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## **MESSAGES FROM THE CROSS**

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## PREFACE

Calvary is the most noted and cherished place on earth. Geographically it could not be called a mountain. It is not famous for its scenery. It was on this elevation outside the walls of Jerusalem that the greatest event of history took place. It was there the Son of God gave His life and died on a cross. It was through His shed blood that atonement was made for the sins of the world. At Calvary we come to a better understanding of the past. We find victory for the present. We are given hope for the future.

Jesus spoke seven times while on the cross. These are immortal messages which came from the lips of the dying Saviour. The author has spent many hours in study and meditation upon the words Christ spoke during the six hours He was on the cross. In presenting these messages there is no claim of scholarship. This book is sent forth with the prayer that it may inspire the reader with a better understanding of Christ's death and to a deeper devotion to the Saviour who gave Himself for us at Calvary.

Buford Battin,  
Lubbock, Texas

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## 1

### PRAYER FOR HIS PERSECUTORS

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus had been brought up at Nazareth. Perhaps He spent His early years as a worker in a carpenter shop. At thirty years of age He entered His ministry. For some three and a half years He was busily engaged in His ministry of love. Now at 33 years of age He had been arrested and condemned to die on a cross.

At Calvary there were three crosses erected. On the right and left two thieves were fastened to die for their crimes. Jesus was nailed to the middle cross. Prophecy was being fulfilled: "He was numbered with the transgressors."

Jesus was given the most attention for there was more bitter hatred shown toward Him than there was toward the other two men. His perfect example and the light of His teachings brought condemnation to the religious group. They hated Him and followed Him to the cross to scoff and ridicule. They cried out, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." These words were hurled at Him and His followers. The nails had been driven through His hands and feet. His seamless robe was taken away and soldiers were gambling for it. Most of His friends had forsaken Him. Only a few devoted followers had come to the scene. At this moment His agonies were most severe and His nerves were tingling with the keenest suffering. His exhaustion may have been greater

afterwards, but His sensibility to pain was perhaps at its most critical moment. It was then He prayed a short prayer; not words of condemnation, not complaint to God, not a prayer for self but a prayer for others. He prayed for those who were His enemies. As was prophesied, "He opened not His mouth" in complaint or reviling but He did open His mouth in a prayer of mercy and love for His persecutors after they had done their worst against Him. Let us observe this brief prayer and meditate upon its meaning.

## I. The Invocation

The first word in this short prayer is "Father." This may be called the invocation. He was invoking the presence and help of God, the heavenly Father. Jesus was God but He was also man and now we see Him as the Son of Man in all His humanity dying in agony. In the hour of death all people look to God and their heart cries out to Him. On the cross Jesus identified Himself with humanity as an intercessor. He looked to the Father in that hour and called on Him, not in behalf of Himself but in behalf of others-those who were His enemies. What an exhibition of love we see as Jesus called on the Father in behalf of sinners. He is the sinner's best friend. In this storm of suffering it was a message of peace and calm to hear Jesus call, "Father." He was calling God, the Father, to come and help His enemies. This was an expression of confidence toward God and love for His enemies.

## II. The Petition

In this brief prayer we recognize a strong petition made to the Father. The petition is "Forgive them." He was not praying that He be delivered from the cross but that those who were responsible for the ill treatment be forgiven of their cruel deeds. He was asking for the best possible thing for His enemies.

Here we see in this petition a demonstration of His teachings. He let the world see that He practiced what He preached. That which Jesus preached on the sunny hill of the Sermon on the Mount He put into practice on the grim hill of Calvary. He was once asked if it was appropriate to forgive seven times if one came seven times asking for forgiveness. Jesus replied that the forgiving spirit was not only to be practiced seven times but if the occasion should arise forgiveness should be extended seventy times seven times. The crowd at the cross had constantly wronged Jesus but the Man on the middle cross still prayed, "Forgive them." He is a Christ who petitions the Father for our forgiveness.

Who was included in this prayer?" Forgive them," He prayed. All who had any share in the mockery, crucifixion and death of Christ were included. It included the Roman governors, Pilate and Herod, who had authority to crucify Him; the Roman soldiers whose duty it was to see that the sentence was carried out to execution. It included the Jewish priests and rulers who cried out against Him and incensed the people against Him. It included the multitude who were rejecting Him. He included all people then living and through every generation to our day, all who reject Him. What love He had to include all sinners in His petition. What a Friend we have in Jesus! He is the One I want for my Saviour.

In this petition we know Christ was confident forgiveness is available. Jesus was actually interceding that sinners be converted and that God convert them. Where there is no conversion there is no forgiveness. Jesus believed with all confidence that the worst sinners and His most bitter enemies could be forgiven if the sinner would cooperate with God by repenting of sin. In the Garden we hear Christ's petition: "If it be possible." In this prayer from the cross there was no "if." He was confident forgiveness was available. Therefore, whosoever will may repent and he can be saved.

### III. The Argument

The final words in this brief prayer offered by the suffering Saviour on the cross might be called the argument. "For they know not what they do." Jesus was not excusing His enemies or justifying them for their deeds. He was strengthening His appeal by saying, "They know not." There were some things they did know. They knew they were mistreating Jesus. They knew Jesus was innocent and no guilt or evil was evident on His life record. Pilate declared, "I find no fault in this just man." They knew their actions were brutal. No sinner is entirely ignorant of his sins.

There was not sufficient excuse for their ignorance. The Scriptures contained many clear promises of the Messiah; His birth, His deeds and His life and death. They could and should have known that Jesus was the Christ. There was no excuse for their ignorance. To have watched Jesus and observed His work and teachings was all that was needed to clear up their ignorance. Light was given but they rejected the light and were left in darkness and ignorance. That did not excuse them. Today people will not read the Bible and will not seek after divine truth. Many of our day are almost as ignorant as heathen concerning spiritual matters. Light is offered but people choose to live in darkness. The ignorance of people in our land will not clear them before God.

Yet, Jesus said, "They know not what they do." There were things they did not know and could not have known about their sins and rejection of Christ. They did not know they were torturing, mocking and killing One who would live on in the lives of millions of people for every century to follow. They did not know the extent of their sin and how awful were their acts. No sinner can ever realize the consequence of his sin at the time of his sinful acts. He does not fear or feel the tragic outcome of his sins. He does not realize the penalty that is assigned to every sin. They did not realize the greatness of Christ or the awfulness of their deeds. Jesus plead as one arguing a case at the throne of Justice. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Jesus is the Saviour who pleads for us to be forgiven for we can not realize the full meaning of the things we do.

### IV. The Answer

We look for the answer to this prayer Jesus prayed from the cross. Did God answer? Yes, God heard the petition of His suffering Son upon the cross and answered. Jesus was praying that mercy be extended to His enemies. In answer mercy overruled justice. If justice had been carried out that crowd would have been destroyed but mercy was granted. We marvel at the mercy shown to the enemies of Jesus.

The Bible gives incidents of judgment on people who were irreverent to God and hypocritical in their dealings. In Genesis 10 we read of the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, who carried on a false form of worship and irreverently offered strange fire upon the altar. The fire leaped out upon them and they were burned to death.

In Numbers 12 we read of Miriam and Aaron becoming critical toward Moses who was God's man called to a great and sacred task. Because of their criticism of Moses Miriam was struck with leprosy and suffered seven days. She would have died had Moses not prayed for her healing. This all came because she criticized Moses and was a fault-finder.

In I Samuel 5, 6 we read of the Ark of the Covenant being stolen from Israel by the Philistines. They took it as spoils of a battle. The ark contained the two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments inscribed upon them. The Ark was sacred because God's law is sacred. The Philistines kept the Ark seven months but loss and suffering became so severe among the Philistines that they were glad to return the Ark to Israel.

In Acts 5 we read of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Ghost and were hypocritical in their profession. Because of this they both dropped dead.

But what became of the crowd about the cross? They lied about Jesus and employed false witnesses to testify against Him. They took the Son of God, beat his back, crowned Him with thorns, spit upon Him, smote His cheeks, nailed Him to a cross, jeered and mocked while He died. We would expect the earth to open and swallow them up or fire to rain down and consume them or see them struck down in some way This did not happen. Jesus' prayer was answered. Justice demanded their destruction. Mercy overruled justice. Jesus' prayer was answered and for nearly forty years mercy was extended to that crowd and opportunity given for them to repent and be forgiven. How great and wonderful it is to have a Christ who pleads for mercy and obtains mercy for us. We are not saved from sin because we deserve to be saved but because of mercy rather than justice. We will not get to heaven because we deserve heaven. We do not deserve it. Justice would condemn us. Mercy obtains salvation and heaven for us.

