

**A sermon series preached at Centurion West Presbyterian Church during
the 6 Sundays of Lent and on Good Friday - 2008.**

This series proclaims the message of the seven words Jesus uttered on the cross.

It seeks the message and meaning of the seven words for us, today!

They are only sermon outlines - not complete, ready to use sermons!

The first word on the cross: "Forgive" - Luke 23: 34 "

Reading: Luke 23:26-34 and Acts 7:54 - 60

Introduction

Our Lord is upon the cross. And there he hangs – silent. But then his lips are seen to move. Is he crying out in pain? Is he asking for pity? No. Is he pronouncing a curse upon those who crucified him?

What then? He is praying for his enemies! "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

The first word on the cross is "Forgive"!

Our Lord prays

Our Lord is praying upon the cross. How significant! He has left us an example that we also should do as he has done.

No longer can his hands minister to the sick, for they are nailed to the tree. No longer can his feet carry him on errands of mercy, for they are fastened to the wood. No longer can he instruct his disciples, for they have forsaken him and fled. But one thing he can do, and does – the ministry of prayer!

Perhaps there are some here this morning who think they have nothing to offer the Lord's people. But there is one thing you can do and that is to engage in the ministry of prayer. Perhaps God may use your ministry of prayer to accomplish more for his church and kingdom than was accomplished by all your other service.

Our Lord is upon the cross. He prays for his murderers. He shows us that no one is ever beyond the reach of prayer. He teaches us, to never give up, to keep on praying. Does it seem to you a waste of time to keep praying for that man, that woman, that child or grandchild of yours? In such times of discouragement think of the cross. Remember that Christ prayed for his enemies, for those who made him suffer the agony and torment of the cross.

We should never look at this first word of the cross, this prayer for Christ's enemies, without also looking at the answer to this prayer on Pentecost Sunday. The Spirit was poured out, Peter preached a powerful sermon, and three thousand were saved. Who are these three thousand? Peter clearly identifies them as those who put Jesus to death by nailing him to the cross (Acts 2:23b,37; 3:13-15,17 and the 5,000 of 4:4). The prayer of Christ on the cross for his enemies was given a most definite answer. The answer is seen in the conversion of the three thousand souls on the Day of Pentecost and the conversion of every single sinner that returns to God.

Jesus prays to the Father

In this first word on the cross Jesus prays to the Father: "Father, forgive them ..." On no previous occasion did Jesus ever make such a request of the Father. All other times Jesus forgave on his own authority. To the paralytic lying on a mat Jesus said, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:2). Why then should Jesus now ask the Father to forgive, instead of directly pronouncing forgiveness himself?

Forgiveness of sin is God's prerogative. The teachers of the law were right in thinking "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mk 2:7). Jesus was and is and always will be God, so his is the right to forgive sins. But in this instance Jesus is in our place and as our representative, and as such the glory and the power of God that are his may not be exercised. For instance, it was well within his power to have called thousands of angels to his rescue. But then his suffering would no longer be as one of us, in our place, and as our representative.

Upon the cross Jesus was no longer in the place of authority and power. He was there representing sinners, totally dependent upon the grace and mercy of God. So he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus lovingly prays for forgiveness

Jesus is upon the cross suffering unspeakable anguish and torment of body and soul. But even then Jesus does not engage in self-pity or concentrate on personal survival or respond in anger and hatred. As he did all his life he looks in love beyond himself to others. "Father, forgive them ..." That was the triumph of redeeming love. What matchless, wondrous love our Saviour displayed when his first word from the cross was for the forgiveness of his enemies.

"Father, forgive them ..." said Jesus out of love. "Forgive" is a word borrowed from the world of commerce. It is a money word. In the Greek culture it meant the cancellation of a debt, the pardoning of a loan. Jesus prays for forgiveness. He prays for the pardoning of a loan. He prays for the cancellation of the debt of sin.

Jesus prays for his enemies

Who is the "them" Jesus was praying for? He was praying for the Jewish leaders who had him falsely arrested, who hit him, spat on him, and told lies about him. Jesus was praying for the crowd who yelled, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Jesus was praying for Pilate who found him innocent yet still gave him up to be crucified. Jesus was praying for the soldiers who nailed him to the cross. Jesus was praying for all of these: "Father, forgive them.."

Jesus was also praying for you and me and every other sinner. He was upon the cross one of us, one with us. He was there because of our sins.

