

From the Cross



Seven Final
Remarks of Jesus

Devotionals for 10 Days over Easter
by
Debbra Stephens

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"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."
(Lk 23:34)

Final words are usually important words.

How much more the World's Savior?

His final words echo from Golgotha's crest – down through every age – and meet us wherever and whenever we tune a reverent ear.

Shall we?

Shall we gather here, this week leading up to Easter, to look more closely at resounding words...piercing words...final words? Words that have power to change us; if, in so doing, we ask ourselves: "What must I learn from them?"

Seven comments are recorded in the four Gospels. The same one is shared in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Three are in Luke's Gospel and three are in the Book of John.

In His final words, Jesus clearly and decisively put into practice what He taught throughout His ministry.

Let us first consider the events that led up to His first words from the Cross:

- Jesus agonized in the garden alone as His companions slept
- He was betrayed
- Arrested
- Denied by a dear friend

- Deserted by His disciples
- The religious leaders conspired against the very Author of their religion
- The Just One was unjustly tried
- His own people handed Him over to the Roman oppressors to be condemned
- Crowds of those He came to save cried out for His death
- He was brutally tortured
- Mocked
- Nailed naked to a Cross

And what does He do as He hangs from the Cross?

He speaks. (More exactly, He prays.)

What does He **first** say?

He prays aloud—seeking forgiveness for His rivals.

He asks for God to forgive them—*before* they seek it...**even as they crucify Him.**

Let's glimpse the scene from the biblical record:

"They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!' In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him" (Mark 15:27-32).

And in Luke 23:32-35:

"Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, '**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One'" (emphasis mine).

Pause to consider everything that led to this point. Now add to that what we just read and deeply consider His response.

He painfully hangs rejected, unjustly condemned, tormented, and shamed.

And yet...He says; "*Forgive them*"?!

Peter later writes: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pt 2:23).

He did not retaliate!

How?!

How does He, when the world screams; "An eye for an eye?"

Aren't I easily angered for far less an offense?

Doesn't our inmost being scream "revenge" when we are slighted in the least?

Peter gives us a helpful perspective: He says Jesus trusted the judging to God. I need to etch that deep across my heart!

Jesus practiced His own teaching to love our enemy (Lk 6:35), knowing that vengeance belongs to the God Who Is Just.

Jesus did not retaliate.

Why?!

Because – as Jesus said – "They do not know what they are doing."

He looked down from the Cross and had compassion upon them, the lost sheep without a shepherd, the sinners in need of saving.

And because He saw ignorance. The ignorance of Pilate...the soldiers...the thieves...the crowd....

Us.

We don't realize what we're doing.

It all began in the Garden, when the flesh blindly—pridefully—wanted what God lovingly forbade. Little did they fully know what they were doing. Or just how destructive and far-reaching their disobedience.

How often does conviction of wrongdoing come after the sin has already been committed? How often—in my ignorance—did I not realize that my actions were the *very* sin that drove the nails and mocked the Righteous, Holy Lamb of God?

*(Not that ignorance is **ever** a valid excuse absolving responsibility.)*

Jesus used His waning breath to utter a prayer: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do..."

Hearing these generous words of Jesus in the context of this brutal setting, and considering all we know of the circumstances, should so fill us with a spirit of *genuine* humility.

Humility, in the realization that we don't always know what we are doing.

Humility, that we are not all-knowing, all-seeing.

Humility, that we cannot save ourselves.

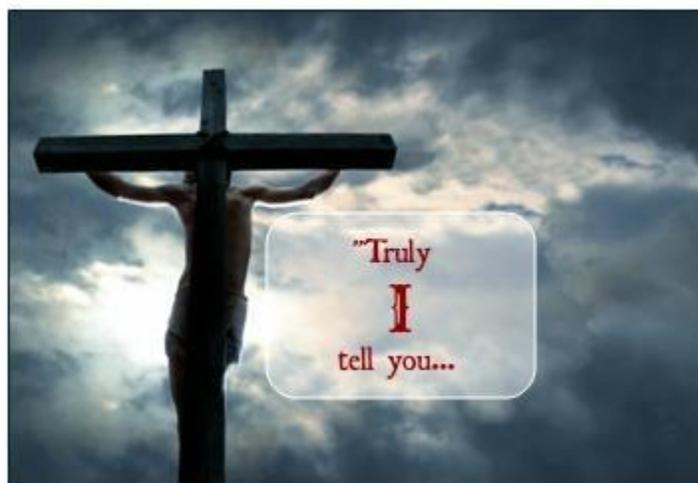
Humility that brings us to repentance – that we might receive the very forgiveness Jesus pleads the Father on our behalf.

