

THE SEVEN LAST SAYINGS OF THE LORD

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For centuries, mankind has analyzed the last words of Jesus as He hung as the sacrificial lamb upon the cross, some two thousand years ago. His words from the cross revealed His character, his compassion, and His love for a lost and suffering world. So many have preached, written, sung, and talked about these words of Jesus, so this message cannot be considered an original. A concerto was written as far back as 1786 using these seven statements from the Lord. However, I wish to present these words as I feel inspired and will attempt to note expressions from previous writers.

From Wikipedia:

The seven sayings form part of a Christian meditation that is often used during Lent, Holy Week, and Good Friday. The traditional order of the sayings is according to the King James Version of the Bible:

1. Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."
2. Luke 23:43, "Verily I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in paradise."
3. John 19:26-27, "Woman, behold thy son! (says to a disciple) Behold thy mother!"
4. Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
5. John 19:28, "I thirst."
6. John 19:30, "It is finished."
7. Luke 23:46, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

You can read the full account of the cross in these scriptures:

- Matthew 26:14-27:66
- Mark 14:12-15:47
- Luke 22-23
- John 18-19

1. Forgiveness

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

"There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' And they divided His garments and cast lots. And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God'" (Luke 23:32-35, NKJV).

As Jesus hung on the cross, He was witness to the Roman soldiers casting lots for His few earthly possessions, his garments. What is remarkable about the soldiers casting lots was that this event was prophesied in detail centuries before in Psalms 22:18, *"They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots"* (NKJV).

When Psalms 22:18 was written some 1,000 years before the crucifixion, the cross and the methods of crucifixion were not yet invented. Also, the Roman executioners that gambled at the foot of the cross did so illegally. And yet the Scriptures prophesied, in exact detail, this event centuries earlier. Brothers and sisters, there has never been a piece of literature as accurate and infallible as the Word of God!

As Jesus suffered from the excruciating pain of slow suffocation, added to the pain of the nails through his hands and legs, he viewed the Romans soldiers, who had just minutes before placed him on the cross, as they gambled for his earthly possessions. At the same time, the rulers mocked Jesus and said, *“He saved others, let Him save Himself if He is the Christ the chosen of God.”* The soldiers mocked Him and said, *“If you are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”*

Jesus cried out to the Father with a heart of love and compassion and said, ***“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** Forgiveness for all, in the form of this man Jesus, was hanging on that cross. Forgiveness for the sin that we are, for the sin that we commit through either commission or omission, was on the cross.

For this reason, Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice that we might have our sins continually and forever forgiven. Jesus loved the rulers of His day that condemned Him to the cross. He loved the Roman soldiers who illegally occupied Israel, who burdened the Jews with high taxes, who stooped at the foot of the cross, who gambled for Jesus’ last possessions, and mocked Him in their ignorance. Forgiveness because of the cross, came from a heart of divine love.

Jesus put to an end the requirement for perpetual animal sacrifices of blood to pay for sins that mankind constantly committed. On that cross, the Lamb of God became the last sacrifice and offered forgiveness to all that would call upon His name.

Ray Overholt (1924-1958) was saved by singing his own song about Jesus on the cross! Ray was a talented cowboy singer who played nightclubs and taverns in Battle Creek, Michigan long ago. He went on to have a rather successful TV show because of his singing talents.

According to a written testimony about Ray Overholt published in 2018:

“One day I thought to myself: I’ve written secular songs, I’d like to write a song about Christ. I opened the Bible and began to read the portion of Scripture that describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, telling Peter to put away his sword,” Overholt said. “I read where Jesus told Peter that he could ask His Father and He would send twelve legions of angels. I didn’t know at the time that that would have been more than 72,000 angels.”

After reading the passage, Overholt says he thought “He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels” would be a good title for the song.

“I was playing in a nightclub in Battle Creek, Michigan when the Lord impressed me to write the song. I wrote the first verse and put it in my guitar case,” Overholt said. “I then gave the club my notice that I was quitting. While I was trying to find out who this man Jesus was and writing the song, I was saved.”

Overholt went on to describe how the song brought him to the Savior. “Sometime later I found myself singing at a small church. I sang “He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels.” Following my singing, a preacher spoke a message that gripped my heart. I knew I needed Christ. So I knelt there and accepted, as my Savior, the One whom I had been singing and writing about.”

