

# The Seven Last Words of Christ

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Good Friday  
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I want to welcome you tonight to the remembrance of our Lord's suffering, crucifixion, and death publically displayed on a cross for the world to see. Since this night is focused on remembering Jesus, we will begin by remembering him the way that he told us to, by taking his body and blood into our bodies in the act of communion. So if you are a follower of Jesus, I want to invite you to stand together with me and hold the juice, which represents the blood of Christ, and the bread, which represents Christ's body. And in a moment, we will take them together in memory of Christ.

This meal is a symbol that God has given to us that we might remember the physicality of Jesus, the Son of God, coming to earth and dying on the cross. That our faith is not just a spiritual hope, but it is a flesh and blood reality. And in the partaking of the bread and the juice, we are proclaiming something deeper than words can say through physically eating and drinking our Lord's remembrance.

Please pray with me. Lord Jesus, we remember you tonight. We remember your suffering. We remember your sacrifice. We remember what you endured on the cross. The punishment that brought us peace was upon you, O God, and so we turn our hearts and our lives toward you and receive the grace available at this communion table.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

My name is Jonathan Rue and I pastor Joshua House. And I'm so glad that you all came out this evening to our Good Friday service, where we worship Jesus and remember his suffering and death.

Now, we're doing something a little different tonight than a normal service looks like. And I want to help some of you understand what we're doing. Some of you that might not have come from a more traditional church background, some of you that might be new to the church. What we do on Good Friday is not the same thing that we do on Easter morning. Good Friday is the emotional low point of the Lenten season, filled with sadness and grief about the suffering and death of Jesus. Lent as a whole is a season where do 2 things: First we identify with Jesus in the final days of his ministry, and in his suffering and death seeking greater unity with our Lord. The second things that we are doing in Lent is preparation. We the church are preparing our hearts and preparing our lives for the wonderful celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter. The main ways that the church has historically found helpful in preparing the heart is through fasting, through prayer, through repentance, and through other spiritual practices that are designed to increase our awareness of the suffering of Christ, that turn our minds on to the experience of Jesus so that we might identify with him in a greater way. And so part of the purpose of this is that we might unite ourselves with Jesus in his suffering so that we might rejoice all the more with Jesus at his resurrection on Easter.

And now for some of us in the church, in recent years, we have totally done away with the season of Lent. We don't want to identify with the suffering of Jesus. We only want to celebrate the resurrection. We only want to have a party and rejoice in the resurrection with Jesus without identifying with the suffering and death, without looking directly at Jesus in his suffering. Thomas a Kempis was a great Christian leader and spiritual writer of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and in his great book, The Imitation of Christ, he wrote:

“Jesus today has many lovers of his heavenly kingdom, but few of them carry his cross. He has many friends who ask for consolation, but few who pray for affliction. He has many companions to share his meals, but few to share his abstinence. We all want to rejoice with him, but few of us are willing to suffer anything for his sake.”

And my friends, we come tonight to force ourselves to remember the death of Jesus. To unite ourselves with his suffering so that we might all the more rejoice with him in his resurrection on Easter. This is the reason behind fasting and depriving ourselves of things in the Lenten season, so that we might feel in our bodies all the more the rejoicing and the celebration of resurrection on Easter.

So, I want to give you warning that tonight's service is meant to prepare your heart for Easter. Tonight's service is meant to help you to connect with the significance of Christ's death, that you might mourn and grieve and then rejoice all the more on the third day when Jesus rose from the grave. So, tonight we turn our eyes on Jesus in his suffering on the cross, his naked and bleeding body is nailed to the wooden posts, and he is set up for public humiliation and display in front of the world. And from the cross Jesus speaks seven final words that

give us insight into the meaning of his work on the cross; into the deep significance of the cross.

A British pastor from the last century named P.T. Forsyth said,

“Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there....Christ, I repeat, is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand his cross.”

