

JJ¹

FIRST WORD: *Luke 23:32-34*

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ 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. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

DEVOTION—A Word of Forgiveness

Someone is hurting you. Physically. Mentally. Emotionally. It doesn't matter what kind of hurt or how much. What are your thoughts toward that person? What emotion? What words are you wanting to say? What words do you say, either to their face or behind their back?

Now imagine what all those thoughts and feelings and words would be if you were but 33 years old with so much life to live, but are being unjustly executed. And not only that, you've spent all night and the early hours of the day being beaten and mocked. And now, you've had the indignity of carrying the thing they'll use to kill you. And finally, as they strip off your blood soaked clothes already drying into your wounds, with a crowd jeering they hold your naked body on the cross as they drive nails through your hands and feet, rusted by the blood

of the crucified. All this while your family and friends stand there watching.

What thoughts fill your consciousness? What emotions stream through your being? What words pierce through the jeering mob?

I think you know. It would not take much imagination to know your own personal answer to those questions. It's not pretty, is it? The seething anger. The thrashing. The sniping, biting, foul words of blind rage and hate.

Friends, do not think that would never be you. That picture would be you to one degree or another. Maybe some of you would take longer to get there, but you would. You know how I know? Because I know that person lives in me as much as it lives in you. The Old Adam. Our sinful nature.

Yet not for Christ. That Old Adam of sin was not a part of his being. Instead, he speaks words only he could say. **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**

Forgiveness isn't something that comes easily to us, and when we deem them unworthy of our forgiveness, then it usually doesn't come at all. A combination of anger and the twisted

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for “Jesus Help”. It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

notion that forgiveness is something an individual must earn from us results in an iciness toward the person or in words devoid of forgiveness spoken in the heat of the moment. Yet Jesus speaks a word of forgiveness!

Don't misunderstand Jesus when he says, **"They do not know what they are doing."** The Jewish leaders surely understood that they had condemned a man who didn't deserve to die. They understood that they had trampled on the very basic concept of justice. Even the Roman soldiers who drove the nails into his hands and feet may well have known that the man they were crucifying had done nothing more offensive than made some (apparently) laughable claims to be a king—he didn't actually deserve to be put to death.

Even if they understood none of this, Jesus was not suggesting that no forgiveness would be necessary. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Not realizing that you were doing something wrong doesn't free you from having to pay the price.

No, Jesus' words here do not suggest that those who put him to death aren't guilty. In fact, his words very clearly show that they are guilty. Jesus asks God here to delay his justice, to not immediately hold them accountable but to give them more

time to come to a recognition of their sin and also, by the working of the Holy Spirit, to faith.

A little over seven weeks later, on Pentecost, Jesus' prayer was answered, as perhaps some of these same people finally realized what they had done. The book of Acts tells us that they were **cut to the heart** (2:37) when they recognized their sin in putting Jesus to death. When they asked Peter what they should do, he told them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. They did, and they received forgiveness from their Father.

Does this word of forgiveness extend also to us, who so often know exactly what we are doing when we sin? Clearly it does, because when we were born, God did not bring immediate judgment upon us for the sin with which we were born. Nor did he merely delay judgment, but he actually answered Jesus' prayer by

bringing us to faith in Jesus. In Jesus we have the forgiveness he first requested for us on the cross—a forgiveness he was about to win for us. Amen.



W E E K

SECOND WORD: *Luke 23:35-43*

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

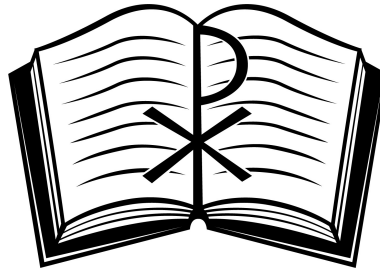
³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”



DEVOTION—A Word of Promise

We’ve already pictured the scene for Jesus. Now picture the scene for this man. Whatever sins he had committed against his society, the law of his society declared that justice required the ending of his life. How deep and dark this man’s life and heart had been that it lead him to crucifixion!

