

## JESUS' LAST WORDS

What do you make of a person's last words? They are generally considered momentous. The last words of Jesus are recorded in Scripture and referred to as the "seven sayings from the cross." Why do the last words of Jesus matter to you, and how might they change your life?

**FATHER, FORGIVE THEM** - Luke 23:34 records Jesus being nailed to the beam and lifted up on the cross by the soldiers. Christ Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.*" This detachment of soldiers may have been among those who mocked and tortured Him after Pilate delivered Him to be crucified. They regarded Jesus as a condemned criminal. They were dividing His garments amongst them, casting lots for His seamless tunic.

In Luke 6:35 Jesus had said, "*love even your enemies, and be merciful even as your heavenly Father is merciful*" as in Micah 7:18 "*God pardons iniquity and passes over transgression.*" Jesus' words are echoed by Steven as he was being stoned to death in Acts 7:54-60.

The soldiers were oblivious to the divine identity before them, and the divine drama being played out on the cross above them. Jesus was giving His life as atonement for sin, so that forgiveness could be extended, not only to them but to all who will receive Jesus as Christ, Lord, Savior.

**HERE IS YOUR SON** - John 19:26-27 says that standing by the cross of Jesus were several people, including His mother Mary, and His disciple John (who was also His cousin). When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"

And from that hour John took her to His own home. Mary was a widow, and so Jesus provided for her continued care. His addressing her as "woman" was not at all disrespectful. Jesus fulfilled the command to honor His parents, and was putting the needs of others before His own.

Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled God's Law with His life. He is the perfect sacrifice for sin, without blemish and without sin, giving His own life to work redemption for those who receive Him.

**TODAY IN PARADISE** - Luke 23:32-43 records the soldiers and crowd mocked Jesus, calling on Him to save Himself. One of the two criminals crucified with Him joined in. The other rebuked him, saying, "*Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.*" One reviled and one repented. One rejected Christ and one received Christ.

He said, "*Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom.*" He heard Jesus words, saw His response to His torturous treatment, and believed in Jesus' message to repent and believe in Him as the promised deliverer. Jesus replied in verse 43, "*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.*" The believer's spirit goes into the immediate heavenly presence of Christ.

God's Word promises that for the believer "*to be away from the body is to be present with the Lord.*" When Christ returns, He will reunite our eternal spirits with glorified bodies in the final resurrection (1Corinthians 15, 2Corinthians 5:6-8). Does this mean you can wait until your deathbed to trust in Christ? No one knows that moment but God Himself. Turn to Him now!

The dying thief confessed his guilt, declared Jesus' innocence, and asked for mercy from the One who is Lord and Savior. This is how to face your own death, trusting in Christ. He performed no works of righteousness, but simply cast himself on Christ as his hope. Of course, if he had lived, his life would have been transformed like all disciples who trust and obey the Lord.

**WHICH ARE YOU?** - Think of the silhouette of three crosses on the hill of Golgotha, Christ in the middle, the reviling criminal on the left, and the receiving confessor on the right. Both criminals had sin within them as well as the penalty of sin upon them. Christ had no sin within Him, and no sin of His own upon Him. But He bore all sin in His own body (1Peter 2:22-25) as "*God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6). The sin of the repentant thief was transferred to Christ.

Which of these criminals are you? You are guilty of sin! But do you bear it, or has Christ borne it for you? Trust in Christ alone to save you, acknowledging that you can do nothing about your sin except believe that Christ has paid your penalty, and receive His forgiveness. Peter says then you too "*die to sin and live to righteousness*" - for the rest of this earthly life and all eternity! ☐