Well, tonight we turn our eyes to the cross to seek a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christ's death. I've called tonight's talk The Seven Last Words of Christ. Let's pray.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:**

**VIDEO #1:**

**“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**

The 1<sup>st</sup> word of Jesus is a word of forgiveness. Jesus is telling us right away that the main reason for the cross, why he is suffering and dying on the cross is to bring forgiveness. And Jesus is not talking about forgiveness as a lovely concept. He is saying, “Father, forgive them—those that are beating me, those that are mocking me, those that are crucifying me, hammering nails through my hands and my feet, and setting me up in agony for public humiliation in one of the most excruciating deaths imaginable—forgive them! Forgive the very people that are doing this to me.”

You know, it's one thing for us to forgive something that's happen in the past, right? Forgiveness is tough no matter what the circumstance, but time does help. Maybe you've been hurt in your childhood, or by a close friend or a family member years ago, and now having let the sting of thing settle and you have opened the wound up to God, and you are finding that you are able to forgive the person that hurt you. That is a commendable thing and a hugely difficult thing.

However, it's another thing entirely to forgive somebody that is actively hurting you, that is in the act of perpetrating violence against you. To forgive somebody while they are *killing* you is something that surpasses reason, outstrips logic, and blows past understanding when we hear Jesus pray Father forgive them for they do not know what they're doing.

This is the power of the cross that Jesus by his own blood shed, is making sacrifice for the sins of others that he might extend forgiveness to those that are killing him and to those who are causing him to die. And that is you and me. You and I did not crucify Jesus. We did not flog him with whips and then hammer nails into his hands and feet. But it's because of our sins that Jesus had to die. It's because of the ways that we have turned from God and marred our

life with the blackness of sin that we need the forgiveness of Jesus. And so we find ourselves in the same place as those that are crucifying Jesus.

The men that made the decision that caused the crucifixion weren't the ones nailing his hands. It was the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious establishment that forced Pontius Pilot's hand to order his execution. And Jesus' forgiveness extends to them and it extends to you and to me—those of us who have caused the death of Jesus because of our sin. And the great news of Jesus' first word on the cross is that no matter what you have done, the blood of Jesus is enough for you. The forgiveness of Jesus can cover over any sin, any rebellion against God that you might have done. Jesus speaks a word of forgiveness from the cross. Father forgive them that are crucifying me now and father forgive them that have caused this crucifixion to be necessary.

*And so we see that the 1<sup>st</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

**And the 2<sup>nd</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:**

**VIDEO #2:**

**"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

This word was spoken to one of the 2 thieves that were crucified beside Jesus. One of the thieves mocked him, joining in with everyone else in blaspheming and taunting Jesus. But one of them rebuked the other thief and said, "Don't you fear God? Since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what we deserved, but this man has done nothing wrong." And then he said to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise."

So, here we see a word of scandalous forgiveness. The second word of Jesus that follows the word of forgiveness is an underlining of it, an extension of it, so that we might not twist the forgiveness of the cross into something to be bartered or sold or manipulated in any way. The forgiveness of the cross includes a thief that has no right to forgiveness. Nothing he has done in his life has earned the forgiveness of Jesus. There is no sense at all from the text that this man had anything good inside of him at all, yet he believed that Jesus was good. And as he's at the end of the line, desperate and without any other hope, and so he believes that Jesus is who he says he is. And he says, "Jesus remember me. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

This is the heart of the gospel, the heart of the cross. That the only way to access this unquenchable, inexhaustible, extravagant forgiveness of Jesus is to ask for it. To believe that Jesus is who he says he is, the Son of God, and to cry

out “Jesus remember me.” Forgiveness cannot come by any other way than receiving it from Jesus, paid for it by the cross. It cannot come by offering a pile of good deeds, of trying to accrue enough good things to outweigh the bad things in our lives. It cannot come by trying to climb up on our own cross and suffer enough for God that he feels sorry for us. It can not come by impressing God with how great we are or by fooling him into thinking that we deserve it. It can only come by calling out to Jesus. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can bring us forgiveness and can lead us into paradise with God.