The need for forgiveness

This first word of the cross, this prayer for forgiveness, is clearly about sins of ignorance: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Under the old covenant God required that atonement should also be made for sins people were not even aware of; sins they did not realize they had committed. In Leviticus 5 we see that sin is always in God's sight, whether we are conscious of it or not. Sins of ignorance need atonement just as much as do sins we wilfully commit. God is holy, and he will not and cannot lower his standard of righteousness to the level of our ignorance. Ignorance is not innocence. So Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Conclusion

Finally, we have to ask on what basis did Jesus pray to God for forgiveness in this first word of the cross? How can Jesus ask God to cancel our enormous debt of sin, whether those sins be committed wilfully or unknowingly? It is the cross itself which is the basis of Christ's prayer for forgiveness. We need forgiveness for the cross; yet without the cross there is no forgiveness. Upon the cross, suffering in body and soul the anguish and torment of hell, Jesus prayed for grace, for forgiveness for his enemies. What love! What wondrous, matchless love.

This is the Word of God.

Amen.

The second word on the cross is "Salvation" - Luke 23: 42,43

Scripture reading: Luke 23: 26 - 43.

He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom".

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

Introduction:

When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for winning, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements and good performance, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award, yet receives such a gift anyway, it is a good picture of God's unmerited favour. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.

Christ crucified between two robbers by the will of God

It was no accident that our Lord was crucified between two robbers. There are no accidents in this world ruled by God. There can be no accident on that day and with that event which lies at the centre of God's revelation of his love and salvation. God was in control. From eternity he had decreed when and where and with whom his Son would die. Nothing was left to chance or to the urges of man. What God had eternally decided, happened exactly as he had ordained, and nothing happened except what was his purpose to happen. God's *"power and will had decided beforehand what should happen"* (Acts 4:28).

When Pilate commanded that the Lord Jesus should be crucified between the two robbers, he was carrying out the decree of God, fulfilling the prophecy of Scripture. Seven hundred years earlier God had declared through Isaiah that his Son was to be *"numbered with the transgressors"* (Is 53:12). On Good Friday Jesus hung on the cross with a criminal crucified on his left and his right. What God ordains and announces comes to pass.

Why did God ordain that his beloved Son should be crucified between two criminals?

Our Lord was crucified with two robbers in order to demonstrate the full extent of his humiliation. At his birth there was no place for him to be born, but a stable, and now at his death, he is numbered with criminals. He hung there in our place, as our Substitute. We are the transgressors. It should have been us hanging there on the cross between the two who deserved the death sentence, because we too deserve the wages of sin, which is death. But Christ took our place. He was numbered among transgressors in our place.

The sovereign grace of God

An important lesson we learn from the second word on the cross concerns the sovereign grace of God. The two criminals were equally near to Christ. Both of them saw and heard all that happened those six hours that Jesus hung on the cross. Both were wicked, dying and in pain. But one of them died in his sins, he died as he had lived, without repentance. The other repented of his wickedness, believed in Jesus, called on him for mercy, and went to Paradise. Only the sovereign grace of God can account for this difference in response under the same circumstances and with the same experience.

Don't we see it still happening today? Under the same circumstances, one is thawed out and the other remains cold with regards to the gospel. The same sermon will be received with indifference by one, while another will see God's love and mercy. To one the Gospel is revealed, to another it remains a closed book. Why does this happen? While upholding that every person is responsible before God for his own sin and conversion, we know that only those come to God whom God calls to him. This is what we call the sovereign grace of God.

These words of Jesus on the cross offer salvation, by grace, to the criminal crucified with Jesus, and to each one of us. Yes, the salvation of the dying robber shows us the glorious grace and mercy of our Lord. The apostle Paul says: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith."* (Eph 2:8).

Salvation by grace is nowhere illustrated in Scripture as well as in the case of the forgiven robber that was crucified with Jesus. He had no "good works," to rely on. He had no high standard of morality. Rather, he was a vile and wicked man; he respected neither the law of God nor the law of man. There is no way that either he or anyone else could say that he had earned his salvation. And, after his conversion on the cross, this thief had no grateful response to his salvation and he bore no fruit of salvation - except faith in Jesus - for his conversion took place just before his death.

Yet, he was saved. His salvation was by grace only. His faith through which he received Christ, was a gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. (See Eph2:8)

The thief on the cross reminds us that salvation is totally by grace: that it is free, unmerited, unearned, and totally dependent upon God and his mercy. He reminds me of the fact that I am saved because of grace, and because of love. The love of God in Christ Jesus. This love I accept in faith. This Jesus I receive in faith.

The criminal on the cross next to Jesus is proof that I don't have to reach a certain standard or level of holiness before God will accept me as his child. That thief is proof that I don't have to get my life under control first, in order to claim the promises of God for myself. He reminds us that salvation is totally by grace; that it is free, unmerited, unearned, and totally dependent upon God and His mercy.

It is important to remember *when* the Lord saved this man. His conversion occurred at a time when it seemed as if Jesus had lost the power to save either himself or others. It seemed as if the enemies of Jesus were triumphing over him. His friends had forsaken him and public opinion was against him. He was in pain, dying! Even those who believed in him had doubts about him. Yet, the thief confessed his faith in Christ.

