

WORDS SPOKEN ON THE CROSS, PART 1

Luke 23:32-43

When someone is nearing the end of their life on earth, they usually have a few but simple, proverbial words to share with their loved ones. Just before he passed away with cancer, my dad told me, “*Don’t live to work. Work to live.*” He also told me to, “*Never stop serving the Lord.*” Those final words are precious to me. Maybe you can recall some words like that as well. No final words, however, are so precious though as those final words spoken by Jesus on the cross.

The cross of Jesus is what Lewis Sperry Chafer called one of the most stupendous events in all of world history. I heard someone once call it the apex of human history, and rightly so. And the Gospels record Jesus speaking 7 utterances as He hung on the cross in those final hours and it’s this moment and those sayings that I want to study in depth and in order this Easter. This is a study I’ve considered doing for the past few years and this is the year for it. And I should let you know that there is a book I will be using in correlation with this series called, “*The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross*” by Arthur Pink, an old preacher and theologian who passed on to be with the Lord in 1952.

Why Study This? Discipleship flows out Christology (study of Christ).

But in studying these 7 last words of Jesus’s earthly life on the cross, we don’t just want to know more facts about what happened on the cross. That’s not why Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John recorded them. In fact, you’re going to see that each of these writers only seemed to write down the utterances of Jesus that supported their purpose in writing, what we call **authorial intent**. In other words, when the gospel writers wrote what they did, they didn’t just write everything they knew that happened as a historian might consider doing. They wrote **history** but it is an intentionally arranged **narrative** genre designed to give instruction in **theology** – helping us understand Jesus and to walk like Him. So they are trying to do something in us concerning discipleship or evangelism (John) with what and how they’ve written. They know that our discipleship flows out of our understanding of who Jesus is and what God has done through Him. For example, Jesus is described as going “ahead” of the disciples (Mark 10:32) because we are to “follow in His steps.” (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus’s words on the cross teach us how to follow Him.

And today we are going to be in the gospel of Luke, and before we dive in we should note the authorial intent. Luke is writing to a man named **Theophilus** who is likely a Roman official of some kind and a recent Gentile convert to Christianity (Luke identified with him using the term “us” in the introduction). And because God’s program has long been predominantly Jewish, he is wanting to know more about his place in God’s program as a Gentile. He believes in Jesus, but he wants to know “*the exact truth*” about the things that have taken place to bring about this great salvation among the Gentiles (Luke 1:1-4). That’s the feel of this book. He wants to know what God has done and is doing so that he knows how to order his life.

So in the beginning of Luke in the Christmas story, in chapter 1, **Mary** is exalting the Lord who allows her to give birth to the **promised Messiah**, her **God and Savior** (46-47). In chapter 2, a righteous and devout man named **Simeon** is blessing God for letting him hold the newborn Savior in his arms, quoting **Isaiah**, saying, *“For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a **Light of revelation to the Gentiles**, and the glory of Your people Israel.”* With the Christian Church being a fairly new thing then, you might be thinking, *“Wait, what? A Light to the Gentiles? How is He going to be a light to the dirty rotten Gentiles?”* So that’s what you see from the beginning of Luke to the end of Acts is that how that plays out and how Jesus is the Light of the world.

Authorial Intent of Luke: God’s purpose is to advance the gospel to all men.

If you say, *“Well that sounds very similar to Acts,”* remember that Luke and Acts, though separate in your Bible, are **2 volumes of 1 continuous story with one central intent**. Imagine how in our study of Acts 13:1-12 last week, Theophilus would’ve responded to Luke’s record of the Gentile Roman governor **Sergius Paulus** finding the **Light** and the Jewish sorcerer **Bar-Jesus** being blinded by Paul in **darkness**. Acts 13 is a big transition in Acts and even bigger when you consider it in relation to both volumes. The Gentile receive Light and the Jew is darkened. Before we finish Acts 13, Paul turns to the Gentiles, quoting **Isaiah** like Simeon, saying, *“For so the Lord has commanded us, “I have placed you as **a light for the Gentiles**, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”* Luke’s central purpose is that of demonstrating God’s purpose of bringing salvation to all men. So there’s the big picture and purpose. Luke 19:10 is often considered the theme verse. Jesus came *“to seek and save that which was lost.”* So with that purpose in mind, let’s read **Luke 23:32-38**. We pick it up in verse 32 as a man named Simon of Cyrene is helping Jesus carry his cross:

*“Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, **“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”** And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, *“He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.”* The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, *“If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”* Now there was also an inscription above Him, *“This is the King of the Jews.”**

I. THE WORD OF FORGIVENESS. (Luke 23:34)

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” It’s amazing to think of what Jesus has been through and is going through as He utters these words. Jesus has been arrested, sold out by a trader, abandoned by His friends, mocked, spit on, crowned with thorns, blindfolded, beaten, stood before illegal & unjust trials of Jews and Romans. He has been scourged so severely with a flagrum whip that some of His insides are exposed. Many who experienced scourging like this died from the scourging alone because of the sheer blood loss and it’s likely He’s entering

hypovolemic shock. Not satisfied, they continue to cry, “*Crucify Him!*” and their demand was granted by Pilate even though Pilate cannot find any reason to punish or crucify Him (23:22).