*And so we see that the 2<sup>nd</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

**And the 3<sup>rd</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:**

**VIDEO #3:**

**“Woman, here is your son”**

***(and to the disciple)***

**“Here is your mother”.**

Now with the first 2 words of Jesus spoken from the cross, we’re getting a clear picture about the purpose of his death on the cross—to bring forgiveness that is not based on anything that we do, but it available to anyone that would turn to him and ask Jesus, remember me.

Now in these next three words from the cross, we get a glimpse of the humanity of Jesus, that Jesus was not only fully God, but that he was fully human. This, of course, is not some minor insignificant detail but makes all the difference in the world. It’s why Jesus the second person of the trinity came to earth as a man and emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant. That he might enter into the full experience of humanity. And as a human being, he might forge a new path that has never been done before, the path of a sinless life. It is because he was a man that he is able to bridge the gap between God and humanity, and be our high priest who could make the sacrifice for our sins. Hebrews 7:26 tells us, “Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens”. Jesus meets the conditions of humanity, of standing in our place, and he meets the condition of being God, so that his sacrifice is effective.

Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus died, “So that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

And it is only because he was fully human and fully God, that we can agree with Hebrews 7:25 that, “he is able to save completely those who come to God through him.”

So, it's no insignificant fact that Jesus was a human being and experienced the fullness of what it means to be human because only by doing so could he experience death and taste it for all of us. There would be no sacrifice for our sins if Jesus did not share in our humanity.

So in this word that Jesus speaks to his mother, who is standing next to the cross, grieving, watching her son, bloodied and naked and dying in agony, Jesus says a specific word of compassion and care. Even in the midst of his agony and suffering, Jesus is not focused on himself. He's not just focused on humanity universally, either. He is still able to look down and see one person, his mother, the woman who gave him birth, the woman who raised him as a young boy, the person he spent most of his life with.

And Jesus cares for her and he says, "Woman, here is your son," as he looks toward "the disciple that Jesus loved" and he tells the disciple, "Here is your mother." Jesus cares about her well being. He knows he won't be there in later life to support her, to care for her as firstborn sons were supposed to do with their mothers. And so, he, in effect, gives her a new son, a new family, so that she will be taken care of and cared for. He gives her the disciple whom he loved, who was likely John. The gospel of John, written by the apostle John is where we read of this person, "the disciple whom Jesus loved", and it's likely that it was John himself. So we see a glimpse of Jesus' humanity by him caring for his family of origin, his mother.

And this is a powerful thing for us to notice as we go through life with an ever increasing sense of our own self-importance; of how important our work is, of how important our ministry is, and how important we are. Our time is so valuable. Our energy is so valuable. And there is temptation to neglect our family members that aren't of any use to us anymore. Jesus' mother was a great use to him when he was a child, but now that he is a grown man, she's not of great use to him. Yet he does not neglect her, he doesn't forget her, even in the moment of greatest struggle and pain and also the most important moment in Jesus' life. He doesn't not neglect his family. His mother.

*And so we see that the 3<sup>rd</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:  
"Woman, here is your son" and to the disciple "here is your mother."*

**And the 4<sup>th</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:**

**VIDEO #4:**

**"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

Now the gospel writer Mark tells us that darkness came over the land from noon until 3 in the afternoon. And after 3 hours of darkness, Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" Now this is among the most mysterious phrases in all of scripture. And there are several layers of what is going on with

this statement. The first is that Jesus was a human being. This is a part of the experience of what it means to be human, where we experience these moments, where it feels like God is a million miles away. It feels like we've been abandoned by God. The sense of isolation and aloneness is part of the experience of humanity and Jesus experiences that in this moment. But what he's experiencing goes far beyond the normal condition of life where we have moments where we feel all alone. Jesus in this moment is taking on the sins of the world. Darkness has come over the land. There is something in the cosmos that is shifting as he absorbs this sin of humanity and takes it into himself and as 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." So Jesus in this moment is taking on sin in himself and entering the hell of separation from God, the Father.