Jesus' prayer was answered immediately. In that very hour God began to bring about salvation of souls. One thief on the cross responded to this prayer. He heard Him praying and knew that he was included. He became penitent and there while dying this sinner looked to Jesus for help asking to be remembered. God answered immediately and redeemed the soul of the penitent thief.

When the centurion who carried out the execution walked away he said, "Truly this was the Son of God." This is evidence he may have been forgiven and saved that day. The Roman who drove nails into Jesus' limbs may have found mercy and pardon.

Just fifty days later came Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out in sanctifying power upon 120 Christians in Jerusalem. They went out to preach to the crowd gathered in the city for observance of Pentecost. On that occasion, 3,000 souls were saved. Jesus' prayer was being answered. Using our imagination we can visualize that great scene. Here is a man who testifies, "I cried out to Pilate to crucify Him but now Jesus has saved me from my sins." It may be another

said, "I spit upon Him but He prayed for me and now I am saved and He is my Saviour." Another says, "I made the crown of thorns and pulled it upon His head but I have been so condemned and miserable I had to repent. I could not resist His great love for me and now I am saved." Another may have said, "I stood at the cross, booed and mocked Him. I heard Him pray for me to be forgiven. I could not resist longer. I have repented and now He is my Friend and Saviour." What victory for Jesus! Not many days later another crowd of 5,000 souls was saved. God heard and answered the prayer His wonderful Son prayed for His enemies.

This prayer of Jesus is being answered today. We have persecuted, rejected and crucified afresh the Son of God in our lives. Forgiveness comes only to those who will yield, cooperate with God and give up their sins. People today know not what they do when they sin against God. He prayed for us and died for us and as we yield to Him His prayer is answered.

There was a very poor woman who wanted to send her ambitious son to college to give him the advantage of an education. The mother had to work hard and make many personal sacrifices in order to provide for her son in school. When the son was to graduate, he wrote his mother to come. She sent back word that she could not because her best dress had already been turned once. She would have to dress so shabby that she was afraid he would be ashamed of her. He wrote back that he didn't care how plain her clothes might be, and urged her so strongly that she went. He met her at the station, and took her to a nice place to stay. The day came for his graduation. He walked down the aisle with his plainly dressed mother and put her in one of the best seats. To her great surprise her son was the valedictorian of the class and he carried the honors of the graduating class, He won a prize and when it was given to him he stepped down and kissed his mother and said, "Here, Mother, here is the prize! It is yours. I would not have won it had it not been for you."

There is One who has paid the real price and made the sacrifice to provide all that we have. Jesus Christ went to the cross for us. He loved us, suffered for us and died for us while we were yet sinners. He saw us in sin and prayed for us, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

All that I am, all that I have, every blessing and privilege I have received in life has come to me because of Christ. All that heaven will mean at the end of our way on earth was purchased by Christ. I feel like bowing in humility, reverence and devotion to bestow my all at His feet saying to Him, "Lord Jesus, You are responsible for it all. I give you all the honor and praise because you provided it through your sacrifice, love and prayer for me."

\* \* \* \* \*

2

## PROMISE TO A PENITENT THIEF

"Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

On the day Jesus was crucified there were three crosses erected outside Jerusalem on Golgotha. Two thieves were crucified, one on either side of Jesus. It was not an accident that Jesus

was nailed to a cross between these men. This was a final malicious chuckle against Jesus on the part of His enemies. Little did they know that prophecy was being fulfilled when they identified Him with sinners. Seven hundred years previous Isaiah had given the prophecy: "He was numbered with the transgressors. . . . He was despised and rejected of men."

These three crosses made a symbol of salvation. On one cross there was a penitent thief who prayed to Christ with faith in Him. On the middle cross was the Saviour who heard the prayer of the penitent and saved him from sin. On the third cross was a thief who rejected and railed on Christ. He died in his sins while so close to Christ This is the condition of humanity. Christ is in our midst giving Himself for humanity. Some repent, believe on Him and are redeemed. Others with the same opportunity reject Christ and are lost

The first word Jesus spoke after being nailed to the cross was a prayer. Jesus prayed for His enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The second message He spoke was an answer to prayer. Both men by Jesus on the crosses prayed. Only one prayer brought any response from Jesus. One thief prayed, "If thou be Christ,. save thyself and us." Jesus made no response. The other thief prayed, "Jesus, Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus answered this man's prayer and saved his soul. Jesus' words here were addressed to a single individual. Our Lord spoke to this man as if he were the only being in the world. What comfort this message has brought to countless needy souls since that far-off day!

## I. The Man Who Prayed

This man who prayed drew the attention of Jesus. Let us observe him. Who was he and what kind of character was he? We do not know his name. He was a thief but not the kind of thief we may think of by that term. He was a revolutionist He with his companions had belonged to the Jewish underworld. They had resorted to outlawry. Perhaps this man on the cross had organized guerrilla bands and sought to prey upon Rome as ruthlessly as they thought Rome had preyed upon them. This man who prayed to Jesus on the cross had been a man of violence whose hands were deeply stained with human blood. Roman authorities had chased him down and decided that he should be crucified for his crimes.

This thief who prayed was a common sinner. He is a typical sinner of today. It may seem a bit harsh to present this thief, robber and revolutionist as an example of a sinner in our community but he is a Bible model of a present day sinner.

Suppose that a business firm in the East appointed an agent to represent them in the West, and that every month they forwarded to him his salary. But suppose also at the end of the year his employers discovered that though the agent had been cashing the checks they sent him, nevertheless, he had served another firm all the time and the firm he served was their competitor. Would not that agent be a thief? Yet this is precisely the situation and state of every sinner. He has been sent into this world by God, and God has endowed him with talents and the capacity to use and improve them. God has blessed him with health and strength. He has supplied his every need and provided innumerable blessings for him to enjoy. But with what result? The very things God has given him have been mis-appropriated. The sinner has served another master, even Satan the enemy of God. He has robbed God.

## II. The Prayer He Prayed

Let us now, after looking upon the man who prayed to Christ on the cross, observe the prayer he prayed. It was a prayer of faith. Faith is determined by the confidence one has in God. This man believed in Jesus. The other thief prayed, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." There was doubting and little faith in Christ. He railed on Jesus and the same as said, "You are not what you claim to be or you would come down from the cross and take us down." The penitent thief did not pray, "Remember me if" but he prayed, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Some have thought this man may have seen Jesus before the day of crucifixion and listened to Him in His ministry because he addressed Him, "Jesus, Lord," using the name familiar to His close friends. It is doubtful that he had ever seen Jesus before that day, but he saw enough of Him on that occasion to give him a foundation for his faith. As there was a weeping mother at the foot of Jesus' cross there could have been a weeping mother at the foot of this thief's cross but we do not know about that. There is a reason for his confidence in Jesus. He may have stood and watched Jesus stand before Pilate and heard the sentence of execution read against Him. He may have seen Jesus undergo the awful scourging with the cruel lash and observed the poise Jesus maintained. He watched Jesus carry the heavy cross, His back bruised and a crown of thorns on His head. He heard His words to the daughters of Jerusalem. He heard the mockery and cry of the mob. He saw Him nailed to the cross and heard Him pray for the forgiveness of His enemies. He heard the mob cry out, "He saved others, himself He cannot save." He read the sign over the head, "This is the King of the Jews." He looked on Jesus and had confidence in Him.

This thief became penitent. He prayed to Him, "Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Against the white background of the innocence of Jesus this outlaw saw himself. He demonstrated a strong faith in Jesus while His disciples fled or followed afar off. He had faith in Christ when His enemies did all to destroy confidence in Him. The kingship of Jesus was the central sarcasm of that dark hour. They accused Him of being a pretender. In mockery they said that a king must have a robe and they threw a discarded scarlet robe on Him. A king must have a scepter so they put a flimsy reed in His hand. A king must have a crown so they made Him a crown of thorns. The sign over His head Pilate had placed there was prompted by sarcasm. "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Yet with all this ridicule the thief had faith in Him. Jesus did not look much like the Son of God but this man could see divinity in Him. He did not think of Him as a king but "the King." He saw himself utterly undone and helpless, his life wasted in sin and now facing death but he saw there was hope for him through Christ. He prayed to Him, "Lord, Jesus remember me." If this man could have such faith surely any seeker after salvation can have faith in Christ

This thief prayed a prayer of confession. He realized that he had done something wrong and he confessed it He felt that he deserved nothing but death. A sinner has to get to the point he feels he does not deserve to be saved before he can be redeemed from sin. Had he compared himself with the other thief or that howling mob about the cross he might have felt quite well of himself. But he felt his own guilt when he looked at Jesus. He first confessed his faith in Christ and acknowledged his guilt in addressing the other thief. He said to him, "Dost thou not fear God? - We receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." He took his stand for



Christ, rebuked the other thief and acknowledged his own transgressions. This was also a confession to the crowd of his faith and confidence in Christ. He was more bold than the disciples. He exclaimed before that mob, "This man (on the middle cross) hath done nothing amiss." Then he confessed his helplessness and need to Christ. He did not ask to be taken down from the cross as the other thief had done. He seemed to feel he did not deserve to live when he thought of his deeds. He did not ask Jesus to give him a place of honor in His kingdom but just requested that he be remembered. "Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

### III. The Prayer Answered

This prayer was answered and the answer came immediately. The other thief prayed, "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us." His prayer was not answered. But when this thief prayed, his prayer received the attention of Jesus who responded immediately with a message of assurance. The first thief prayed to be saved from death but the second thief prayed to be saved from sin and hell. A penitent sinner no sooner seeks than he receives, no sooner knocks than the door of mercy is opened to him.