Jesus is already so exhausted that a man named **Simon** helped Him carry the cross-beam. This is a detail supporting his authorial intent: Simon is from Cyrene, likely dark-skinned, thus demonstrating that a Gentile was involved in helping carry Jesus’ cross. It shows that Gentiles like Theophilus can take up their cross daily and follow Him. Last week, we noted the diversity of church leadership at Antioch that supported the intent. At this point though, Jesus has also been crucified – nails driven into His hands and feet and that likely through the ankle bone as one unearthed body revealed recently. But it’s amazing rather than be focused on Himself, soaking in self-pity, or pronouncing curses on His crucifiers, Jesus is focused on others. **He is praying for them. Interceding for them** before the Father. “*Father forgive them.*” It’s a prophetic fulfillment.

Isaiah 53 is 1 of 4 the **Servant Songs** of Isaiah. It describes in detail that the Messiah King/Prince would come and suffer – obviously something most people missed because they are mocking Him and telling Him to come off the cross if He’s the Messiah. Actually Daniel 9:26 prophesied the day of His royal entry and His being cut off and having nothing (the King is crucified). But in doing so He is fulfilling prophecy. I just want to read a few verses here, “*But the Lord desired to crush Him, causing Him grief; If He renders Himself as a **guilt offering**, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, **My Servant, will justify the many, For He will bear their wrongdoings. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the plunder with the strong, Because He poured out His life unto death, and was counted with wrongdoers; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors.***”

Jesus is the prophesied Intercessor.

So there’s a lot there for us. One, I just want us to catch the vision that Jesus’ crucifixion is not an accident. It was prophesied over 500 years ago in great detail and even planned before the creation of the world, the Bible says (John 1:29; Rev. 13:8). Jesus could have taken Himself off that cross. He could’ve called down legions of angels at His arrest. But instead, He laid down His life for us. Also, He is our **Intercessor in 2 ways: as a priest and a sin offering**. Priests in the Old Testament interceded between sinners and God. Well, as the **Son of God** and **Son of Man**, He intercedes between sinful man and holy God by offering Himself. Jesus proved Himself to be the quintessential Intercessor for sinners through this saying by the way **He interceded for sinners in prayer like a Priest before the Father, while interceding for sinners by offering Himself as a sacrificial guilt offering**. The depth of the significance of his utterance profound.

But I think it gets even more detailed than that. This sin offering satisfies ignorant sin. They do not know what they are doing.

Jesus forgives all our sins, even sins of ignorance.

What OT sins of ignorance should remind us of the most is **1) Gentiles who do not know God** or His Law. This shows us that Jesus is willing to forgive even the ignorant, sinful Gentiles have lived much of their lives without God – encouraging Mr. Gentile Theophilus, no doubt. But **2) even Jews had to offer offerings for sins of ignorance.** They would have to offer rams or bulls without blemish (typifying Christ’s perfection) for their sins to be covered (Lev. 4:2; 5:15-16; Num. 15:22-25). David himself prayed in Psalm 19:12, *“Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.”* So even if we have the Law and are trying to be spiritually attuned to our walk with God, we are so sinful that we will sin without even realizing it sometimes, and that’s something that can really mess with your conscience if you don’t understand how Christ has completely forgiven you. It leaves people in confessionals trying to recount every sinful thought.

So what Jesus is doing by saying this is that those **OT sacrifices were just a shadow of Himself, the Lamb of God, who can fully forgive us all our sins – even unknown sins.** Hebrews 9 says He is the sacrifice who can make a worshipper **perfect in conscience**, knowing Jesus has obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 7:25 says, *“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

Forgiveness is man’s greatest need.

It shouldn’t be of any shock to us that forgiveness and the willingness to forgive comes up in Jesus’ words on the cross because that’s what the cross is all about. Man’s greatest need is to be forgiven of his sins, which is what Jesus is accomplishing on the cross in that moment. All who believe in Him can be justified from all things that the Law couldn’t justify them from. The reason why Luke is adding all of these horrific details about being crucified between two criminals and people mocking and jeering is to show us that **He is willing to forgive even the vilest of sinners.**

But let’s ask, how does this understanding of Christ affect our discipleship? As disciples of Jesus, Jesus shows us how to face injustice and suffering. He is not uttering threats but is **praying** for His enemies and demonstrating a willingness to forgive them. He’s applying his own Sermon on the Mount: *“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”* Praying speaks of willingness to forgive.

Disciples always maintain a willingness to forgive.