Ray Overholt met the Savior that he had sung about. He received forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. My friend, you can too. Jesus is still in the “saving” business.

Ray’s well-known song goes like this:

They bound the hands of Jesus in the garden where He prayed;
They led Him thro’ the streets in shame.

They spat upon the Savior so pure and free from sin;
They said, “Crucify Him; He’s to blame

He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free.
He could have called ten thousand angels,
But He died alone, for you and me.

Upon His precious head they placed a crown of thorns;
They laughed and said, “Behold the King!”
They struck Him and they cursed Him and mocked His holy name;
All alone He suffered everything.

When they nailed Him to the cross, His mother stood nearby,
He said, “Woman, behold thy son!”
He cried, “I thirst for water,” but they gave Him none to drink.
Then the sinful work of man was done.

To the howling mob He yielded; He did not for mercy cry.
The cross of shame He took alone.
And when He cried, “It’s finished,” He gave Himself to die:
Salvation’s wondrous plan was done.

2. Salvation

“Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

“Then one of the criminals who was hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’” “But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’” (Luke 23:39-43, NKJV).

Jesus came to offer mankind salvation and an eternal home in heaven. The Scriptures are full of references to an eternal home for those that have given themselves to Christ.

There were two thieves that hung on either side of Christ. One was self-centered and only wanted to be free of his death penalty. The other was repentant. The repentant thief knew that he himself deserved his sentence, but that truly this Jesus was a just man.

I often marvel at the simplicity of the criminal’s question to Jesus. The repentant thief did not know the traditional “sinners prayer.” He must have known almost no scriptures. It was impossible for him to be baptized as his life was already slipping away on the cross.

He simply asked the Saviour *“Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.”* And that was all that Jesus needed, the repentant heart of a sinner looking to Jesus for salvation. Jesus spoke, *“Today, you will be with me, in paradise.”*

It is very easy to be “saved.” It is very easy to have your name written in the Book of Life. The thief learned the “way.” The Scriptures offer us much hope in receiving salvation through Jesus.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJV).

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know” (John 14:1-4, NKJV).

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to

the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NKJV).

Do you know the Saviour as your Lord? Have you asked him into your heart? With a repentant heart, you can receive God’s salvation before you finish this article.

3. Relationship

“Woman, behold, thy son! Behold, thy mother” (John 19:26-27)!

“When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:26-27, NKJV).

Methodist minister Adam Hamilton’s 2009 interpretation: “Jesus looked down from the cross to see his mother standing nearby. As far as we know, only one of the twelve apostles was there at the foot of the cross: ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved,’ and who is usually identified as John. Naked and in horrible pain, He thought not of himself but was concerned for the well-being of His mother after His death. This shows Jesus’ humanity and the depth of love He had for His mother and the disciple into whose care He entrusted her.”

Jesus demonstrated from the cross His love for all of mankind, and His love and desire to provide for His mother, Mary. Jesus was taking care of His earthly responsibilities before His journey through the grave and ultimately into heaven. He loved His mother. John was given the responsibility of caring for Mary and he did well.

John, known as the Apostle of Love, would eventually move Mary to Ephesus (modern-day Turkey) where he would care for her for the remainder of her days. Perhaps that is why the Lord allowed John to live into his 90’s at a time when few would live to be 50 or 60. John needed the lifespan to care for Mary.

To love God is to love His people. They go hand in hand. To love God’s people is to love God. The Scriptures are filled with admonitions to love one another, as Jesus loved His own mother.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:12-13, NKJV).

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NKJV).

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Peter 4:8, NKJV).

4. Abandonment

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34)?

“And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me’” (Matthew 27:46, NRSV)?

“And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me’” (Mark 15:34, NRSV)?

This is the only saying which appears in more than one Gospel and is a quote from Psalms 22:1.

This statement that Jesus cried out often stands as a mystery to many. Did God really forsake His only Son on the cross? The answer is no! But God, for a few moments, could not look at Jesus as He carried the stain of not just my sins, but the sin of the world, past, present, and future.