The answer was abundant. The man received more than he expected. He seemed to think that at some far-away day Jesus would come into His kingdom and the penitent wanted to be remembered. Jesus answered, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Usually one lingered long upon the cross before he died. When the soldier came to the cross and broke this man's legs, hastening his death and relieving him of his pain he did not realize he had a part in answering the prayer. That day the thief died and his suffering ended. Jesus took him by the hand and walked into heaven with him as the first trophy of grace, a soul redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. What an abundant answer to a simple prayer of faith.

The message Jesus spoke from the cross to a penitent thief gives assurance to us. This was a universal answer. He answers every penitent sinner with the same promise he gave to this man on the cross near Him. Since the suffering Saviour heard this man above the howling mob and turned His attention to him in spite of His own weakness and suffering, it is easy to believe He will hear and answer every sinner's prayer of confession and repentance. This thief was not saved by any religious ceremony. He did not join the church. He was not baptized. He never went to church. He did not ever take the Lord's Supper. He did not use his hands or feet to serve God. He was nailed to the cross and did not have the privilege of doing these things, yet Jesus saved him immediately. It is not by ceremonies or works that we are saved from our sins. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Here is assurance to every sinner that he can be saved immediately if he will come to Christ

In this message of Jesus to the penitent thief we are given the assurance that after death we are immediately taken to heaven. To believe that at death we fall asleep and the soul sleeps in a grave until some far-off resurrection is not the faith of the New Testament but it teaches "to be absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord." Jesus said, "Today thou shalt be with me." For the Christian death means immediate glory.

In this promise of Christ to the penitent man on the cross we have the assurance of an abiding fellowship: "Thou shalt be with me." The Saviour was conquering death. He would live forever. This man was given the promise of entrance into an abiding fellowship with Christ To be saved from sin is more than the removal of a penalty. It is the restoration of a fellowship. Sin causes man to lose fellowship with God. Salvation restores that fellowship. Heaven provides a perfect and permanent fellowship with God through time and through eternity.

Some day, because of the great grace and love of God and through the great salvation provided me I expect to get to heaven. There are a lot of people I want to meet and talk with down the street and stop at the former thief's mansion. I will say to him, "Will you tell me about your life on earth and all that happened at Calvary?" Then he will answer, "I will be glad to tell you. I never get tired of telling the story. I lived a very sinful life and when the end came I was dying upon a cross because of my crimes. I had been watching Jesus as He was brought to Calvary that morning. I observed Him closely, listened to what they said about Him. I noticed how they seemed to center their hatred upon Him and I watched His response and heard Him pray for sinners. There, while nailed to the cross, I looked up and saw Jesus by my side. I knew that He was more than a man. I tried to rebuke the other thief. Hope leaped up in my heart and I cried out to Him, 'Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom'. He answered, 'This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' When He said that I forgot that I was a criminal; I forgot the cross; I forgot that I was dying. I hung there with a song in my heart, rejoicing that I was going to be with Him in paradise. That evening it was all over. Jesus brought me up here and I have been here ever since. In these two thousand years I have never been able to tell Him how much I love Him."

Then I will say, "I never saw Him as you did, but I did see Him by faith. He spoke to me, too. He has brought me safely to the heavenly home." Then we will go down the street together and meet the Saviour and try again to thank Him for saving such sinners as we were when we met Him.

If you are not on your way to heaven, come today in simple faith to Jesus and He will save you. He is the sinner's friend. He will save you now.

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3

### PROVISION FOR HIS MOTHER

"Woman, behold thy son! ... Behold thy mother!" (John 19: 25, 26).

Today we stand again at Calvary where a dying Saviour invites all to come and find the life that never ends. The first word Jesus spoke from the cross was a prayer for His persecutors. The second word was the answer to the prayer of a thief and revolutionist on a nearby cross promising salvation to this dying man. The third word was a message to His mother and to John as a final word to two whom He loved the best.

We hear Him speak a word of affection. He loved His mother. Mary loved her Son. John was the apostle who had a deep love for his Saviour. Here we see a human relationship for friends

and home that is tender and strong. The affection Jesus had for His mother has done much to lift womanhood to a position of honor and respect.

Bishop Arthur J. Moore of the Methodist Church and Homer Rodeheaver of sacred music fame were together visiting Africa. While in the jungles of Belgian Congo they were paying a visit to a native chief who stood before them with his thirty-three wives. Mr. Rodeheaver gave the chief a necktie. The chief, knowing that in accordance with custom he must give something in return for the necktie, called out his biggest and stoutest wife and said, "Take her."

In lands where Jesus is not known woman has no position, no worth, no dignity as a person. Confucius said, "Woman has neither a mind nor a soul." That was something of the thought of the world until Jesus Christ was born of a woman, slept in a mother's arms, called a woman Mother and later lifted the womanhood of the world so high that men in Christian lands take off their hats in the presence of a woman. Jesus did not forget mother and home in the hour He was dying. Let us come near the cross and observe this scene.

### I. The Mother By The Cross

The scripture says, "There stood by the cross of Jesus His mother." Every loyal and devoted mother makes a real sacrifice for her children. Mary had been called on to make many sacrifices but was always submissive to God. At the cross she no doubt reviewed in her mind her past experiences with Jesus for a mother would think of these things as she watched her son die. Like her Son she was not unacquainted with grief.

At the beginning when Mary was unmarried and had lived in perfect purity the angel appeared to her and revealed to her that she was highly favored. God had appointed her to be the mother of the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost. This was no light matter for Mary to become the mother of our Lord in this mysterious and unheard of way. It brought with it no small danger to Mary's reputation and it was a trial to her faith. Mary replied, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem on their mission it must have brought anxiety to her that there was no room in the inn and she had to lay her newly-born babe in a manger. It brought anguish when she learned of Herod's purpose to destroy her infant's life. It was a burden to her to have to flee to Egypt to save her child's life and remain for a period in a foreign land among a pagan people. As Mary stood at the cross all of these experiences must have been reviewed in her mind.

This experience at the cross required courage for her to stand and see her Son die by crucifixion. She knew He was innocent. How brave Mary was! The weaker sex was the stronger at the cross. While others fled from the scene Mary and three other women were the first to come to His side and identify themselves as followers and friends. Perhaps their sex made them safer. In Mary's life there was no feminine weakness demonstrated. There was no wild outcry of uncontrollable anguish. There was no fainting. If she spoke a word it is not recorded by gospel writers. She stood with courage and devotion in unbroken silence. Her love for her Son made her brave and gave her courage to stand by the cross in reverence of Him.

Mary's grief was greater than we can ever know. It was the grief of a mother for her Son dying on a cross. In Simeon's prophecy in the temple when he took the Christ Child in his arms he announced that a sword should pierce the mother's heart. Her heart was pierced. It is always hard for a mother to see her son die. She naturally expects him to lay her head in the grave. Jesus was only thirty-three years of age and far worse, dying the death of a criminal. The crowds are mocking, the priests are jeering, the soldiers are callous and indifferent to Him while they gamble for His seamless coat. Mary is unable to relieve Him but she stands by the cross. His wounds bled but she dared not attempt to relieve Him. His mouth was parched but she could not moisten it. Those outstretched arms used to clasp her neck. She used to fondle those pierced hands and feet and with mother love she had directed them in their first feeble movements. The seamless coat may have been made by her own hands. The nails seemed to pierce her the same as Him. The crown of thorns round His brow was as a circle of flame about her heart. The taunts flung at Him wounded her likewise. Love brought her to Calvary and gave her courage to stand by the cross in reverence while Jesus died for the sins of the world. She might have been called the "Woman of sorrows and acquainted with grief." In observing Mary the world sees a picture of Christian mothers in their love for their children and their Saviour.