And a humility to heed the command that we do the same. (*After all, have I ever been treated even remotely to that extreme?*)

May I, too, pray for my enemies. May I have the same attitude to pray God forgives my enemies. And—more accurately yet—forgive my enemies. *Even before they seek it.*

Jesus has called upon God for our forgiveness,
He calls us to forgive,
And He does forgive . . .
the humble and contrite of heart.

We bless You, Forgiving Lord, that in Your immense suffering You sought God's forgiveness for Your enemies. In that horrific moment, You lived out Your message and extended grace. May we do likewise.



It's easy to romanticize the setting of the days encapsulating Jesus' ministry. We imagine serene settings—Jesus roaming rolling hills, preaching to solemn crowds, while gentle sheep graze in the background. It was, in fact, anything but! The crowded streets were overrun with armed soldiers, greedy tax collectors, incensed politicians, and agitated religious leaders. And crucifixion was a common practice-of-choice by the merciless, ruling Romans.

We get a very real sense of the scene from today's reading:

"The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.'

"The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'

"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

"But the other criminal rebuked him. '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.'

"Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

"Jesus answered him, '**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise**'" (Lk 23:35-43 *emph mine*).

This, the second of the seven final sayings of Jesus from the Cross, is found in Luke's Gospel.

From the start of this comment, when He says; "Truly **I** tell you," Jesus, the Source of all truth, refers to His authority. He is making a promise He can make good on. He offers what He – *and only He* – can deliver.

That Jesus is hung between two criminals – robbers, more specifically – fulfills Isaiah's prophecy. The prophet also says elsewhere; "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me" (Is 65:1). And elsewhere it is written; "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Rm 10:20-21).

Here, recorded for all mankind, Jesus offers the Good News of the Kingdom. And the faith of this dying thief is rewarded with eternal promise by its reigning King.

Faith—for all of Jesus' ministry He searched for it. And He commended it whenever and wherever He found it.

Jesus asked the question; "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith?" (Lk 18:8). He admonished the disciples' lack of it with His "You of little faith," and gave blessing at every sign of it, remarking; "Your faith has healed you."

Jesus, now counted among the transgressors, looks nothing like the king the sign proclaims. He bears no royal majesty. His body – mangled, bruised, bloodied and torn – masks His identity. He does nothing extraordinary. No grand display. No miracle does He perform.

He but suffers.

But faith sees more.

Something of faith reveals to this crook that the man dying next to him has something to offer.

For Jesus to deny this man's faith would be counter-intuitive. It goes against His very nature.

To the end, Jesus saw others...

 He loved others...

 He saved others.

He saves still.

We see Jesus extend kindness and compassion toward this man, in the most horrific circumstances. If it were left to us, wouldn't we scream warning . . . judgment? Wouldn't we exclaim: "*But he's a thief!*", "*A common criminal!*"?

We have this ridiculous perception that only the “good” go to heaven. We shudder to think of hardened criminals strolling streets of gold, in the presence of angels.

But wait! If that were the case, it would not only deny multitudes entry – myself included – it discounts any need for a Savior.

We know full well there is nothing we can do to earn the reward Jesus promises. But often we fall for the lie that we have to earn our way—performing good deeds at a break-neck pace.

But here is this thief. He has nothing to offer Jesus. And no time left to prove his worth. Thankfully, that doesn’t stop him from asking.

Atop Golgotha, with crosses and criminals, Jesus extends raw, unquestionable grace. By this condemned man is proof that Jesus indeed is a “friend to sinners.”

Yet the self-righteous, religious-of-the day—striving to keep their 600+ laws—are the ones in danger. Entry into the kingdom based solely on effort only earns them denial.

It is common to believe that those with a portfolio of good deeds and respectable conduct are those worthy of a seat at the King’s table. But the Kingdom is for the redeemed – those purchased through faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Holy Lamb of God.

It is for those saved by grace—through faith in God’s Son...just as that one poor soul sentenced to die for his transgression can attest.

Let’s not forget there were two thieves on that hill. Both had equal access to Jesus. Both encountered Jesus, the God Who Saves. Jesus hung *between* the two, emphasizing there are only two ways to go – towards Jesus or away. With or without.

How they represent both choices available to mankind!

There are but two options: acceptance or rejection. Penitence or pride.

One, with his dying breath, expends his energy mocking Jesus. The other defends Him and seeks only remembrance.

But Jesus offered him far more than he could have imagined. He but wanted to be remembered by the King. And yet Jesus promised Him paradise...*immediately*.