How can we possibly explain that a dying robber took a suffering, bleeding, crucified man for his God? There can be only one explanation, which is the sovereign grace of our Lord!

A contrite sinner

To get to the heart of the second word of the cross, the word of salvation, we must realise that the remorseful robber represents all sinners of every age, everywhere.

He is not only a sinner, *he is a converted sinner*. He rebuked the other robber for his mockery of our Lord. "*Don't you fear God,*" he said, "*since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong*" (vs 40,41). He repents of his sin and evil. He acknowledges his guilt and the judgment of God upon his sin.

We also see him turning in faith toward Christ: "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" The thief, by grace, recognized Jesus as the Messiah, as the Son of David, who would rule over the Kingdom of God to be established. "Remember me," says the robber. He is placing his destiny in the hands of Jesus.

The Lord wants us all to recognise ourselves in this remorseful sinner hanging on a cross next to Jesus. He wants us to recognise our sin and the wrath of God on sin. He wants us to repent of our sins and turn to Jesus in faith. He wants us to cry out too, "*Jesus, remember me ...*"

A word of salvation from the cross

The crosses were only a few feet apart. The Lord immediately heard the cry of the repentant man. Remember the promise of Christ, "*whoever comes to me I will never drive away*" (Jn 6:37). We see here that this promise is the truth. Jesus answered him, "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*" The thief asks Jesus to remember him, but Jesus says, "*you will be with me.*"

I urge you to turn to Jesus right now in repentance and in faith. We saw the power of Christ the Saviour. Even then, even there dying in pain, he had the power to redeem from hell and open the gates of Paradise. Never doubt the ability of our Saviour to save you. If a dying Saviour could save so powerfully, how much more a Saviour who rose from death in triumph, never more to die!

Conclusion

To receive a wage that you have not earned, to get the prize that you have not won and to be awarded the acknowledgement you do not deserve! That is what it means to be saved by grace through faith. Listen then today to the Lord's merciful, loving words as it echo's through the ages to reach us as God's word here, today! "You will be with me in Paradise!" This is the truth! This is the word of God.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Third word on the cross: "Family" John 19: 26,27

Reading: John 19:16b-27

A mother's suffering

"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother," says Scripture (vs 25).

Like her son, Mary was not unaccustomed to grief. Not at all! What sorrow it must have caused her when she had to lay her new-born son in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. What anguish must have been hers when she learned of Herod's plan to destroy her child. How her soul must have been pierced when she saw her son despised and rejected of men. What grief must have filled her heart when she saw him hated and persecuted by his own people. No words are adequate to describe how she felt as she stood there at the cross.

Some thirty years earlier Simeon had warned Mary about the grief that would be hers because of her son. Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple "to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22). There they were met by Simeon who "was waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25). Filled with the Spirit Simeon sang a song of praise to God. Then he turned his attention to Mary and said,

(Lk 2:34-35) *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* It was especially at the cross that Simeon's tragic words became a reality for Mary; a sword pierced her soul as she stood there and witnessed the execution of her first-born son.

We see and hear little of Mary. She stayed in the background. But now, in her son's supreme hour of agony, she stood by the cross. What a sword pierced her soul then!

Those of you who are parents can fully understand Mary's suffering and grief. Consider that the one who agonized there on the cross was her child. What agony she must have suffered there by the cross.

Jesus was suffering and dying. Yet he thought of his mother. He knew how she was suffering and grieving for and with him. He therefore addressed a word from the cross to her, a word of comfort to a sorrowing mother: (Jn 19:26-27) When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," (27) and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." Jesus knew Mary's agony. In his moment of supreme and unspeakable anguish, he spoke to her. *Amazing, isn't it, that even upon the cross Jesus could demonstrate love and concern for those around Him?*

The perfect example

You all know that God engraved the Ten Commandments on the two tablets of stone. These decrees are still in force today and will continue to be in force until that day when there is a new heaven and new earth. Even Jesus had to obey the laws of God.

It is the fifth commandment which interests us today. It is the commandment specifically addressed to children. "Honour your father and your mother." This fifth commandment is restated in Ephesians 6:1,2:

(Eph 6:1-3) "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother--which is the first commandment with a promise-- that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

The commandment for children to honour their parents goes far beyond mere obedience. It also includes love and affection, gratitude and respect. Children and young people, God wants you to honour, love, obey, and respect your parents. He wants you to show them affection and gratitude.

Even on the cross Jesus showed himself to be perfectly obedient to the fifth commandment. In his third word from the cross we see Jesus as the perfect example of how children of all ages are to treat their parents. He was in his moment of supreme anguish and suffering. Yet, he still honoured his mother by thinking of her needs and committing her to the care of John, the disciple he loved.

What a perfect picture we are given here of a child honouring, respecting, and loving his mother! An example for children of all ages to do likewise to their parent or parents.