And, at first, this man also mocked Jesus. At first, his heart was so darkened with sin and unbelief, he could not see his Savior crucified next to him. This is what it took for God to get this man’s attention! Not the warnings of parents,

friends, or the priests. Not the consequences he had already faced in life. Not the capture and jail cell. Not the trial. Not the judgement. Not even as the nails drove through his flesh. Then it was only rage. Then he was as spiritually ignorant as a brute beast.

But then the agony of raw wounds and the early stages of suffocation began to set in. Then the reality of his situation as he looked at his peers cheering his execution began smashing his hard heart to pieces. He saw Jesus’ mother and friends weeping over him. Something

this man probably didn’t have at all. Truly he was alone. And then truly he considered what he had been taught as a youth—that all his sins made him worthy of a suffering and loneliness far worse than what he now faced.

Then certainly Jesus’ first words kept ringing in his heart. **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** Certainly he must of thought something like, “If he can pray this for the men who crucified him, could he... would he...might he possibly pray this for me?”

Then rang the mockery he himself had earlier also spouted. But now came a new reaction. A reaction that can only come from a heart of faith! **“Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly,**

for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

And then, this brand-new, simple, child-like faith—so strong because of who that faith is in—cries out with the plea for forgiveness. **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** He wants to know if there is room and welcome there for him in Jesus' heart and the halls of heaven.

And isn't that what you want to know? Isn't that the question you have when you see the depth of your depravity and sinfulness?

Jesus' second word from the cross calms every troubled heart that hears it and believes. A word of promise you get to hold in your heart today, and most especially on the day you die. **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** Amen.

THIRD WORD: *John 19:25-27*

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

DEVOTION—A Word of Love

That was the number one thing on Jesus' mind at that point? Jesus was always focused on loving his neighbor, but with

everything else that was happening, how could the one thing on his mind be that his mother would be cared for after he left? Yes, his mother, but with the wrath of God for the sins of the world about to hit him like a runaway freight train, this was the one thing on his mind?

Obviously it was, because he took some of what little strength he had remaining and spoke this word of love. Oh, we can try to make it comprehensible. We can point out that family matters all the time and mothers especially matter. But even as we make the argument that what Jesus did here was the right thing to do, we end up condemning ourselves, don't we? We end up condemning ourselves in the way we have dealt with our mothers.

For even in regard to the people who have probably done as much for us as any person in the world, our words have not always been ones of love. Instead, there have been words of dismissiveness and rebellion, words of anger and disrespect—the very opposite of love. And those loveless words have come in far less trying circumstances than what Jesus faced. **At times, our loveless words have come in circumstances that weren't trying at all. We can't even make up an excuse other than we felt like it, because the one thing on our minds at that moment was ourselves.**

In this word of love, we see that Jesus, our substitute, kept God's command to love his neighbor. He kept God's command to love his mother, obeying

God's Fourth Commandment in our place, that his perfect obedience might be credited to our account.

In this word of love, we see something else as well. In Jesus' overriding love for his mother, in Jesus' love for his family—a love that even superseded his own personal anguish—we see his love for us. We might be inclined to think that Mary was worthy of such love and concern from Jesus because she was his mother. She was family, but so are we.

Jesus' first word from the cross was a word of forgiveness, a word that said your soul was covered because your sins have been covered. This word tells you that the rest of you is covered by Jesus' love for you too. Amen.

FOURTH WORD: *Matthew 27:45, 46*

⁴⁵ From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

DEVOTION—A Word of ???

The unspoken answer to Jesus' question—that God has forsaken him because he is punishing him not only for every sin you have ever committed (which would be an absolutely staggering burden all on its own) but also for the sins of the whole world—tells us what Jesus was experiencing, and it tells us why he was experiencing it. It doesn't, however,

provide the adjectives or the illustration capable of doing it justice.