Max Lucado wrote: “The only thing more outlandish than the request was that it was granted. Just trying to picture the scene is enough to short-circuit the most fanciful of imaginations; an ex-con asking God for eternal life? But try to imagine the appeal being honored, well, that steps beyond the realm of reality and enters absurdity. But as absurd as it might appear, that’s exactly what happened.

“When you get right down to it, any contribution that *any* of us make is pretty puny. All of us—even *the purest of us*—deserve heaven about as much as that crook did.”

This anonymous thief encountered a condemned Jesus, but believed Him a King coming soon into His Kingdom. With his dying breath he made a plea to the Savior and received the eternal promise of God.

He was given the Good News of the Kingdom, which is: penitent sinners that turn to Jesus for saving—even up to their final, dying breath—are extended the gracious gift of paradise.

And—by faith—don’t you believe he got it?

Yours is the kingdom, Lord Jesus. Remember me, a sinner.



Of the seven final sayings of Jesus from the Cross, three are found in the Gospel of John—this, our first to ponder.

The first statement Jesus made is recorded in Luke and Jesus speaks to the Father for **forgiveness**.

The second is a **salvation** promise made to the seeking sinner.

Now He speaks of **relationship** to His beloved mother and disciple.

Forgiveness – Salvation – Relationship: that pretty much summarizes what He preached (and we're not even half-way through His final remarks).

The Text in John 19 reads; "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, '**Woman, here is your son,**' and to the disciple, '**Here is your mother.**' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." [v26-27 emph mine]

Here Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce Mary's soul (Lk 2:35) is fulfilled.

I can't imagine the pain she endured, but she stayed by her son's side. She remained the Lord's faithful maidservant to the end. And God bestowed upon her the grace to persevere.

The suffering of Jesus is beyond comprehension. And yet, in His anguish, He sees others. He sees and provides for their needs. And here – at the very end of His life – Jesus continues to extend love, care, and compassion toward others, namely His

mother. He obediently fulfills His duty as firstborn son in assigning a caretaker for His widowed mother.

In John's Gospel, Mary surfaces only twice: At the opening of Jesus' ministry (with His first miracle) and at the close of Jesus' ministry (at the Cross). And both times Jesus addresses His mother the same way: "woman." At the account of Jesus' first miracle, where He turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana, He called her "woman." And here again at the Cross, He uses the same terminology. I found that rather curious and had to dig a bit deeper. I learned that in Hebrew "woman" is a term of respect, just as "ma'am" is used here in the south.

One of Jesus' last concerns were of family—and from the Cross He united one disciple to another *as family*.

In Christ we are all given to one another as family – for that is what we are. That is what Jesus has made us to be.

Kinship in Christ is not about bloodlines but about sharing this life we live **in Christ**.

It's not blood—but bond.

Our responsibilities do not end with our children or our parents but extend to all mankind. We **are** our brother's keeper – across every border, nationality, gender, social and economic class—especially across the tall, hardened walls of our feelings.

We . are . family.

We are given one to another to nurture, protect, disciple . . . **love**.

Jesus taught us to love God, love our neighbor and, yes, even our enemy. He came precisely to show us what that love looks like.

And Jesus taught us about discipleship. Matthew quoted Jesus as saying: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." Following Jesus often requires sacrifice.

Following Jesus is often about leaving . . . but it's **always** about loving.

Jesus knew it firsthand. He left **all** to be obedient to the call of God. But He entrusted the care of the ones He loved to others.

God asks for our sacrificial commitment. God gave up His Son in the pursuing love of others. And Jesus gave up His family in order to love others. And He had an expectation that others would love His family in His stead.

Are you loving His family?

Those adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus are part of the family of God. That only goes to reason then that we are all brothers and sisters of the same family in Christ.

Hebrews 2:11 backs that reasoning, stating: "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."

John received firsthand instruction from the Lord to love others. And his writings are filled with instruction on loving one another in the family of God in Christ Jesus.

"By this everyone will know
that you are my disciples,
if you love one another."
(Jn 13:35)

"This is his command:
to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,
and to love one another as he commanded us."
(1Jn 3:23)

"Dear friends, since God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.
No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another,
God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."
(1Jn 4:11-12)

These are but a few.

And what of the many teachings from other New Testament authors? Like:

Hebrews 13:1 - "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters."

1 Corinthians 1:10 - "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

The New Testament contains a whole list of "one another" passages. We are told to:

- Serve one another
- Admonish one another
- Accept one another
- Encourage one another (*multiple times*)

- Forgive one another
- Submit to one another
- Be kind and compassionate to one another

We were given to one another.