A new family

This third word of the cross can not merely be a word to a suffering Mary. Something deeper must be in mind. A deeper meaning is suggested by the verse that follows our text: "*Later, knowing that all was now completed ...*" (vs 28a). The words and actions of Jesus in his third saying from the cross completed the work that the Father has given him to do. Making Mary the mother of the Beloved Disciple and making the Beloved Disciple the son of Mary somehow and in some way completed the work that the Father had sent Jesus to do.

A deeper meaning is suggested when you consider that Jesus commended Mary to the care of the Beloved Disciple rather than to the care of one of her other sons, his brothers. (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). How come it was not one of them given the responsibility of looking after Mary? As compared to Jesus' brothers and sisters, there is something special about Mary and the Beloved Disciple. Mary and John believed in Jesus, they accepted him as Saviour and Lord, whereas Jesus' brothers and sisters, says Scripture, "did not believe in him" (Jn 7:5).

Now notice what happens. Jesus is on the cross. *Below Him are two of those who still believe in Him.* (Jn 19:26-27) *Beneath the cross of Jesus a new family is created. The blood of Christ forms a new home. Through his redemptive work upon the cross Jesus forges a new family of the redeemed. We know it as the Church!*

Up to that time the community of God's people Israel was based on physical descent. But now there is a new community, a new family, a new fellowship of God's people. This one is not based on physical descent but on spiritual descent. It isn't blood lines but a common belief in Christ that unites this new family.

We see here the fulfilment of Christ's words of prophecy in Mark 10: "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Beneath the cross of Jesus Christian fellowship is born not just for Mary and John but also for you and me and everyone who believes. Beneath the cross of Jesus all true believers become family. Beneath the cross of Jesus we all become brothers and sisters in the Lord. Beneath the cross of Jesus we all become part of a new family – a new family made up of thousands upon tens of thousands of true believers. This, of course, is what Jesus had in mind in his third word from the cross: that we be joined with true believers into a loving, caring family.

Now you and I should do two things. *First, we must praise God for the blessed family of believers formed beneath the cross of Jesus! Second, we must do whatever it takes to make the church into more of what Jesus wants her to be: a family of true believers who loves, cares for, and supports each and every one of us.*

Conclusion

This third word from the cross is a word of love to a suffering mother; it is a word of example to children of all ages; and, it is a word establishing a new family of the redeemed.

"The fourth word from the cross: Forsaken" - Matthew 27:46 and Psalm 22 : 1 - 2 and 22 - 24:

Reading: Matthew 27:45-56

Introduction

The Bible tells us Jesus said in a "loud" voice: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" Here we have the original words of Jesus in the original language. There is no translation of the Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus, into the Greek language here. Rather, what we have are the actual words used by Jesus.

We are now faced with the question of why God's Holy Spirit inspired the Gospel-writer Matthew to here preserve the actual and literal words of Jesus. Two answers spring readily to mind. First, it is the Holy Spirit's intention to drive home to us the personal intensity of Christ's sufferings; can't you hear the anguish: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" Second, the Spirit wants us to see the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures; you see, the Lord's fourth word from the cross is a direct quote from the Hebrew of Psalm 22:1.

A cry of agony

Jesus' fourth word from the cross is first of all a cry of agony: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Sabachthani, forsaken: It means "to abandon, to let go, to leave."

It is awful to be forsaken. "Forsaken" is not simply a matter of being alone, but rather the feeling that no one really cares what happens to you. It is not necessarily caused by a set of circumstances - it also is a state of mind. Being alone involves physical separation, but being forsaken includes both spiritual and psychological isolation. It produces the feeling of being cut off from others whom we should like to have as friends.

So many today are forsaken. Babies are abandoned on someone's doorstep or in a park or garbage dumpster somewhere. Pre-school children are forsaken by mothers in the streets of our inner cities. An increasing number of people abandon or forsake their marriage partner. Elderly parents are abandoned in a nursing home or hospital – rarely thought of or visited.

At the end of his life Jesus was totally on his own. The crowds had turned against him. His disciples had left him. His family did not believe in him. He cried out that even his God had forsaken him! Of everything he suffered, this was his greatest pain and sorrow.

In one way Jesus was not abandoned or forsaken by the Father. The cross, you see, was God's will and plan for Jesus. The way of the cross was the path that God had chosen from eternity for Jesus to take. And, it was in obedience to this plan that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Mt 26:39).

It was God's will, then, that Christ be crucified. In this way God did not forsake or abandon Christ; instead, he continued to carry out his divine plan devised from eternity.

According to his divine plan God physically forsook Jesus. It was because God abandoned Jesus, that Jesus could be betrayed by Judas. Because God had abandoned him, Jesus was mocked and falsely accused. Because he was abandoned by God, Jesus, though innocent and found to be innocent, was still treated as though being guilty. Because Jesus was abandoned by God, he died the cruel death on the cross.