And in that moment, Jesus experienced something far more excruciating and terrifyingly painful than physical pain of spikes and thorns and whips. He experienced something far worse in the separation from his father. And so he cries out, echoing Psalm 22, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you abandoned me?"

There are certain things in life that one might understand on a cognitive level, an intellectual level. Jesus understood that he needed to pay the penalty for our sins. But in the experience of becoming sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God, as he took on that sin, even though he knew it, even though he understood it, he still cries out, "Why God? WHY are you forsaking me?"

And there are things that we go through in life, that we might understand theologically, yet still we cry out to God, "Why?" The experience of pain, the experience of loss, the experience of isolation and aloneness from God makes all of us join with Jesus in crying out, "Why?" And we are left comforted only by knowing that we are not crazy nor alone in our experience and in our question, but we are sharing in something the Jesus Christ himself experienced on the cross. And my friend, that is a comfort in the midst of pain. That we serve a God who entered into our pain and cried out in anguish just like we do, the question "why?".

Martin Luther, the great reformer who once said, "God forsaking God. Who can understand it?" Yet as we approach this profound truth and reality, it calls us to worship, to humility, and to adoration of the mystery of our God.

*And so we see that the 4<sup>th</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:  
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

**And the 5<sup>th</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:**

**VIDEO #5:  
“I am thirsty.”**

Now this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> word continuing to reveal the humanity of Jesus. This reveals that he wasn't just God that was playing a role like a human being, but that he was a human being who had thirst, who experienced pain. Let me just take a moment and describe to you the agony that Jesus found himself in as he tells of his thirst. Crucifixion was among the most tortuous penalties of the ancient world. It was particularly terrible because the act itself damaged no vital organs, and it did not cause any excessive bleeding of the body either. So, death came slowly. And sometimes it would take several days for a person to die through shock or the painful process of asphyxiation as the muscles used in breathing suffered increasing fatigue and eventually shut down. This is, of course, in addition to the great humiliation of being crucified in front of the world. Crucifixion was quintessentially a public affair where the victim was stripped naked and fixed to the cross for public display.

Each of the four gospels is remarkably brief in describing the process of crucifixion. They simply report, “They crucified him.” And so for Jesus to be speaking anything from the cross is a remarkable thing and his words would've been chosen very carefully because as his body is pulling him down toward earth making it very difficult to lift himself up enough to be able to fill his lungs with air and then be able to speak out words. And we don't have any word recorded of him describing the pain that he was in or the agony that he felt, but he does say I am thirsty. And this was both a very clear signal that his body was in pain of thirst against those in the early church that were a part of the heresy of Docetism. And the docetic group claimed that Jesus was God, but he wasn't fully man. He only seemed like a man. He appeared like a man. But he wasn't really a man, it was all an illusion. So, when Jesus was on the cross, they said, he was merely pretending that he was in pain, but he wasn't because we pure spirit.

Well Jesus' claim here that “I am thirsty” cuts against that and reveals that Jesus was fully human, was experiencing pain and was desperate to taste a drink on the cross, as fluids were draining from his body. And if it were not so, then he would be a liar. Because he claimed, “I am thirsty.”

And so the gospel of John tells us in chapter 19, verse 29, a jar of wine vinegar was there and they soaked a sponge in it and put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant and lifted it to Jesus' lips. Now this is not only a confirmation of the humanity of Jesus, but it is also the fulfillment of prophesy. The Old Testament book of Psalms, in chapter 69, verses 20 & 21, the psalmist cries out and says,



“There insults have broken my heart and I am in despair. If only one person would show me some pity, if only one would turn and comfort me. But instead they give me poison for food, they offer me sour wine for my thirst.”

Stepping into the suffering of the people of Israel that was embodied in this Psalm. And Jesus suffers with Israel as he is taking away their sin.