## II. The Son On The Cross

Let us look upon the Son on the cross. It was the Son of God giving His life on the cross. He was divine. He was also Son of man. In the life of our Lord there is always a strange blending of the humanity and deity, the majestic and the lowly. At His birth He was laid in a manger; yet angels came from heaven and sang His praise. He was asleep in the end of a boat, overcome with fatigue, and had to be awakened as to His danger; yet He arose and immediately rebuked the wind and the waves and there was a great calm. He was resurrected from the dead; yet those hands that had throttled death were not above preparing breakfast for a few fishermen who had come from a night of fruitless toil. On the cross we see Jesus dying as a man for sin; yet He was not dying for His sins but He gave Himself as God's perfect gift for the sins of the world.

We are impressed with the attitude of Jesus on the cross. He had little concern and anxiety for Himself, but great concern for others. He thought of His loved ones. In that awful hour He was alone, but His loneliness did not render His suffering selfish. Others did not understand why He was dying on a cross. In the midst of His terrible sufferings, in the conflict He was waging to bring redemption to our race, we could not have wondered if Jesus for the time had forgotten all of earth. Instead He seemed to forget self and think of others. His heart concern was for loved ones. He is a Saviour who cares and constantly concerns Himself with our good and our welfare.

## III. The Disciple At The Cross

On this occasion our attention is turned to the disciple at the cross. The one disciple who stayed nearest to Jesus during the trial and crucifixion was John. He was one of the youngest men among the twelve. He seemed to have loved Jesus the most and his great love for his Lord made him more bold. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane it was such a time of excitement and shock that great fear came on the disciples and all of them fled away. John forsook Jesus and fled just like the other ten men.

John did not go far or stay away long. It is to be regretted that anyone will turn away from Christ but how admirable and noble it is to return to Him. John returned immediately. He saw Jesus led away to the council for trial. John was acquainted with the high priest and he went in where Jesus was being tried. He stayed by until Jesus was sentenced to be crucified. He then went to Calvary and was at the cross with Jesus. Perhaps on the way he found Mary and accompanied her and the women to the top of Calvary.

It must have brought comfort to Jesus to see this disciple He loved so much. John had been a close friend to Jesus in His ministry. John had been in close fellowship with Christ. At the last supper John was so close that he was seen leaning upon His breast. John had courage to come near and stand by the cross while Jesus was dying. We have no record of anything he said to Jesus but at times the things we might say do not seem to count so much as to stand and identify ourselves as friends who love and care. Let others forsake Him or follow afar off, let the mob howl against Him, John stood at the cross with Jesus. No one could doubt the devotion of John. He loved Jesus.

#### IV. The Assignment From The Cross

In this hour of suffering Jesus made an assignment from the cross. There were many other things to claim His attention but He took time to attend to the interests of His mother. It is likely that Joseph had died some years before, because no mention is made of him after Jesus was twelve years of age. Likely Jesus supported His mother through labor in the carpenter shop in Nazareth until the time He entered His ministry and other children were able to take their part. Jesus looked at His mother and only spoke a brief message to her: "Woman, behold thy Son." It was John she was to behold, and she was to take him as her son. Jesus was dying and could not be with her and He was giving her a son to take His place. This was a gift from Jesus to His mother. He was giving John to her as a son. What a gift as He assigned her to be a mother to John and take Him as her son. Jesus did not call her "Mother" but addressed her "Woman." Perhaps to call her "Mother" would have touched her with more grief and He was trying to comfort her and thus He addressed her tenderly, "Woman, behold thy son."

Jesus then turned His eyes to John and in a few words He made an assignment to the beloved apostle. Jesus said to John, "Behold thy mother." Jesus was assigning John to the responsibility of being a son to Mary and to take her as his mother. This was not a burden but a great gift Jesus made to John. What a privilege it was to take Mary, accept her as his mother, give her a home and enjoy a blessed fellowship with her. Why did Jesus assign His mother to John? Mary had four other sons and at least two daughters but they had not yet understood Jesus and had not become Christians. Perhaps they did not have the means of caring for her and John would be a devoted son. Jesus would have been uneasy to assign His mother to the care of Simon Peter or another disciple. John would be most dependable. He was young and it is thought that he had the financial means to adequately care for His mother. He could make her comfortable and John would be devoted to her as he was devoted to Christ. No two people on earth loved Jesus more than His mother and this disciple. They would be devoted to each other as friends with common interests.

The assignment was accepted. They had thought there was nothing they could do for Jesus, but they learned there was something. John could care for His mother. Mary could be a mother to

John. They could do this for Jesus. The Scripture says, "From that hour that disciple took her into his own home." Perhaps John went away with Mary before Jesus died on the cross. They went to the quietness of John's home which may have been nearby. This was a beautiful scene as we visualize John taking Mary to be his mother and she to take John as her son.

I am sure the years that remained in Mary's life were spent in a blessed fellowship in John's home. John learned things about Jesus from Mary's lips that he would never have known. This further prepared John for writing the fourth gospel with the emphasis on the divine nature of Jesus. John's life was enriched by this fellowship.

God was gracious to John. He lived to old age and was the only one of the twelve apostles who died a natural death. After Mary was dead John went to Ephesus. He was persecuted and exiled on the island of Patmos. God revealed things of the future to him and let him see the scenes of the judgment, heaven and hell as no other man ever had revealed to him. John gave us the book of Revelation. Much of the book presents a problem to our understanding but we can not see and understand things in God's eternal plan as John had things revealed to him. John accepted this assignment and what a gift, what a blessing it brought to his life.

## Conclusion

In this third word Jesus spoke from the cross He made a brief statement to His mother and an equally brief statement to John. Jesus was speaking a message for all of us. We are inspired by the words. We are impressed that Christ remembers His own. He was mindful of John who loved Him and He remembered His mother. Christ never forgets us and He will honor our love and devotion to Him. Christ knows how to supply our material needs and provide for our physical welfare. He remembers us in our sorrows and gives us help in our spiritual problems. He will not forget us in the trying circumstances of life. John and Mary never faced a harder situation than that day at Calvary. Their faith was tried but Jesus remembered them. He always remembers His own.

This incident at Calvary teaches us that Christ's assignments are accompanied by rich returns. Mary had been given an assignment through the announcement of the angel to her. She carried a serious charge for thirty-three years, to the day she stood at Calvary and saw her Son crucified. In return she was given a home, a rich fellowship and now for nineteen centuries Mary has been the most honored woman that ever lived. She received good returns. John was given a serious task-that of making Mary his mother and being a son to her. John was blessed with rich returns from this assignment. What a blessing it is to stand close by Christ, let Him assign us our place in life and then fill that place no matter how humble and lowly. Be faithful to Christ and your life will be rich and full and blessed.

We learn from this experience at Calvary that if we love Christ we will be faithful to look after His interests. As John and Mary left Calvary they went to carry out the request of Christ. Mary went to be a mother to John and take him as a son. John took Mary with all the tenderness and love he had for Jesus and could have had for his own mother. It will work thus in our lives today. If we love Christ we will look after His interests. There is no better testimony of a Christian experience than interest we have in His cause.

The late Dr. George W. Truett told of a little girl not long from the old country and not yet adjusted to American customs. She had professed to be saved and wanted to join his church. The pastor feared she might not be properly trained. He asked her to wait a little and consider it further before she joined. When he saw the girl weeping and felt she was disappointed, he explained that what he asked her to do was not unusual, for people often discussed the matter thoroughly before taking the step. Then the girl told him she was weeping over the sins of a wayward brother and asked him to pray for him. An old deacon spoke up when he saw her interest and burden and said, "Pastor, I move we receive her into the church." If we love Christ we will have a concern for souls and will be faithful to look after His interests.

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4

## WORD OF ANGUISH

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

We have considered the first three statements Jesus made from the cross. We now come to the fourth: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The fourth word stands at the center of the seven. Here 'the tragedy of the crucifixion reaches its climax. The seven words may be divided into two divisions. The first three reveal His concern for others. He prayed for His crucifiers, He promised salvation to a thief on a cross nearby and He made provision for His mother. These first three reveal His concern for others. The last four words He spoke concern His personal interests. It is characteristic of Jesus that He was first concerned about others and then about Himself. He did not spare Himself on any occasion but to Him others were first and Himself second.

