down to Egypt, He ministered in Galilee, He was rejected by the Jews, He was received by the Gentiles and He rode into Jerusalem on the colt of an ass.

He was betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver, He was pierced in His hands and feet, He was mocked, and insulted, and He cried, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

They gambled for His clothes. His bones weren't broken.

And all of that was foretold and all of that came to pass in accordance with the promise of Scripture.

And here as well... Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (NKJ)

There's sorrow here, there's scripture here.

Thirdly, there's sympathy here. The book of Hebrews tells us that we have a high priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, He was in all points tempted like us and because He suffered being tempted He is able to help us when we are tested and tempted.
(KJV)

Listen, Jesus was God but He was also man. And here, as a man He says "I thirst".

A few chapters earlier He's weeping at the graveside of a friend.

Even earlier, He's so tired that He lies down and falls fast asleep in the middle of a storm.

And as a man, Jesus understands us when He suffered. He agonised, He knew heartache and pain and sorrow. He thirsted.

And in doing so, He showed us that God plays the game of life by the very same rules that you and I have to play by.

He wasn't exempt, He wasn't immune.

So there's sorrow here, there's scripture here, there's sympathy here.

And there's salvation here. When He cried, "I thirst", He did so that we might never have to make such a cry!

During His life Jesus spoke about a man, who died and went to hell. In hell, he was in constant, conscious anguish and torment.

And from the flames, he begged, he pleaded for someone, anyone, to dip even just the tip of their finger in water and give him a tiny drop to drink.

Listen! The Son of God bore the curse of hell's thirst, so that all who believe in Him might know the blessing of Heaven's eternal, refreshing water.

He offers to thirsty, barren, parched sinners, the water of life, which He said, is like a fountain, springing up into everlasting life.

You remember the story of the bad Samaritan?

For years she'd searched for happiness and found only heartache.

Her life was empty and broken. Longing, thirsting for satisfaction, longing, thirsting for God, for Christ, for Salvation.

And Jesus satisfied her thirst with living water.

"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst again..." (NKJ)

And she drank and was saved!

Let me ask you, are you thirsty? Are you a parched soul? Well, thankfully, there's life-giving water available! If only you would let down the empty bucket of your heart you'll be saved!

And are you needy? Jesus was exactly where you are. He walked the road you're on. He's been there, He's done that, He's bought the t-shirt.

In every pang that rends the heart, the Man of Sorrows has a part.

You can't say, no one knows what I'm going through. You can't say, no one knows how I feel, because Jesus does.

Are you thirsty? Are you needy?

And are you going to copy? Peter tells us Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. We are to live the way He died. He died acknowledging His humanness.

And sometimes we give the appearance that we have it all sorted, that we're some kind of super saint. I've got news for you, there are no super saints. Isn't it about time that you copied Jesus and admit that you're human after all?

I thirst. There's sorrow here, there's scripture here, there's sympathy here and there's salvation here.

Cross Words

6 – All Done and Dusted

John 19 Verse 30

“It is finished.”

If you've ever run a marathon you'll know by the end of the 26.1 miles your chest is tight, your legs are numb and your feet are on fire.

And keep in mind, when the gun goes, everyone will start BUT unfortunately not everyone will finish.

Well, we can't say that when it comes to Jesus because He finished the race, He completed the course.

Remember, as He dies He cries, 7 times, 7 cries, 7 sayings, 7 words from the cross. His cross words.

Word number 6 is found in John 19 verse 30 He cried with a loud voice and said "It is finished."

Three words in English, just one word in Greek. TET/AL/ESTI, finished, the greatest word ever spoken.

First of all a word, a cry of assurance.

For 6 hours He's been on the cross, rejected by His enemies, forsaken by His friends and judged by His Father.

Never forget He's there as the sinner's substitute.

Taking our place, bearing our sin, paying our debt, removing our curse, suffering our hell and enduring our grief as well as carrying our sorrows. Wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

And yet despite the pain and the suffering and the misery and the agony He's filled with confidence, filled with certainty and assurance.

Just think, at the age of 33, an age when most people are just starting out, Jesus cries "It's finished."

Please note, He doesn't say "I'm finished." No. He says, "IT is finished." The work, the plan of redemption is finished.

Picture if you can a Greek artist in his studio. Hat on his head, paint on his clothes, pallet on his arm and a brush in his hand.