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus' sufferings are unique, so he cannot have just physical abandonment in mind here. Our Lord is speaking here of a spiritual abandonment, a spiritual forsakenness, by the Father. The Father forsook him, physically and spiritually, in body and soul. *To be forsaken by God in this fashion is to suffer the pangs and torments of hell. Hell is the complete absence of God and all that is good; hell is a total separation from God.*

He cried out upon the cross after the three hours of darkness in the middle of the day. Both are signs that God has abandoned and forsaken Christ. Both are signs that God has even cursed Christ. Galatians 3:13 tells us, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This cry startles, and surprises us. Imagine, the only begotten Son of God, the eternal and natural Son of God, making such a cry! Didn't God say at the baptism and the transfiguration of Christ, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 16:5)? Didn't Christ

live in the bosom of the Father from eternity, and during the thirty three years here on earth, didn't Christ enjoy unbroken fellowship with the Father? But now, now the beloved Son is forsaken by the Father. This cry startles and surprises us.

Why did God forsake Jesus in both body and soul? What was the barrier that now existed between the first and second persons of the Triune Godhead? The barrier was sin. It was because of sin that Christ was forsaken and abandoned by God. I think of 2 Corinthians 5:21 which says, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Jesus became sin for us. He became sin, he took on our sin, he was cursed and abandoned and forsaken, all to save us from our sin.

Cry of triumph still to come

Jesus' fourth word from the cross is also a cry of coming triumph, for Christ, and for us, because of Christ. Jesus' fourth word is a direct quote from the Hebrew of Psalm 22. Though it is especially the first verse that Jesus has in mind, he was also thinking of the rest of the psalm.

In Psalm 22 we see so much that apply to the sufferings of Christ upon the cross. Think of our Lord upon the cross as I read selections from this Psalm:

(Ps 22:6-8) But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. (7) All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: (8) "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him

(Ps 22:18) They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

In verses 22-31 this Psalm takes on a decidedly positive note. Listen to brief selections as I read them:

(Ps 22:22) I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

(Ps 22:25) From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfil my vows.

Why this change from suffering and pain to praise and worship? Why can the psalmist start off with,

(Ps 22:1) My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

and end with,

(Ps 22:27) All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him. What accounts for this change?

We are given the answer in Ps 22: 24: For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

In crying out from the cross the opening words of Psalm 22, our Lord most certainly had in mind the triumphal call of verse 22ff. Even in the agony of being abandoned and cursed and forsaken by God, even then and there Christ was thinking of the victory of Easter Sunday.

Precisely here is our victory in and through Christ: Christ took our place! He was forsaken so we don't have to be. He was separated from God so we don't have to be. But more than that, as the Spirit inspired apostle makes clear in a couple of places, we share in Christ's victory on Easter Sunday in that we are raised in and with him.

This is the Word of God.

Amen.

"The fifth word from the cross: Thirsty" John 19:25-30 John 19:28

Introduction

"I am thirsty." These words were spoken by our suffering Lord just before "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:30b). How tragic: the Maker of heaven and earth with parched lips; the Lord of Glory in need of a drink.

A word of Jesus' humanity

While here on earth the Lord Jesus gave full proof of his humanity, his sinless humanity. He entered this world as a baby and was wrapped in strips of cloth (Lk 3:7). Like any normal human child, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature" (Lk 2:52). As a man he became tired (Jn 4:6). He was hungry (Mt 4:2). He fell asleep (Mk 4:38). He prayed (Mk 1:35). He rejoiced (Lk 10:21). He was troubled (Jn 11:33). He wept (Jn 11:35).

In our text, Jesus cried out, "I am thirsty." *This is further evidence of his full humanity for God does not get thirsty, nor do the angels, nor do we in glory (Rev 7:16).* We thirst now because we are human and thirst is part of being human now. Christ was thirsty because he was and is fully man. The book of Hebrews says this about Christ :

(Heb 2:17) ... *he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

A word of Jesus' sufferings

"I am thirsty." This word of the Saviour also expresses his sufferings.

The Bible tells us that at the institution of the Supper was the last time Jesus ate and drank before he was crucified the next day. The Bible tells us Jesus was so anxious and upset about his imminent crucifixion that he was sweating. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus also was whipped. The whip used on Jesus had pieces of lead tied to the end. Back then people were whipped until their backs became a big bleeding and open mass of flesh. They were whipped until they were almost dead. And think about his crucifixion. Nails, pain, blood, fever! And now think of how he has gone a night and a day without anything to eat and drink. Is it strange that Jesus said "I am thirsty?" This word on the cross expresses the Saviour's bodily, human suffering.

The Bible tells us that "A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips" (Jn 19:29).