*And so we see that the 5<sup>th</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:  
“I am thirsty.”*

**And the 6<sup>th</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was:**

**VIDEO #6:  
“It is finished.”**

It is finished. God’s plan that has been in motion for thousands of years to bring salvation, redemption and forgiveness to all people is finished. And in the scriptures, this phrase is contained in a single Greek word, “Tetelestai”. In the Greek the tense of the verb implies that something has come to an end, it has been completed, perfected, accomplished in the full and that something has consequences that will endure on and on. “Tetelestai”— it has been and forever will remain, finished. This is the most powerful single word of all of Jesus’ ministry, it is the most powerful word in history. “Tetelestai” is a word that could not simply be spoken. The son of God had to die to speak it.

There’s an Anglican scholar named Bishop Stephen Neill. And he said,

“In the Christian theology of history, the death of Christ is the central point of history. Here all the roads of the past converge. Hence, all the roads of the future diverge.”

This work of Christ on the cross is God’s great plan of rescuing all people for all time. It is the culmination of God’s plan in the past and it is the fulcrum upon which all of God’s plans going forward swings. In proclaiming these words, Jesus is proclaiming victory. He’s proclaiming triumph. At the moment just before his death, he recognizes that He has completed the work of God on earth, the rescuing of all of humanity from the clutches of sin and death. It is finished.

The great German theologian who was martyred in World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said this,

“It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, to his son Jesus Christ, then to seek what God intends for us today...I find no salvation in my life history but only in the history of Jesus Christ.”

The work of Christ on the cross is the most crucial, the most important, the most valuable thing ever to have been done on earth and Jesus says, "It is finished."

All of the prophecies that are pointing to the life, ministry and death of Christ have been fulfilled.

Jesus is saying:

- I have been born of a virgin, as Isaiah said I would.
- I have preached good news to the poor, proclaimed freedom to those captive and brought recovery of sight to the blind, all just as Isaiah said I would.
- I have been sold for 30 pieces of silver, as Zechariah said I would.
- I was falsely accused but did not open my mouth, as Isaiah said I would.
- I have had my beard plucked out, my back flogged, and I have been mocked, all just as Isaiah said I would.
- I have had my clothes taken from me and gambled for, as the psalmist said I would.
- I have been hung on a tree, as Deuteronomy said I would.
- I have been forsaken by God, as the psalmist said I would.
- From the cross, I've made intercession for my persecutors, as Isaiah said I would.
- In my death I agonized with thirst, as the psalmist said I would.
- Not a bone of mine has been broken, as Exodus and the Psalms describe.
- I have been pierced for the transgressions of others, as Zechariah, the Psalmist and Isaiah all said that I would be.
- I have been killed alongside the wicked, and I have voluntarily poured out my life unto death as Isaiah said I would.

I have fulfilled all of these prophecies and more. It is finished.

And so we see that the 6<sup>th</sup> word spoken by Jesus on the cross was: "It is finished."

And so we come to the last word of Jesus from the cross where Jesus will finally give up his spirit to God the Father. And again we see Jesus reaching back into the Psalms to find language of trust in the faithfulness of God. He draws from the words of Psalm 31, verse 5, which says, "I entrust my Spirit into your hand. Rescue me Lord for you are a faithful God."

This is the place that we all must come to on the day of our death. When we come up against the end of our life here on earth, we recognize that we have nothing else to commend us, we have no power, no control over what's coming ahead. We can't buy our way out. We can't convince or compel anyone to rescue us. We come before God and entrust our spirits to him, we place ourselves in the hands of God.

And this is what Jesus does. With his final words he releases his future to the Father, trusting that God will be faithful. That God will deliver him.

And so with sweat running down his face and drops of blood pouring off of his body, as he's heaving in agony at the threshold of total collapse, in the blinding pain of his beatings and of the nails tearing his flesh apart, in the midst of the slow death of asphyxiation as his muscles shut down under the agony of loss of blood and of fatigue, in the midst of being mocked and persecuted, in the midst of feeling abandoned by God the Father and taking on the sins of the world, crushing him with its weight,

**Jesus looks up to heaven and cries out the 7<sup>th</sup> and final word spoken on the cross**

**VIDEO #7:**

**“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”**