He's after perfection, he's worked on this masterpiece for months.

The shades, the shadows, the colours, the characters, the moods, the mixes, the various details. Everything must be right, everything must be perfect.

Eventually, he stands back. Is there any slight defect, any improvement he can make? Does he need a little touch here or a little touch there?

No. There's nothing more to be done. And so he sits down and says, "TET/EL/ESTI, finished, flawless, perfect, complete."

And that's the word Jesus uses. "Tetelesti". Finished.

His work is fully and completely and entirely and flawlessly and perfectly finished. Everything necessary for Salvation has been done. A word of utter assurance.

Secondly it's a word of achievement.

Jesus shouts, not in defeat BUT in victory "Finished!"

And as He shouts here's what happens, the foundations of hell begin to shake, the prison walls of death come crashing down, the barriers that separate man from God start to crumble.

Because of His triumphant cry, because of His shout of Victory, because of His words of achievement millions are set free from the bondage of sin, millions are brought from darkness to light from spiritual death to spiritual life, from the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of God.

There's victory over hell and victory over Satan.

And there's victory over sin too. Those riddled with guilt can come to the cross and find pardon, those in the grip of fear can come to the cross and find peace, those who are lost, those who've failed can come to the cross and they'll be given a brand new start.

Victory. Victory over hell, victory over Satan and victory over sin. And thankfully there's also victory over death. Why? Because the work is done and the victory is won.

"It is finished!" A word of assurance, a word of achievement. And thirdly, a word of access.

When Jesus made this cry something happened. According to Luke's Gospel and also according to Mark's Gospel. The veil in the Temple was torn in two. NOT from the bottom to the top but from the top to the bottom.

That veil, that curtain was 60 feet long and 30 feet high and as thick as a man's hand. And it took 300 priests to lift it.

And what's more, that curtain, that veil was symbolic. Symbolic of separation. It separated the priests, the most holy people in Israel from God. Can you believe that?

God was on one side and they were on the other side. And in between was this thick curtain.

And now Jesus shouts and the Priests watch as the curtain begins to tear, as the veil is rent and a way of access is opened right into the Holiest of all.

And for every believing sinner there is access. We can know God for ourselves, we can fellowship with Him, we can enjoy forgiveness from every single sin.

Now we can draw near to God, we can come close to God, we can come to God on account of the fact that Jesus has opened up the way for us. How wonderful!

It is finished, a word of assurance, a word of achievement and a word of access.

There's a call here, to leave pointless religion behind, to stop hiding behind the thin cloth of self-righteousness and run as fast as we can to Jesus and get a real covering, His thick robe of perfect righteousness.

Run to the only One who can deal with our sin, the only One who can bring us to God, the only One who can give us hope, the only One who can take us to heaven.

There's a call, there's a caution, you don't need to keep trying, you don't need to keep trying to get yourself into God's good books. It's not about us, it's about Him.

And there's a challenge, Peter tells us, Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. And we're to live the way He died.

How did He die? He died finishing the work God that gave Him to do and that's how we are to live.

We're to keep right on until the end of the road.

Paul said, I've fought a good fight, I've finished the course and I've won the crown.

And that's the challenge, for us not to stop half way through, not to give up but to finish the work that God has given us to do. It is finished!

Cross Words

7 – His Last Word

Luke 23 Verses 3 to 46

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

Over the years I've sat beside and held and prayed with those who were dying. I've heard them speak for the last time.

And I've watched families get as close as they can so as to catch every single word.

Why? Because last words are important words. You see, what we say in the face of death is extremely revealing.

As Jesus died, He cried. 7 cries. He spoke 7 times from the cross. His crosswords.

His final cry, His last word was just before He died and it's extremely revealing. In fact, no dying words were more revealing.

They are recorded in Luke chapter 23, verse 46: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Let's notice 3 things about the last words of Jesus.

To begin with, they're words of prayer, "Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit." (KJV)

It's the very same prayer that David prayed in Ps 31 hundreds of years before. It's the very same prayer Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed in the book of Acts.

In fact, it's a prayer Mary His mother taught Him as a child.

Like every Jewish boy He would've recited these very words as soon as He wakened in the morning and again as He lay down to sleep at night: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." (NKJ)

And so here we have a prayer and what's more it's coming from the lips of a man of prayer.