This was now the second time Jesus had been offered a drink of the wine-vinegar. The soldiers first offered it to Jesus when they arrived on Golgotha Hill and before they pounded the nails into Him. Matthew's Gospel tells us that "they offered Jesus wine to drink ... but after tasting it, he refused to drink it" (Mt 27:34).

But now, after the three hours of darkness, after being forsaken by God, Jesus could have a drink. "Knowing that all was now completed," knowing that he had sufficiently borne God's anger against our sin, knowing that his work of redemption on our behalf was now finished, Jesus could now have a drink of wine-vinegar-wine. "A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips." That hyssop is a reminder of the Passover Lamb sacrificed in the place of the Israelite first-born. That hyssop is a sign that the Passover Lamb has been slain, namely, Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the whole world!" (Jn 1:29).

A word of Jesus' reverence for Scripture

"I am thirsty." This word of the cross also shows Jesus' reverence for the Holy Scriptures.

Listen to the entire text this fifth word from the cross is found in:

(Jn 19:28) *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." Jesus said "I am thirsty" so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. The Scripture referred to is Psalm 69 – a Messianic psalm which describes the Messiah's sufferings. In this psalm the Spirit declares, (Ps 69:21) They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*

This remained yet unaccomplished. The Messianic predictions of the previous verses from the Old Testament had already been fulfilled. Now all that remained to be accomplished at this point was the drink of vinegar and gall. For this to be accomplished Jesus cried out, "I am thirsty."

Jesus had hung on that cross for six hours and had passed through unbelievable suffering, yet he knew and remembered that one prophetic word of Scripture still remained to be fulfilled. *He overlooked nothing*. He submitted to Scripture and took steps to fulfil it. But this should not surprise us. Didn't Jesus himself say, (Mt 4:4) Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Deut 8:3)

Jesus bowed to the authority of Scripture both in life and in death. *How about you? Do you live on every word that comes from the mouth of God? Do you meditate on God's law day and night (Ps 1)? It is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Ps 119:105)? Are you, like the Saviour, committed to fulfil the Scripture?*

A word of Jesus' sympathy with the suffering

"I am thirsty." This fifth word from the cross is also a word showing us how Jesus can sympathize with his suffering people. The problem of suffering has always been a puzzling one. Why should there be suffering in a world that is governed by a perfect God? Why should there be pain and cancer and death? When we look out at our world we rightly recognize that too often it is a valley of tears.

The cross shows us, however, that God is not ignorant of our sorrows, for in the person of his Son he "took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" (Is 53:4).

The book of Hebrews touches on the value of this when it says, (Heb 4:15-16) *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses ... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Is your body racked with pain? So was his! Are you misunderstood, misjudged, misrepresented? So was he! Have those who are nearest and dearest to you turned away from you? They did from him! Are you in the darkness? So was he – for 3 terrible hours in the darkness of hell itself!

(Heb 2:17) *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

A word expressing a universal need

"I am thirsty." This word finally expresses our Lord's and every man's thirst for God. If we compare our text with Matthew 27 we see that this fifth word from the cross was spoken by our Lord right after the three hours of darkness. During those three hours God had turned his face away from Jesus. After the three hours of darkness, the three hours of forsakenness, Jesus was crying for God. Jesus had in mind those beautiful words that his Spirit inspired in the psalmist:

(Ps 42:1-2) *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. (2) My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Jesus had been without God for three awful hours. No wonder he cried out for God. No wonder he said, "I am thirsty."

"I am thirsty," also cries natural man. "My soul is empty." Yet, as Jesus explains in more than one place, natural man looks in the wrong things and goes to the wrong places to fill his soul when he goes after wealth, honour, pleasure, wisdom, power, and knowledge. Jesus said, *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again"* (Jn 4:13).

Christ alone can quench our thirst. He alone can meet the deepest need of our heart, our soul, our person.

Come to Jesus. For if you die in your sins your eternal cry will be the moan of the damned: "I am thirsty." In the lake of fire the lost suffer the flames of God's wrath for ever and ever with none to quench their thirst. Come to Jesus and drink of him. For only in him can you satisfy your thirst.

This is the Word of God.

Amen.

The sixth word on the cross: "It is finished" - John 19: 30

Reading: John 19:28-37

Introduction

"It is finished." This was the cry of our Lord just moments before his death.

"It is finished." Is this a cry of defeat? No, it is a cry of triumph. What does this cry of Jesus mean? Three things are in mind: firstly, that Jesus' life is finished; secondly, that Jesus' work of redemption is finished; thirdly, that Scripture's promises about the Messiah are finished or fulfilled.

Jesus' life is finished

"It is finished," said Jesus. Jesus' life was ended. He was a living human being. He ate and drank, slept and walked, preached and prayed. But now all this was finished. His life was at its end. In a moment he would die. "It is finished," was his cry.