Between these two groups of sayings there seems to have elapsed a long interval. From the sixth to the ninth hour which was noon to mid-afternoon; three hour period, Jesus was silent on the cross. During this interval there was darkness over the land. Perhaps there was a heavy dark cloud that brought darkness. The sun seemed to refuse to shine upon such a deed of shame. Things seemed to have been silenced about the Cross. It was midnight darkness at midday. The few friends perhaps went away. Enemies, who for three hours had taunted Him, likely dispersed. Now it was dark and lonely and the only noise likely was the groans of dying men on the crosses as they suffered the agonies of crucifixion. This was a long and lonely three hour period of suffering in the darkness. It must have seemed like an endless night suffering all alone for the sins of the world. Yet, it was for your sins and for mine that He suffered. At the end of three hours of darkness Jesus broke the silence by crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

### I. Was Jesus Forsaken?

This word of anguish Jesus cried out seems like a mystery. Jesus cried to God, "Why?" It seemed that on every other occasion He understood the meaning of everything. But now the Saviour cries out, "My God, why?" God did not forget His people in Egypt long ago. He heard their cry in bondage and delivered them. At the Red Sea they were being pursued by Pharaoh's army but God did not forget them. God opened the sea and delivered them. Nebuchadnezzar sent three Hebrew men to a fiery furnace because they would not bow to the image. God did not forsake

the three Hebrews but delivered them through the furnace. Darius sent Daniel to a den of lions. God did not forsake Daniel but delivered him from the lions. Now the Son of God was dying on a cross and God lets him die alone and allowed Him to cry out, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

Jesus had always served so acceptably. He was the one perfect man. He had never disobeyed. He had lived in perfect harmony with the will of the Father and in close fellowship with Him. This made it more difficult for Jesus. A man who goes into the night from a brilliantly lighted room finds the darkness more depressing than if he went from a dimly lighted room. Even so, no man misses the presence of God so much as one who has been keenly conscious of that presence through the years. Always God had been real to Jesus. Now, why was He forsaken? What a mystery! Jesus was not unconscious. It was not just a feeling of being forsaken. He knew what it was all about. Now he was actually forsaken.

This word "forsaken" is a word of appalling woe. It is one of the most pathetic words we could use. We have seen a town that was once thriving with industry in a mining area but suddenly the mines closed and the people left. The town was forsaken and the silence of the once busy streets makes you want to turn and go your way. There is the mother who is forsaken by her husband and left with the care of her children. There is the helpless innocent child who is forsaken by parents. There is the man who is forsaken by his friends. These scenes from life are pathetic but the worst scene of all is to see a man forsaken by God. Jesus was forsaken. The crowd had mocked Him, they had crowned Him with thorns and arrayed Him with a mock robe, they had scourged Him, they had spit upon Him and plucked off His hair, they despoiled His garments, they nailed Him to a cross. He was forsaken by His friends and mocked by His enemies. Yet He suffered all these things in silence. He endured the cross and the shame without opening His mouth for He seemed to understand the reason for it all. But now, as God turned His face and withdrew His presence He cried out in a heart rending prayer to God. Surely this is a prayer that ought to melt the hardest heart. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

This was a mystery. Yet it has its meaning. We should be able in a small measure to interpret the meaning of this mystery. Why did God forsake His Son Jesus Christ and let Him die alone and forsaken on the cross? I realize that in explaining this cry of Jesus that all I can do is to wade about in the surf while the great ocean of truth is out beyond my ability to understand and explain.

We are certain that God was well pleased with Jesus and never more so, than when He was sacrificing Himself to the utmost on behalf of others. Jesus was now treading the winepress alone. He had been forsaken by religious leaders, by family, by friends and now by God. On the cross at this period Jesus was actually forsaken by God and was dying alone.

## II. Why Was He Forsaken?

Let us consider why He was forsaken; not to explain why friends and religious leaders forsook Him but why He was forsaken by God. Jesus, while dying on the cross, was taking the sins of the world upon Himself. They shouted at Him, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." He could have avoided the cross and saved Himself from crucifixion, but his love for sinners and concern for a provision of salvation would not permit Him to save Himself. He became the



scapegoat for sin. He was free from sin but took the sins of the world upon Himself to pay the penalty for the sins of others. He was not a sinner but took the sinner's place. He became the sin offering and the real sacrifice for sin. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Sin separates from God. When Jesus took the sins of the world upon Himself He took the place of a sinner. Because of the world's sins which He took upon Himself this separated Him from the presence of God. It is the nature of God that He cannot look upon sin to have any fellowship with it. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13).

In the Old Testament types the animal was slain and after its blood had been sprinkled the body of the animal was removed to a place outside the camp where the carcass was burned. Exclusion from the camp was banishment from God. Thus it was with the leper. All the days of the plague the leper was separated from the people. Adam and Eve had communion with God until they sinned and then fellowship was broken. Sin brings a cloud between God and man separating a soul from the presence of God. Sin separated Jesus from the Father. The sins were not His but the sins of the world which He took upon Himself. "For He hath made Him to be sin who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus was dying as a sinner must die and the sins of the world He took upon Himself separated Him from God.

In finding an explanation for this situation of being forsaken on the cross we know that the price Jesus paid satisfied the justice of God. God is love but He is also just. A just God must require that a penalty be paid for every sin and the price is great. When the world was sunk in sin in Noah's day the earth was overflowed with water. This was a punishment for sin. When fire and brimstone were rained on Sodom and Gomorrah it was a punishment for sin. When plagues were sent upon Egypt and her armies were destroyed at the Red Sea it was a punishment for sin. The penalty for the sins of the world was being accepted by Christ on the cross. He suffered the everlasting punishment for the guilt of all sinners. At Calvary the Lord was smitten by the sword of divine justice for "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). When Jesus took the sinner's place God's justice was satisfied. He was drinking the cup presented to Him in Gethsemane. Thus it had been foreshadowed in Egypt on the memorable night of the Passover-the lamb's blood must be where God's eye could see it. God had said to Moses, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Ex. 12:13). When Jesus cried out in a word of anguish from the cross it was not only the supreme moment of suffering it was also the supreme moment of achievement. God was not dealing with Him as a loving and merciful Father with His child, but as an offended judge with an evil doer. Divine justice was satisfied.

### III. Lessons For Us

There are valuable lessons in this for our hearts. In this terrible ordeal while He was lonely in the darkness and forsaken He never wavered in His faith. In spite of His sufferings and with all visible support gone He asked why, but He did not doubt that God was bringing out of His experience the best purpose possible. It is easy to trust in God in the sunlight but it tests our faith during times of darkness and gloom and suffering. Jesus did not give over to defeat. Neither did He declare in stubborn bitterness He would see the ordeal through. He kept His faith. He called God His own: "My God, my God . . ." He did what had been the habit of His life; He turned to God in prayer. So long as we claim God as our very own we cannot be utterly desolate.

In this we see a demonstration of divine love. Heaven or earth never looked upon such love as Jesus demonstrated. A playwright has pictured Barabbas, the released criminal, slipping out of Jerusalem and standing for one brief moment in the shadows viewing the cross on which He ought to have hung, and saying, "That was my cross. Who was the man who hung there in my stead?" Jesus hung unto the cross which each of us should have suffered. Jesus had said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus laid down His life also for His enemies.

Is there anyone in the world who would drink a cup of poison to save you? Jesus did. Is there anyone in the prime of life who would turn his back upon everything and die for you? Jesus did. He was willing to endure that utter loneliness that we might never be alone. He suffered for sin that we might not have to suffer through eternity for our sins. He went through the darkness of death alone so that we might never know what it is to die a comfortless death forsaken and alone. What a demonstration of divine love!

In this fourth word and the circumstances that prompted Christ to cry in anguish there is a warning to the unsaved. God is merciful and has proved it by providing a Saviour and a plan of salvation. There is a limit to His mercy. There is a point where mercy ends and justice begins. Some day the door of mercy will be closed and then will come the day of judgment and justice. Some would argue that since God loves everybody, He is too merciful to carry out the threatenings of His word. This is the way the serpent argued with Eve. God had said, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die." God did not spare His own Son when He found sin on Him-the sin of others. Do you think He will spare you if you come up to the judgment with your sins on you? If He poured out His wrath on Him who bore no sin but ours, do you think He will hold back His wrath if you go on in your sins and come to the end of your way with sin still on you? Jesus was separated from God for three hours. If you reject Him you will be separated from God for eternity. Jesus suffered a night and a day going through Gethsemane, the trials, torture, mockery and crucifixion in order to bear your sins and pay the penalty. If you reject Him you will suffer in hell throughout eternity. What a lesson to the unsaved to hear Jesus cry out from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

## Conclusion

This fourth word Jesus spoke from the cross was a prayer. It came from a heart burdened down with the sins of the world. It was a cry for a return to the presence of God and the restoration of divine fellowship. The God in whom He trusted did not let Him down. Jesus was not disappointed in the outcome. He received an answer in the restoration of the conscious presence of God that enabled Him to go through the remainder of the crucifixion with a quiet heart and to reach the end with words of triumph. He was able to die with a shout of victory.