Then what word does? What word could possibly be used to describe suffering the holy and just wrath of God for every sin you have ever committed? "Anguish" is a word we tend to use only in the most extreme circumstances, to describe only the deepest of human emotions and sorrow, the most painful feelings we've ever experienced.

While I don't mean to dismiss the depth of the deepest anguish you've experienced—it just doesn't feel right to use the same word to describe what Jesus was experiencing on the cross. Take the deepest emotional sorrow you have experienced and multiply it by the worst physical pain you have endured. Then take the result and crumple it up and throw it away—because that number can't do justice to Jesus' words here any more than the word "anguish" can.

So what word would do it justice? I don't know, but I know this: I cannot find a word (or even a paragraph) to accurately describe what you hear from Jesus in this fourth word from the cross. I don't even want to find such a word. If such a word existed, and I could comprehend even a tenth of the meaning of such a word, I feel like that knowledge alone would be enough to kill me. Being forsaken by God? I cannot imagine it, nor do I want to.

I believe we do best, in reverent awe, to leave this fourth word untitled. Do not let the fact that there are no words to describe it convince you there is nothing to see here and hastily move on. There may be no words, but then let us stand mutely in reverent awe and wonder at the love—well, now love hardly seems to be a sufficient enough word either, does it? But it's what we have to work with, so...may we stand mutely in reverent awe and wonder at the love that led Jesus to suffer hell in our place so that we would never have to experience its indescribable horror.

Please stand for a moment of silence to behold the cross of our Lord Jesus in the darkness of this Good Friday.

FIFTH WORD: *John 19:28, 29*

²⁸ Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

DEVOTION—A Word of Fulfillment

Why did Jesus speak this word? The most obvious answer would appear to be because he was thirsty. And there's no doubt that he was. A raging thirst was one of the effects of crucifixion.

It does us good to hear this, because it reminds us that although Jesus acted and spoke differently on the cross than you and I would have—words of forgiveness

and love rather than words of anger and self-pity—what he was experiencing on the cross was real. Because Jesus was a living, breathing human being, he was feeling very real pain, every bit as much as you and I would have felt.

Therefore, what took place on Calvary that day was not a charade. Jesus was not pretending to suffer. These were actual nails, those were actual tendons and nerves, and that was actual pain. This was actual thirst. All this reality reminds us that a real payment for sin was made on the cross on our behalf. Our sins have really been paid for.

But was his thirst—and a desire to quench it—the primary reason Jesus spoke this word? Was there enough wine vinegar in all the world to take away the thirst Jesus must have felt? I doubt it. But John tells us the chief reason Jesus spoke this fifth word from the cross was **"so that Scripture would be fulfilled."**

The same Savior who said that he had come to fulfill every last bit of God's commands (Matthew 5:17,18) had also come to fulfill every last prophecy made about him. In Psalm 22 Jesus had prophesied about himself, **"My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth"** (v. 15). Then in Psalm 69 he said, **"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst"** (v. 21).

Given all he'd been through, it hardly seems critical that Jesus would fulfill this

small portion of Scripture, but that had never been Jesus' way. He didn't take any days off from being your perfect substitute and Savior. He left nothing undone.

Therefore, there is no need for you to do something to be saved, to finish off what Jesus started. Even in this seemingly most minor of matters, Jesus has done it all. Amen.

SIXTH WORD: *John 19:30*

³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."

With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

DEVOTION—A Word of Completion

Finished. It's hard for us to think of many things actually being finished. Oh, little things get finished, like writing an exam, reading a book—those sorts of things can be finished. Laundry, grocery shopping, cleaning, car and home maintenance—those sorts of things are never really finished. They need our constant attention. There's always something that needs redoing before long.

And who of us would dare to say that we are finished working on our relationships with others? Even if there isn't something that needs fixing, there's always something we can do better.

Many people think that same way about their status before God. They view their status before God as unfinished, as something always under construction. They not only talk about getting on God's good side but also what they need to do to stay there. In other words, they think it's never finished.