It’s important that we understand as Arthur Pink did, that He did not personally forgive them but expressed His desire to forgive them. Their forgiveness is conditioned upon their repentance. If they will repent – change their mind about Jesus and trust in Him as Savior – He will forgive. Jesus is just applying what He taught a few chapters back in Luke 17, He said, *“If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent, forgive him.’”* He had a willingness to forgive but sometimes forgiveness is conditional. But we make sure we do our part and Jesus is the perfect example.

He shows us how to respond: We are **patient** with them, understanding we're undeserving and ignorant sinners too. We **pray** for them. We continue to **love** them. We express our **willingness to forgive**. We aren't malicious (Eph. 4:25-32) but **leave room for the wrath of God**. We don't take our own vengeance in this life (Romans 12:19). And we **entrust ourselves to the Just Judge** (2 Peter 2). Despite ill or unjust treatment, we can be content and be unreservedly committed to God knowing that one day we will be fully and clearly vindicated. Wrongs that were suffered will be made right and the righteous will rejoice in it.

II. THE WORD OF SALVATION. (Luke 23:39-43)

This utterance is found in verse 43 and spoken to one of the criminals that He was crucified with. *"³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" ⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*

This scene reminds us again of Isaiah 53 where even though innocent, Jesus is *"numbered with the transgressors."* Sinless, He died for sinners, as a sinner, in the midst of sinners. Pink notes how God ordained Jesus to be crucified between 2 sinners to show the depths of shame into which the glorious Son of God had descended into as **the Son of Man** – Luke's favorite title for Jesus – a title that identifies Jesus with us. He truly occupied the lowliest of positions, emptying Himself of His glory to come and die the worst form of punishment between criminals, taking the place of even the worst of sinners. And the reason He did it is right there:

Jesus saves us to be with Him in paradise.

One of things I am thrilled to talk about is **paradise**. One of the most powerful and driving, motivating thoughts in my heart and mind is that of paradise. I was showing my wife a picture that I want to buy and put in my office – it has three of my favorite things on it. **Emerald** waters, my favorite color, reminding me of the emerald rainbow around God's throne before the tribulation (Rev. 4:3). It has the **sunset** in it, one of my favorite aspects of creation that makes me worship. And it has **palm trees**, which reminds me both of how I should be evergreen, even in a spiritual desert (Psalm 92) and it reminds me of **paradise**, where Jesus is. This picture speaks powerfully to me about many biblical truths (and not just about a vacation, haha).

We were created to live with God in an Edenic paradise but that was lost in Genesis 3 with sin. All of creation has suffered with us, making life with thorns very difficult (Genesis 3:17-18; Romans 8:20). But the good news is, Jesus has taken our thorns and paid for sin on the cross and will fully restore paradise someday. Heaven will be paradise. The earth at Jesus' return will be paradise. And the New Heaven and New Earth will be paradise. But what really makes paradise, paradise? The fact that **Jesus is there**. It's going to be awesome living in a world where the curse is lifted and

removed, but the best thing is that we will be in the full expression of His presence and see His face (Rev. 22:3-4). Paul said in Philippians 1:23 “*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*” Death is not the end. There is no such thing as “soul sleep”. The immaterial part of us separates to be present with the Lord when we die. The criminal joined Him *that day* in paradise.

Disciples seek to share the gospel with all men.

Remember this is a criminal that was an outcast. He would be tossed into a mass grave for criminals where he would be forgotten – no special tombstone for him for people to remember him by. That’s why he says, “*Remember me...*” It’s his way of saying he wants to be forgiven and doesn’t want this to be the end. Jesus remembers even those who don’t deserve a tombstone. He seeks to save all men. Think of all the personalities highlighted in this chapter. An outcast criminal. Simon of Cyrene (26). Romans like the centurion in verse 47. Women are mentioned several times (27, 49, 55). A prominent and wealthy Jew in verse 50. In the rest of Luke: prostitutes in 7:36-50; tax collectors in 19:1-10; Samaritans (Acts 8), Gentiles (Acts 10), enemies like Saul. It all tells us Jesus died for all and to see them become part of His story of redemption. That’s why we seek to share Jesus with all.

Jesus died for all, but all must decide.

We must make up our minds about who Jesus is and what He has done. Is He your Savior or no? Because He only invited one of these criminals to enjoy paradise with Him. Both of them knew they are sinners, but only one criminal cried out to Him to be saved and Jesus exceeded his expectations. The thief only wanted a place in Christ’s *future* kingdom on earth, but the grace exceeds his expectation, for, “*Today,*” he would be with Jesus in paradise.

Most assume this dying thief was converted on the cross that day and had no opportunity for good works either before or after he believed in Jesus. He didn’t have time to be baptized or do religious works or good deeds. He couldn’t turn over a new leaf and or commit to live a better life. He is helpless to try and save himself. If he was saved, it was by grace alone through faith along in Christ alone. I think Luke wants us to see that and understand that. The way to Paradise is not by what we do, but by trusting in what Christ has done for us on the cross. That is the place of forgiveness.