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"I thirst" (John 19:28).

Jesus cried out from the cross, "I thirst." His sufferings had been prophesied in Psalms 69:21. "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The One who cried out with thirst was the One who made the water of the sea. He made all streams and fountains, all wells and waterbrooks and the rivers that run among the hills. He was now thirsting for water. What a mystery!

Standing in Jerusalem a short time before He said to the people, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." The One who offered to quench the thirst of others with the water of life was now suffering thirst.

To the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well He said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13, 14). The One who offered these words to others was the One who cried out in mortal exhaustion, "I thirst." This is a contrast between inward wealth and outward poverty. He was the One who became poor that we might be made rich. He was the Bread of Life, yet He hungered for bread. He offered thrones and kingdoms and mansions, yet He had no place to lay His head. The One who offered others the water of life cried out in death, "I thirst."

## I. The Extent Of His Suffering

We are not able to realize the extent of Jesus' suffering. This was the only expression of physical suffering Jesus spoke during the whole ordeal. Death by crucifixion is the most painful mode of torture ever conceived by man. The draining away of blood brings on intense thirst. Physicians assure us that the worst we can imagine would be a feeble approach to His sufferings from thirst.

Let us observe the things which preceded this cry. On the evening before Jesus had met with His apostles and instituted the Lord's Supper in an upper room in Jerusalem. He spent some time there with the disciples. He then went into the Garden of Gethsemane for prayer. There He became exceeding sorrowful. He spent the time in such agony of soul passion that drops of bloody sweat dripped from His brow. Perhaps He prayed there until midnight when Judas came as a traitor leading a mob to the Garden. He greeted Jesus and kissed Him. The mob rushed in to make the arrest. In the middle of the night He was taken before Caiaphas, the high priest. He was mocked and falsely accused. He was held until morning without rest. He was taken early in the morning for trial before Pilate. He then was taken to Herod. Likely He was marched across town under guard and followed by the mob. Standing before Herod He was mocked and marched back to Pilate. He was scourged, crowned with thorns, spit upon, mocked and sentenced to be crucified. The heavy cross was placed upon His bleeding back and the journey to Calvary was begun. He fell beneath the load and another man was called to carry the cross. His hands and feet were nailed to the cross. He hung there for three hours in the midday heat and then for three hours in darkness and loneliness. Through all this He never murmured or complained. He suffered it all in silence. He thought of others but not of Himself. He prayed for His persecutors, promised salvation to a thief, provided for His mother. Now after nearly six hours on the cross, His blood flowed through His

wounds, sun shone through and dispelled the darkness. His body was racked in pain, His mouth parched, His tongue swollen, His throat burning, His body cries out for water and He says, "I thirst." He suffered as much at Calvary as a sinner could suffer in an eternity of hell.

## II. The Simplicity Of His Request

Let us consider the simplicity of this request. The simple request was not made in the beginning of His sufferings but when the worst of His ordeal was behind Him. He asked for water that He might be sustained to bear the cross to the end. When He saw that He had done all He could for lost men and had won the battle for them, then He thought of His own famished and thirsty body. He did not ask to be taken down from the cross but only asked that He be given a drink of water to help Him face death on the cross. It was a simple and reasonable request.

In this terrible hour there is beauty in this request. It has its lessons for us. We see in this request made by Jesus a beautiful spirit of forgiveness. Jesus did not hold an ill will toward the crowd who persecuted Him and put Him to death. Some of us do not like to ask favors of others. If we do we desire to ask them only of those who are our friends. We certainly do not like to ask of those who have wronged us or who are hostile to us. Jesus was not like that. He was so forgiving He was willing to ask a favor even from an enemy.

This request Jesus made reveals a beautiful spirit of humility. Throughout the ordeal of the crucifixion Jesus had been taunted by having the fact of His weakness and inability to save Himself flung into His face. They had said, "If thou be the Christ come down from the cross." Had Jesus been proud and boastful He would have died rather than confess that His enemies were right in affirming His human frailties. He confessed His need and threw Himself on their generosity. The Man who claimed to have the water of life to give others now was confessing His thirst for water. This Man who claimed the ability to give an inward and unfailing spring was not too proud to ask for water at the soiled hands of an outcast Samaritan woman at Jacob's well or from the bloody hands of His bitter enemies who were determined to murder Him. This reveals a beautiful spirit of humility.

[Please read my bracketed comments beneath the author's next paragraph. -- DVM]

This simple request reveals Jesus' faith in man at his worst. He had a deathless faith in men.\* He believed in the men who were His followers. They often disappointed Him but He trusted them. Without this amazing faith Jesus could never have become the world's Redeemer. We have a Saviour who believes in us and will trust us even more than we will trust Him. He trusts men to respond to His requests. He went to the cross and endured the suffering because He believed men would accept the atonement and His sacrifice would not be in vain. He did not doubt that being lifted up from the earth on the cross He would draw all men unto Himself. This faith sent Jesus courageously to perform His task. One of the greatest services we can render to others is to believe in them.\*

\*[While it is true that people often respond favorably when others trust them, and while it is true that there are times when it is good to show others that you are willing to trust them at the

risk of a loss to yourself, still, the author's statements in the above paragraph do not seem to me to be either doctrinally sound or Scriptural. Honoring others with our trust in this way does not seem quite the same to me as "having faith in men." Rather than Jesus having "faith in men," quite the opposite was so: John 2:24-25 "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." It was not a "faith in men" that prompted Jesus to die on Calvary. It was, rather His "love for men," -- His love for treacherous, lost, untrustworthy men. While Jesus taught: "Have faith in God," Mark 11:22, never once did he teach his disciples to "have faith in men." Indeed, His Word curses those who do: Jeremiah 17:5 "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." One should not always be suspicious of others on the one hand, nor too quickly place trust in others on the other hand. But, that warranted trust that we may repose in others between these two extremes seems to me to be best, and more Scripturally, called something other than having "faith in men." -- DVM]

At times I have been disappointed because of a lack of kindness on the part of some from whom I felt I had a right to expect it. But far more often I have been surprised by the kindness of others from whom I felt I had the right to expect nothing. Who would have been willing to trust that crowd of cruel men about the cross? Who would believe in them enough to make a request of them with hope that they would respond to grant the request? Jesus had faith in man at his worst. All men may cast you away but Jesus never. People may lose confidence in you. You may lose confidence in yourself but Jesus believes in you and sees possibilities in you and your success. He believes in us and trusts us to respond in granting Him His simple requests.

### III. The Response To His Request

We have heard the request He made for a drink of water and now we are anxious to know the response that was made. Surely they would give a drink to a dying man suffering with such intense thirst. There was no move for a while. The rabble still howled. It looked like one was about to respond and some said, "Let Him alone. He has called for Elijah. Let's see if the old prophet who went to heaven with a chariot of fire long ago will come back and give him a drink of water." Jesus had not called for Elijah. In His previous word Jesus had prayed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus used the term "Eli, Eli" which sounded like Elias and they accused Him of calling for the prophet. Jesus was misunderstood in life and misunderstood in death by those whose minds were prejudiced against Him.

Then one man's heart was touched with sympathy for Jesus. Perhaps this was a Roman soldier and the mob would not dare stop him. Matthew's gospel says that one of them ran and took a sponge. He dipped it in a vessel of vinegar or sour wine, put it on a reed and lifted it to Jesus' lips. He called for water and the only response was an offer of sour wine. When Jesus went to the cross He refused this drink for He wanted to go to the cross in His clear mind. Now Jesus accepted the drink. It was likely a stimulant used by the soldiers as a beverage. Why did Jesus accept it? This was not His request or choice. It was all He could get. He accepted with gratitude that which was offered Him. The Lord often does not get what He requests of our lives but He takes the best that is offered to Him. Then it may be that He moistened His lips and swallowed a bit of this to enable Him to remain in His clear mind to the end. He could have only obtained a few

drops from the sponge that had been dipped in the vinegar. How much better would have been a cup of cool water.