People who think and speak that way appear to be very humble, but they are in fact very wrong. When they think that way, they ignore and disregard Jesus' words because he said, "**It is finished.**"

The sacrifices for sin? The writer of Hebrews says, **Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many** (Hebrews 9:28). Finished!

The condemnation of God's law? The apostle Paul says, **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (Romans 8:1). Finished!

The necessity of measuring up to God's standards perfectly? The writer of Hebrews says, **By one sacrifice [Jesus] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy** (Hebrews 10:14). Finished!

Jesus' sixth word from the cross was very literally *a word*. In Greek it is just one word: *tetelestai*. It was the word a shopkeeper would write on someone's bill when it had been paid. Paid in full! Finished. The bill for our sins has been paid.

Jesus summoned his waning strength to say these words because they needed to be heard. It wasn't his Father who needed to hear these words—the Father already knew it was finished. No, it was for us! We who are tormented by our sins against the holy God need to hear these words to know that Jesus was tormented for us, and the torment is finished. Jesus spoke those words to us so that when the devil comes to us on our deathbed, when he holds the Ten Commandments before us to fill us with despair over our sin, we may speak Jesus' words to the devil: *"It is finished! It is finished! The blood of Jesus Christ his Son has purified me from every sin"* (Cf. 1 John 1:7). Amen.

SEVENTH WORD: *Luke 23:44-46*

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

DEVOTION—A Word of Confidence

We have come to the final word Jesus spoke from the cross, the last thing he said before he died. If you do an internet search for famous last words, you'll be able to read the last words of many, many people. Many of them are words of wit, probably preserved to illustrate the spirit of the speaker, courageous even in the face of death. I suspect they're intended, if only subconsciously, to comfort us with the idea that death isn't particularly

intimidating. That death merely serves as a setup for a punch line.

The reality, of course, is that even if a person's last words use death as the setup for a punch line, it's the last punch line ever spoken. Death delivers a knockout punch that silences everything.

One might think, then, that Jesus' last word, because he always spoke the truth, would be a word of defeat, a word of despair. Instead, he says, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** Those are not words of despair or defeat. They are not words of death. They are confident words of victory. They are confident words of life. Just as Jesus had assured the thief on the cross that he would be in paradise immediately after he died, Jesus also expected the same. He knew his body would be placed into a grave, but he knew his soul would soar immediately into the loving embrace of his Father. He knew that soon his soul would reunite with his body—a perfect, glorified body.

Once again Jesus addresses God as his Father. He knew that he had fully done everything God had asked of him. He knew he stood blameless before God. He knew he could address him as Father. Therefore he could, and he did, peacefully and confidently entrust his soul to God.

At our last hour, we may speak with the same confidence we do when we pray Luther's Evening Prayer, which echoes

Jesus' confident words: *"Into your hands I commit my body and soul and all things."* Even in death we may be confident, for we know what Jesus has promised. We need not fear having our souls sentenced to everlasting suffering by an angry judge. Rather, at our last hour, we look forward to having our loving Father take our souls to heaven, because we too will stand blameless before God. We will stand before God with sins paid for—sins removed. It is finished. Amen.

There is, in one sense, an eighth word of Good Friday. It's the word spoken by the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilate regarding the tomb of Jesus. To anyone who had witnessed the events of that day, this word might have appeared to be the last word—the slamming shut of a tomb, a life, and all hope. God gets the last word. He always does. And although we go home tonight with the slamming ringing in our ears, we know better than to go home without hope. We go home knowing that this last word of Good Friday is actually a good word, because it ensures that the only way someone could come out of that tomb would be if he were the very Son of God. It assures us that the tomb will be empty on Easter Sunday for only one reason: because our Savior didn't only give himself up to death, he rose up and defeated it. Hear now the eighth word of Good Friday: (Reading of the burial of Jesus and the posting of the guard).

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

Theme artwork used by permission. Bible artwork by Ian M. Welch—Copyright 2013 Ian M. Welch. All Rights Reserved. paramentics.com

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NIV. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.