When it is time for us to leave this world, very few of us will go without a struggle. I have stood or sat by more than one death-bed. So often it has been a fight for each breath, a struggle to hang on to life, a battle to the very end.

How different Christ is from us: "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Christ submitted to death. He embraced death. He died willingly, of his own accord. But, then, didn't Jesus say this is the way he would die? *Consider his words in John 10:*

(Jn 10:17-18) The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

Jesus died willingly out of love for you and me so, if we believe, we will not be lost. You see, God's justice and truth demand that he go all the way to death for only the death of God's Son could pay for our sin. The Greek word for "It is finished" is Tetelestai. Archaeologists have repeatedly found it scrawled across tax receipts used in those days. In this context it means "paid in full."

"It is finished." "Paid in full." Sin's account is settled, our debt of guilt is wiped out, because Jesus suffered and died for our sins upon the cross.

Jesus' redemptive work is finished

His work was finished, it was completed, it was ended. But we must be more accurate. "It is finished" refers only to the end of Jesus' redemptive work. It marks the end only of his work as Mediator and Saviour. For, we know from Scripture that his work as Lord continues. Christ is in heaven right now. There, as Lord of the universe and as Head of the church, Christ is hard at work on our behalf and for our good, preparing a place for us, pleading for us before the Father, defending and keeping us safe from the attacks of Satan.

"It is finished." Jesus has completed the work God has sent him to do on this earth. What was started when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem, was ended on Golgotha. Christ's salvation work was now done. This means Christ's work of suffering was now done.

The cup of wrath has been drained. The wages of sin have been paid. Never again shall he be in the hands of his enemies. Never again shall he be in darkness. Never again will God's presence be taken from him. Jesus has accomplished our salvation. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, we can contribute to his work of redemption done on our behalf.

Christ, and Christ alone, has accomplished our salvation. We know that, but we find it so hard to believe. We have to be so careful about the ancient heresy of adding to the work of Christ. In fact, every time we take pride in our faithful attendance at Sunday services, every time we pat ourselves on the back for being such a faithful supporter of Church and Kingdom, every time we think our standards and level of righteousness are so much higher than anyone else's, every time we become self-righteous about our support of Christian work, we have stooped to work's righteousness again.

"It is finished," said our Lord. He did what needed to be done to save us from our sins. There is nothing we need do, there is nothing we can do, to complete this work of redemption.

Scripture's promises are fulfilled

"It is finished." Scripture has been fulfilled. The Greek word translated as "finished" also has the meaning of "bring to fulfilment, completion." Verse 28 uses this word twice: "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled ..." Jesus used the same word at the end of his life: "It is finished."

Every element of his suffering had been predicted and fulfilled. The betrayal by a close friend (Ps 41:9), being forsaken by the disciples (Ps 31:11), false accusations (Ps 35:11), his silence before the judges (Is 53:7), his numbering with the transgressors (Is 53:12), the crucifixion (Ps 22:16), the mockery of the crowd (Ps 109:25), the taunt that the Lord does not save him (Ps 22:7,8), the casting of lots for his garments (Ps 22:18), the prayer for his enemies (Is 53:12), being forsaken by God (Ps 22:1), the drinking of wine-vinegar (Ps 69:21), the committal of his spirit into the hands of the Father (Ps 31:5), the piercing of his side (Zech 12:10), his bones not being broken (Ps 34:20), his burial in a rich man's tomb (Is 53:9) – all these were foretold and came to pass.

"It is finished," cried out Jesus. Scripture has been fulfilled. The more than 300 promises, the more than 300 prophecies about the Messiah, have been realized.

All these promises that have been fulfilled in, by and through Christ, concern his first coming to our world. Scripture also has a whole series of astonishing promises about his second coming: a glorious return upon the clouds with sounding trumpets and clashing thunders; bodies raised from the grave and made like Christ's glorious body; every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; a new heaven and new earth; no more mourning, crying, pain, or death; no hunger or thirst; no darkness or fear; life forever in the glorious presence of God.

We know this: that if God brought to completion all his promises about the first coming of the Messiah, then he will just as surely bring to completion all the promises about the second coming of the Messiah. Not a word of God can fall to the ground. Not a single promise of his can remain unfulfilled. "It is finished," said our Lord upon the cross, speaking of his first coming. And, at the end of time, when everything has been completed and fulfilled, he will say, *"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End"* (Rev 21:6). Then he will have accomplished everything the Father promised us, until it has been finished. Then everything will have been accomplished.

This is the Word of God.
Amen.