So here's Jesus. The dying Jesus. Only a short time left to live. This is it. The final countdown.

He's in agony and yet, as He hangs on the cross He communes with His Father, He converses with His Father, He talks to His Father, He prays to His Father.

"Father, I trust Myself to You, I leave Myself with You, I give Myself into Your care, I commend My Spirit to You." They are words of prayer.

And they're words of power. "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." (NKJ)

Isn't that something? Here's Jesus in total control, He lays down His life, He gives up His spirit, He orders His own death.

Just think of it. He's in charge of the method of His death. He's in control of that.

Of course, they tried to stone Him, they tried to throw Him over the edge of a cliff.

But He wasn't to be stoned, He wasn't to be crushed on the rocks. NO! He was to suffer the curse of the cross.

And so He set His face resolutely, like a flint, to go all the way to Jerusalem, to death, to the cross to shed His blood.

And all the while, He's in charge. He's in charge of the method of His death.

He's also in charge of the manner of His death.

John tells us that "He bowed his head". (KJV)

He carefully and deliberately positioned His head. What control. What power.

He was in charge of the Method of His death and the Manner of His death and the moment of His death.

Listen! For us death is the master. But for Him, death is the servant. He dismisses His spirit and He does so with absolute precision and sovereign authority.

Augustine was right, when he said, "He gave up His life, because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it."

Words of Prayer and words of Power.

And lastly, words of peace.

During the whole sorry episode Jesus is completely composed.

In spite of the pain, in spite of the suffering and the misery and the agony, amazingly we still find that He's in control of all of His faculties. He's calm and composed.

And here again it's the very same. Wonderful assurance, wonderful confidence. Confidence in His Father.

He commits Himself, He places Himself, He gives Himself, He entrusts Himself into the safest, the greatest, the strongest hands ever.

"Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit."

Into the hands that created the universe, into the hands that scooped out the oceans, into the hands that flung the stars into space, into the hands that heaped up the mountains and rule the nations and the affairs of men.

Into the Almighty hands of the Almighty God. And He does so with calmness and composure and peace and certainty and unwavering assurance.

When Jesus cried out He knew that after the cross, would be the crown, that after the crucifixion, would be the coronation, that after the agony, would be the victory and that after the pain, would be the peace and after the hell, would be heaven.

Words of Prayer, words of Power and words of Peace.

Some lessons.

First of all, to pray is Christlike, we're never more like Jesus than when we're praying.

If we want to grow and develop and mature as Christians, there's no other way. No shortcuts. No quick fixes. It takes prayer. A lifetime of prayer.

No prayer, no growth. It's as basic as that. Do you want to be more and more like Jesus? Then pray. That's the first lesson.

The second lesson is this: We have a mighty Saviour and His power is infinite and even man's last fearful enemy is no match for Him. When it comes to death, He calls the shots.

Aren't you glad about that? His own death and our death. None of us will go before His time.

Please remember that. Jesus is in charge. God has put all authority in heaven and in earth onto His shoulders. That's a lesson to learn.

A third lesson is this: To be in His hand is to be safe forever.

We can put our head on the pillow at night and know that we're safe not just for time but safe for all eternity.

Before Satan can separate you from Jesus Christ, he would have to tear down all the battlements of heaven, he would have to throw God off His throne, he would have to slay all of the hosts of angels, he would have to silence Christ's intercession on our behalf. And that's impossible!

I want to tell you, you can face life and you can the life to come with confidence because of Him. You're safe and you're secure.

Peter told us that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow. We're to live the way that He died. Peter went on to say, when He suffered He threatened not,

when He was reviled He didn't revile in return but He kept on committing Himself to the One who judges righteously.

And that's not only how He died, that's how we are to live every day, every moment of every day. God, here I am, take me, hold me, help me. I'm committing myself to You, entrusting myself to You.

7 crosswords.

“Father, forgive them, they do not know what they're doing.”

“Assuredly I say to you today you'll be with Me in Paradise.”

“Woman, behold your son, son, behold your mother.”

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

“I thirst.”

“It is finished.”

And lastly: “Into Your hands I commit my spirit.”

The crosswords of Jesus.

Aren't you so glad for the cross? Aren't you so glad for the cries from the cross. Aren't you so glad for the One who died on the cross?