Jesus made this request to the crowd trusting one of them to respond. God heard this request also and made response to the cry of His Son on the cross. Jesus was human and His body had gone through such torture and the shedding of His blood brought on this intense thirst. He had requested water for his body. Jesus was also divine. He had eternal existence and when He became human He did not cease to be all that He had been previously. Since He was divine He suffered not only in body but also in Spirit. Because of His sensitive divine nature Jesus suffered far more than any other man would have suffered in the same ordeal. He was thirsting for fellowship with the Father. He had spent many hours in the hands of the mob. Darkness had surrounded Him for three hours. He had been forsaken by God and found Himself dying alone on the cross. He had known constant fellowship with the Father. During His ministry He could slip away to the seclusion of a mountainside for prayer. Now His soul was thirsting for a restoration of this communion with the Father. God heard His request and responded by giving Him victory and triumph in the hour of death. The pain was relieved and during the final moments on the cross Jesus was given peace and consolation and a triumphant testimony in the moment of death. God the Father quenched His spiritual thirst. If men were unsympathetic God came to His rescue giving Him peace and grace in the last moments. He restored Him to the divine fellowship for which His soul was thirsting.

## Conclusion

There is a sense in which Christ thirsts today. He has put aside His humanity and no longer experiences a physical thirst. He endured that once and for all. He thirsts for our life and our love. He longs for our fellowship. You can offer Christ your affection which satisfies Him today.

While Jesus rested at Jacob's Well the Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus engaged her in conversation. Jesus was hungry and had sent the disciples to buy food. He was thirsty and he asked the woman who came to the well to give Him a drink of water. In the conversation He led this sinful woman to an experience of salvation. The woman went her way to witness for Christ and bring others to hear Him. This woman who found salvation brought such a blessing to the heart of Jesus that He lost His desire for water and His appetite for food. When the disciples returned with a supply of food Jesus did not care to eat and drink. He told them that He had meat to eat that they knew not of. The experience was spiritual food and drink to Him. We can this day bring joy and blessing to Christ. This is a great thought. We have realized that Christ can bless us and make us to rejoice. We can also bring blessing and rejoicing to Christ by our response to Him, by giving Him our love and devotion. Christ thirsts today and often people let Him thirst in vain because they make no response to His call.

Christ thirsted and endured it on the cross that He might be able to satisfy our thirst. Jesus said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." He was teaching that material things will not satisfy the soul. Only the water of life that Christ offers will satisfy the spiritual thirst of man. He took our place and suffered the agony of the cross and the intense thirst that He might be able to sustain us in trouble and suffering. This world is the scene of pain, wretchedness and death.

This world may at times seem to be a vale of tears. Jesus experienced the strongest and mightiest agony of thirst that we might never thirst for the water of life. Christ satisfies our thirst.

Through Christ we are kept from thirst through eternity. He thirsted in order that our portion may not be with that soul who was tormented in the flames of hell and who craved and begged for a drop of water for his burning tongue. Jesus provided in His sufferings that gift of the water of life and that we might be led to the pure river of the water of life. He was willing to thirst that we might never thirst.

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## 6

### WORD OF TRIUMPH

"It is finished" (John 19:30).

In the last two messages we heard Jesus' cry from the cross expressing spiritual and physical suffering. Now we hear Him cry out: "It is finished." By the world's standards these words might appear to be a surrender. His words might seem to indicate to the casual observer that Jesus knew He had done all He could but that it still was not enough. The battle was about over and there appeared to be no chance of winning. But the world has misunderstood the death of Christ as they misunderstood His life and teachings. When Jesus exclaimed, "It is finished," He did not utter a wail of despair but a shout of triumph. It was the declaration that all for which He came from heaven to earth to do was now done and the full price of our redemption was paid. He had done everything necessary to bless you and me for time and for eternity.

#### I. Christ's Mission On Earth Was Finished

The Saviour now realized that His mission on earth was finished. He had given up heaven's glory to take on earth's shame. He had come to earth to accomplish a task. At twelve years of age He realized that He must be about His "Father's business." This sense of duty was to grow upon Him with the development of His manhood. He faced the cross as a part of His mission to earth. When He uttered this cry He had been upon the cross nearly six hours. The period of darkness was past. The awful cup had been drained, His precious blood had already been shed, the loneliness had been endured and the justice of God had been satisfied. As the Incarnate Son of God the sacrificial work was completed. The divine-given task was performed and the goal of the Incarnation had been reached.

When He came to earth He set out to fulfill His assignment. Looking back now from the close of life, he was not to regret that any talent had been abused or misused. He who created the wealth of the world came to earth and lived in poverty. He who was rich became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich. He faced a life of toil. He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life. Everything He did was met with opposition. Obstruction became more and more persistent and cruel until Calvary reached its climax. He had been acquainted with grief, pain and sorrow. He suffered at the hands of men, at the hands of Satan and at the hands of God. He lived always in the shadow of the cross. He discussed the crucifixion with Moses and Elijah at the

Mount of Transfiguration. He told His disciples that He was to give His life and while in Gethsemane He prayed to the Father concerning this cup of suffering. Now He looks from the cross upon His mission as He sees it being completed and exclaims with a note of victory, "It is finished."

## II. The Prophecies Of His Life And Death Had Been Fulfilled

Centuries beforehand the prophets of God had described step "by step the life of the Son of God on earth and they gave a detailed account of His humiliation and suffering in death. One by one these prophecies had been wonderfully fulfilled to the very letter. It had been prophesied that He would be "born of a woman," that His mother should be a "virgin" and should be the seed of Abraham and a lineal descendant of David. Prophecy foretold that He should be born in Bethlehem of Judea and that He should be named before He was born. Prophecy referred to the flight into Egypt and the return to Palestine. Prophecy made mention of one going before Christ to make ready His way. Prophets had made known that when the Messiah appeared "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." It had been stated that He would teach in parables. Prophecy had heralded His "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. The prophets had told that He would be "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." The prophets had told the whole story of His trials and crucifixion mentioning that He was numbered with the transgressors, the piercing of His hands and feet, the mockery of the crowd and the casting of lots for His garments. All these things were predicted centuries beforehand and now they were fulfilled to the very letter. Jesus, knowing these things had come to pass, said, "It is finished."

## III. The Atonement For Sin Was Accomplished

The atonement for sin was accomplished and all promises of redemption were now fulfilled. The types had their meaning in the cross. God had given Noah the task of building an ark as a shelter against a flood and for the saving of the righteous from destruction. Now Christ had provided the Ark of Salvation and a shelter from the storm of divine judgment.

Abraham had been called on to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice upon an altar. Now Christ, the only begotten Son of God, had been sacrificed upon the altar of God as a substitute for all sons of humanity who would accept the atoning blood.

Moses had instructed the Hebrews in Egypt to slay lambs and apply the blood of these lambs to their doorways as protection from the angel of death. Now Christ was the Lamb of God whose blood availed to deliver us from sin's bondage and the second death.

In the wilderness Moses and his people encountered fiery serpents that inflicted suffering and death. The brazen serpent was placed upon a pole for the people to look upon. Now the Son of Man was lifted up on the cross and He provided a cure for the serpent's bite, offering a remedy for sin.

Through the centuries the animal sacrifices had been offered and the blood of animals presented by the people. Now that, to which so much in the Tabernacle and its ritual



foreshadowed, was accomplished in Christ's suffering and shed blood upon the cross. The types were now finished and the atonement for sin was accomplished.

There is abundant proof that Christ finished His work. In the temple there was a veil separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies. This veil was rent from top to bottom at the time of Jesus' death on the cross. This shows that every obstacle has been removed. The way to God is now open to all who will come for "by one offering" atonement has been accomplished.

The proof of Christ's finished work is found in the resurrection. The raising of Christ from the dead was evidence that God had accepted His sacrifice. Following His resurrection ministry Jesus ascended to heaven and His going away was witnessed by His disciples. He was seated at the right hand of the Father. The exaltation of Christ to this position with the Father reveals the Father's approval and delight in the sacrifice of His Son.

Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit when He went away. It is proof that Christ finished His work of atonement when He sent the Holy Spirit to apply the virtues and benefits to all who will accept the provisions of Christ's death.

The proof of Christ's finished work is found in the blessed effects upon all who believe in Him. As the oak is contained in the acorn and as the fruit is wrapped up in the blossom so the fruits of Christ's redeeming work were contained in His death on the cross. For every sinner who will repent and believe there is justification and adoption. Every Christian who will consecrate with faith in the merits of His blood there is sanctification. No one is ever disappointed who comes to Christ of Calvary with trust and confidence in Him. Jesus seeing that the price had been paid and the atonement for sin was accomplished cries out, "It is finished."

## Conclusion

The finished work of Christ brought the defeat of Satan. Christ's word of triumph, "It is finished," announced the defeat of the powers of evil. The victim had become the victor. Christ won in the decisive battle of the ages. At Calvary there was the most bitter hatred ever turned loose but there was the greatest demonstration of love the world has ever witnessed. Love won in the decisive battle against hate. There was a conflict between darkness and light but light, as always, penetrated the darkness. There was a demonstration of sin at its worst but there was holiness in its absolute purity, Satan was defeated and Christ was the victor. At the close of this terrible conflict Christ cried with a proclamation of eternal victory, "It is finished."