The seventh word from the cross: "Father..." - Luke 23:46

Reading: Luke 23:44 - 54

A word of renewed fellowship with God

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." We cannot hear these words without calling to mind what Jesus had just suffered. Do you remember how for three awful hours the perfect fellowship between the Father and the Son, between the first and second persons of the Trinity, was broken? Do you remember how the light of God's presence was removed from Jesus and there was darkness over the whole land? And for this reason Jesus said, "I am thirsty" (Jn 19:28) meaning, in the words of the psalmist, (Ps 42:1-2) *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Up to the cross there had been perfect and unbroken fellowship between the Father and the Son. During the Last Supper, for instance, when Jesus prayed his High Priestly prayer, he could say to the Father, "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine ... you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:10,21). In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus could pray to his Father: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42).

Jesus' first word upon the cross was to the Father: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). And now his last word is to the Father: "Father," he said, "into your hands I commit my spirit." But between this first and last word, he hung on the cross for six hours: three hours spent suffering at the hands of men and another three hours spent suffering at the hands of God. Now all is done. The cup of God's wrath is now drained (Lk 22:42). The darkness is over. "Father," he says, "into your hands I commit my spirit."

This seventh word of the cross shows Jesus to have fellowship again with the Father. The Saviour is once more in communion with the Father. He can once more speak to the Father because the Father is no longer removed from Him.

He whom Jesus calls Father is also our Father because of Christ and his work upon the cross. The Father is also my Father. What comfort is contained in this title! What assurance it conveys! God is my Father. He is my Father and he loves me, he cares for me and supplies all my needs. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us," says the Apostle John, "that we should be called children of God!" (1 Jn 3:1).

From the hands of men into the hands of God

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." This seventh word shows Jesus going from the hands of men into the hands of God. Christ had foretold he would be in the hands of men. Three times he said to his disciples, (Mk 10:33-34) "... the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him ..." (Mk 8:31, 9:31). And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, (Matt 26:45-46) "... Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

It wouldn't have been difficult for Christ to avoid going into the hands of men. Jesus said at his disposal were more than twelve legions of angels – any or all of whom Jesus could have called to his defence (Mt 26:53). But, in obedience to Holy Scripture and the will of God, Jesus allowed himself to be delivered into the hands of men (Mt 26:54,56). The appointed hour had come. So he delivered himself into the hands of sinners.

Nut now, of his own free will he delivers himself from the hands of men into the hands of the Father. Never again will Christ be in the hands of men. Never again will he be at the mercy of the wicked. Never again will he suffer shame. Into the hands of the Father he committed himself, and the Father would now look after him.

What happened to Christ in the Father's hands? In three days God would raise him from the grave. Forty days after that the Father would exalt him to the highest place and give him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

A word of commitment

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." This seventh word from the cross expresses Christ's perfect commitment to the Father. Jesus, of course, always displayed a most perfect commitment and obedience to the Father. As a young boy, he said, *"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* (Lk 2:49). When the Devil tempted Jesus to depart from the Father's will after he had fasted for forty days in the wilderness, Jesus remained obedient to God and lived by every Word of God. *"My food,"* said Jesus, *"is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work"* (Jn 4:34). He did all things unto the glory of God.

As Jesus lived, so he died. He yielded himself into the hands of the Father. This was the last act of the dying Saviour. It was completely in keeping with the whole of his life. It showed his total confidence in the Father. It revealed the intimacy between the Father and the Son. It exhibited his absolute dependency upon God.

Jesus left us an example here that we should do as he has done. The Saviour committed his spirit into the hands of his Father in death because it had been in the Father's hands all through his life!

At death you can commit your spirit into the hands of God only if you have already committed your spirit to God during life. Have you done this? Have you committed your spirit into the hands of God?

A word of security

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." In this last word from the cross Jesus shows us the only place where a man's soul is eternally secure: with God. At the moment of death Christ put his spirit into the hands of the Father. Why? Because there, and only there, his spirit would be forever safe and secure.

Our most precious belonging is our spirit. It is far more precious than our homes, businesses, bank accounts, cars, computers, or whatever else you care to name. The spirit within is a precious treasure and our main care in life is to see it secure and in safe hands. That's why our relationship with God is the most important thing in life. That's why we faithfully come to worship services every Sunday. That's why we diligently spend time each day in Bible study and prayer. That's why we attend Bible study groups. That's why Christian parents read Bible stories to their children and teach them God's ways.

When you face death, will your spirit be safe and secure in the hands of God or will it be lost? If your spirit is in God's hands when you die, it is safe and secure. If it isn't in God's hands, it is eternally lost. Only those who have lived for Jesus can die in the Lord.

Conclusion

Thanks be to Christ, for in him we too can have that same confidence. Death is not the end for us. After death my spirit continues to live. My prayer is that your spirit and my spirit will live with God, for the other possibility is too horrible to even contemplate. My prayer is that this Lententide helped you to commit your life, yourself, yes your spirit, to God in Jesus Christ who suffered for us, through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

Live as someone whose life has been committed to God, and you too will go to heaven, because your spirit is forever in God's safe keeping!

This is the word of God.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.