Though Jesus was sinless, for those few hours He hung on the cross, He

bore all of the sins of the world. God could not look upon sin. *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV).

Jesus knew the human emotion of feeling forsaken as we sometimes do. Jesus was acquainted with all of the human emotions of grief, loss, and pain. But the greatest agony of all must have been those few hours God looked away until it was finished. We are blessed to have a Saviour that is fully acquainted with our sorrows. He fully understands all the human emotions that we endure.

“He is despised and rejected by men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him: He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3-4, NKJV).

5. Distress

“I thirst” (John 19:28).

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’” (John 19:28 (NKJV).

This was another prophecy fulfilled over a thousand years before the crucifixion. The Psalmist wrote, *“They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink”* (Psalms 69:21, NKJV).

Jesus knew what it was like to be thirsty. The blood loss from His injuries on the cross caused dehydration to rapidly set in causing an unquenchable thirst. What a tremendous thought that the one that could give “living water” also knew what it was like to be physically thirsty for temporary water.

The Scriptures record a previous event where Jesus was physically weary and thirsty. He used this incident to prove that He had the authority to pour out “living water.”

“Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water’” (John 4:6-10, NKJV).

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life’” (John 4:13-14, NKJV).

Because of the price Jesus paid on the cross, living water is now available to all that ask without price.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17, NKJV).

6. Triumph

“It is finished” (John 19:30).

“Jesus said, ‘It is finished’” (*tetelestai* in Greek) (John 19:30).

It is finished. What a simple, powerful, and profound statement. The crowd that witnessed the crucifixion must have been familiar with this word that Jesus proclaimed. *Tetelestai!* Literally meaning, *it is finished!*

Business documents and receipts for goods or loans that had been fully paid for were stamped with the word *Tetelestai!* It is finished. It is now complete, paid in full. Your sins are erased. The debt is forever forgiven. Jesus completed His mission. It is finished.

The resurrection that would soon follow would change the world. When

Jesus proclaimed triumphantly, "It is finished," He made the resurrection available to all of mankind, in their own time.

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, NKJV).

Much like the song we joyfully sing:

He paid a debt, He did not owe,
I owed a debt, I could not pay,
I needed someone to wash my sins away.

And now I sing, a brand new song,
Amazing Grace, all day long,
my Jesus paid a debt
that I could never pay!

It is finished! Dispensations and time pivoted on this crucial moment on the cross. In another 50 days or so the dispensation of law would make way for the Dispensation of Grace and for the church age. Time would ultimately be measured by "before the cross, and after the cross," however, in less specific terms.

On this very night, there would be earthquakes. Darkness would fall in the middle of the day, and graves would be open with lost loved ones rising from the earth. Death would lose its grip, and in the sacred temple, the two-inch-thick veil that separated man from the presence of God in the Holy of Holies would be torn through the middle, from top to bottom, from heaven to earth. Truly - it is finished!

7. Reunion

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

"And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'" (Luke 23:46, KJV).

Once again, this proclamation from the lips of Jesus was also prophesied in Psalms 31:5 over a thousand years before the crucifixion. This was a divine announcement, that the Son of God had committed His path and destiny to the Father.

"Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth" (Psalms 31:5, NKJV).

Adam Hamilton (pastor and writer) has written that "When darkness seems to prevail in life, it takes faith even to talk to God, even if it is to complain to Him. These last words of Jesus from the cross show His absolute trust in God: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: ...' This has been termed a model of prayer for everyone when afraid, sick, or facing one's own death. It says in effect: I commit myself to you, O God. In my living and in my dying, in the good times and in the bad, whatever I am and have, I place in your hands, O God, for your safekeeping."

The Christian symbol for Christianity is an empty cross. I have always loved seeing that elegant, simple symbol. It means so much to so many so quickly. My wife wears a cross necklace, and it immediately communicates to those around her that she is a Christian. I heard a young teenager say that he always wore a cross so that his classmates knew who he stood with.

In the days of Jesus, under Roman occupation, the cross was seen as a horrific instrument of torture and death, until crucifixion was finally outlawed. But Jesus made the empty cross a symbol of triumph. Life over death, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life.

Permit me to close with just a few words from the song The Old Rugged Cross:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best,
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown. ✝

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