The manufacturer of fine watches uses the best materials for making the parts of a watch. Each part is accurately made and properly assembled. The workman skillfully adjusts the watch so that it will record time correctly. After testing and examining his workmanship very carefully he places the watch on display and says, "The watch is finished." He means that his work is completed and the product of his skilled labor is now ready to be put into use as a dependable and valuable timepiece.

More than nineteen centuries ago, on a hill outside Jerusalem, Christ hanging on a middle cross, lifted His voice in a triumphant exclamation, "It is finished." He was not rejoicing that the

sufferings were ended and that He would soon escape from the experience. He was thinking of all the battles up to that moment and the victory being purchased by His shed blood. Sin had done its worst but love had won in the conflict. Christ had finished His work and now lost and defeated souls around the world have access to the fountain where sinners may plunge and lose all their guilty stains.

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7

## PRAYER OF SOUL COMMITTAL

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

We come now to the last word Jesus spoke before He died. He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." He uttered these words "with a loud voice . While all the words of a dying person are full of interest, there is special importance attached to the last statement. The life of Jesus was observed very closely and all that He did and said in life were very important. Now in the moment of death the Saviour would call us to stand near and observe how He can die. He taught us the art of living and by His last word He teaches us the art of dying.

### I. A Prayer

The final word of the dying Saviour was a prayer. Six hours He hung upon the cross. Three hours He suffered at the hands of Satan and men. Three hours He suffered separation from God. Now it is all over. The cup is drained. It is like going from hell to heaven. The Saviour is seen once more in communion with the Father and this fellowship is never more to be broken. He had spent His life in communion with the Father and now it was natural for Him in death to carry out the habit of prayer.

It was about His Spirit that He prayed. Many have concern only for their body and possessions. Their pain and trouble may cause concern for the place where the body is to be laid and where possessions are to go. Jesus gave attention to His body and said, "I thirst." He provided for His mother. Then His prayer was about His Spirit. The spirit is the finest, highest and most sacred part of our being. Spirit is that which is allied to God and eternity. It is that which sin seeks to corrupt and our spiritual enemies seek to destroy. Jesus knew that He was launching out into eternity and He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Death is an appropriate time to pray. While prayer is in order at all times and seasons, there are occasions when it is especially appropriate; at the close of day when we are about to enter the state of sleep; at the beginning of a new day with its cares and responsibilities; in moments of peril. On a deathbed it is more in its place than anywhere else. It is then we are parting with relatives and friends, with business and property, with the comforts of home and with all that is earthly. It is appropriate then to lay a firm hold on God.

If we would desire our last words to be words of prayer we should be familiar with prayer now. If the blessings of God's presence are to accompany us on our death bed, we must be at peace

with Him now and acquaint ourselves with Him now while we have opportunity. The one who is faithful in prayer in this life will not find it hard to reach God in prayer at the hour of death.

## II. A Quotation From Scripture

The last word of the dying Saviour was a quotation from scripture. In the hour of death it was natural for Him to quote scripture. He turned to the hymnbook of His people and quoted from Psalm 31. He added the word "Father" at the beginning of the quotation and made it His final prayer. Jesus had so saturated His mind and heart with the scriptures that its thought and language became His own. He had been a diligent student of it all His days. He heard it in the home of His childhood. He listened to it in the synagogue. He may have found use of the synagogue rolls and hung over them in secret. He used the scriptures in the wilderness to fight the enemy and overcome him. He used it in controversy with His enemies who sought to trap Him. Now in the supreme need of His dying hour He made it His own prayer.

In the most sacred moments and transactions of life there is no language like that of the Bible. Especially is this the case in everything connected with death. If we wish to find inspiration and support from the scriptures in the hour of death we must make it our counsel while living. The Bible is good for the living and we ought to read it, reverence it and obey it during life. Then it will be our stay in the time of death.

## III. A Final Offering For Sin

In His last word the Saviour made a final offering for sin. He offered Himself as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In Old Testament times priests went through endless ceremonies offering sacrificial animals. The blood of the animals was poured into a vessel and the priest would then go to the Holy Place of the temple and offer this blood to represent atonement for sin. Once a year the priest entered the Holy of Holies with blood to represent the cleansing of the people. All this was pointing toward the death of Christ and His shed blood upon the cross.

These Old Testament sacrifices were all fulfilled in Christ. The slain lamb was the picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God. The blood of the animal was a symbol of the blood of Christ which was shed for our sins. Now, as Jesus goes back to the Father, He takes His own blood and offers it for the sins of all people. With His blood He paid the price of redemption for all men. When God looked upon the shed blood of His Son, which was given at Calvary, He accepted it as the complete price for man's redemption. The blood of bulls and goats and lambs will no longer suffice but we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. It was Christ who "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

The Saviour in His last word made the final offering for sin but we must appropriate this for our salvation in order to be among the redeemed. In the death of Christ provision was made for all to be saved but no one will be saved from sin unless the individual accepts the provision and His shed blood appropriated. Salvation is promised but there are conditions to be met. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (I John 1:9). He cannot forgive unless we confess.

If the believing Christian will give himself in consecration to Christ He will cleanse the life of indwelling sin. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). If we confess He will forgive. If we will walk in the light to make an entire consecration to Him then by faith He will cleanse us of the sin nature. There was a veil in the temple separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The practice of the priests was to enter the Holy Place with the blood of the sacrificial animal for the forgiveness of the sins of the people. Once each year the priest entered the Holy of Holies with blood for the cleansing of the people. When Jesus died on the cross the veil in the temple was rent. In His last word Jesus made a final offering for sin. The offering of Jesus' blood can be appropriated for the washing away of our sins and for the cleansing of our hearts. "For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). It is our privilege and responsibility to appropriate His blood for our personal salvation. There is nothing in death that makes a bad man good or a good man bad. People die as they live. There is power in the blood of Christ to make us what we ought to be.

#### IV. Christ's View Of Death

The last word of the Saviour revealed His view of death. He died as He lived -- committing Himself to God. As death came upon Him Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit." The person to whom He committed this precious treasure was His Father. These words set forth the last act of the Saviour before He expired. He was depositing His soul in the hands of God. He was giving it to God in hope of finding it again. He was making a deposit in a safe place, to which after the crisis of death was over, He would come and receive it. Seven times on the cross His lips moved in speech. Seven is the number of completeness or perfection. At Calvary, as everywhere, the perfections of Christ were displayed. Voluntarily He had delivered Himself into the hands of sinners. Now voluntarily He delivers His spirit into the hands of the Father.

It is our privilege and our responsibility to commit our souls to God now. If we are to use this prayer in death we must put it into practice during life. If we are to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," then we must begin now to live the life of the righteous. Christians need to make this committal. They should not be satisfied just to give their souls over to Christ to be saved from hell. They ought to allow Him to sit upon the throne of their hearts and lead them in all the affairs of life. Paul exhorted the Christians at Rome, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). If we give ourselves wholly to God in life He will gladly accept us now and in the hour of death we will have our soul deposited in His hands for eternity.

#### Conclusion

We see here a wonderful change for Christ as He spoke His final word from the cross. Just as the seventh day was the day of rest and satisfaction, so the seventh utterance of the Saviour brings Him to the place of rest. His first word from the cross was, "Father forgive," and now His last word is, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Between these utterances He had hung there for six hours of suffering. Now all is done. As long as He was in the hands of men His plight

was a sorrowful one. But never again can men torture Him, never again will He be at the disposal of wicked sinners. He commits Himself to God and the Father will look after Him now.

The Father received Him. On the third day He raised Him from the dead. Forty days He appeared among His disciples in a post-resurrection ministry and the Father received Him home to heaven. He was exalted above all principalities and powers and given a name above every name. Today He sits upon His Father's throne. No one in the crowd on the day of His execution, not even the few who were personally loyal, would have dreamed that two thousand years later in every country under the sun millions of people would observe the anniversary of His death.

Some day He will visit this earth again. Once men judged Him, then He will judge men. Once He was in their hands, then they will be in His hands. Once they said, "Away with Him," then He will say, "Depart from me."

Because of Christ and our devotion to Him we can look forward to the time of our change. Long ago Job said, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." Because of what Christ did for us at Calvary we can pass from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. We can become the children of God and face death with faith and assurance that we will inherit everlasting life. The mortal will put on immortality and Death will be swallowed up in victory. When the saints are called to leave this earthly life then "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

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THE END