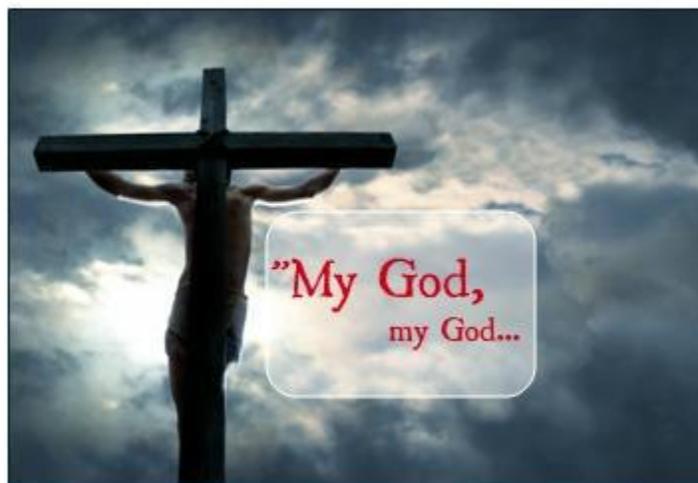
The elderly that needs help is our father or mother. The battered woman is our sister. The man struggling with worldly temptations, our brother. The bullied student is *our* child.

At the foot of the Cross we are all equal disciples.

Yes, Christianity is about relationship—relationship with Jesus (which reconciles our relationship with our Heavenly Father) and relationship with one another.

Jesus made that point perfectly clear—
in final words delivered from the Cross.

Loving Jesus; You modeled relational love for us—by Your words and by Your example. We give thanks that we are made able to love as You love through the Holy Spirit. Help us to obey Your command to love one another and to do so more and more.



"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"
(Mt 27:46; Mk 15:33-34)

I must confess, I have personally struggled with this verse for years.

And much of what I've studied preparing this devotional tried to confuse me even more!

I am indebted to our preaching minister for aid as I tried to sort through my discoveries.

There is much we don't understand about this phrase but one thing is clear, Jesus suffered greatly . . . **for us**.

Three of the seven sayings of Jesus from the Cross were spoken in the light of day; four He spoke into the darkness. Into heaven.

Between the hours of Noon to 3:00 darkness reigned. The lack of light is representative of divine judgment, bringing to mind the Exodus plague.

It was about 3:00 p.m. when Jesus uttered these heart-wrenching, bone-chilling words. In the historical account of Josephus, 3:00 was the time the sacrificial lamb would be offered. I do not find that either ambiguous or coincidental.

The phrase Jesus utters are ancient words penned by King David and recorded in Psalm 22:1. Reading this Psalm in its entirety reveals a song of trust in God and of ultimate triumph. So I wonder, is Jesus questioning **or quoting**?

Match that with several other verses and you begin to really wonder if Jesus could have ever really been forsaken by God.

Moses quoted these words of the Lord to the Israelites at the end of his life and then repeated them to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.... It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Dt 31:6, 8).

Psalm 9:10 reinforces the stick-to-it-ness of God: "And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you."

Psalm 37:28 has this to say: "For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off."

Many Psalms lament the afflictions of man. Psalm 73 (specifically verses 21-26), a prime example of one taking their anguish to the God of Heaven and of faith finding hope to endure.

Where else would you turn when your humanity is agonizing over suffering?

Verse-upon-verse speak to the omnipresence of God. What of Psalm 139?

"Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you."
(vs 7-12)

The verse that especially confirms for me God's faithful presence at the Cross is 2 Corinthians 5:19, for from that Scripture we learn that "God **was in Christ** reconciling the world to Himself."

God promises **never** to leave or forsake those that follow Him. And we all know that God is faithful to His every promise. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rm 8:39). And I am of the rather strong opinion that it's not possible for this

Duo of the Trinity to even **be** separated. Didn't Jesus even testify that They are One? (Jn 10:30)

Jesus enjoyed perfect fellowship and unbroken unity with God. He maintained an abiding relationship with God. Theirs was the most intimate of relationships.

Jesus **experienced** what it would be like to feel cut-off from God. He **felt** that so we wouldn't have to experience that reality for all eternity. He experienced what we experience, that He might fully identify with our human condition.

How often do we feel God is not present? Or that our sins have created a void that seems insurmountable? But when we feel God has abandoned us, should we trust our feelings...or God? We can feel – but we must still believe. Jesus may have **experienced** the human **feelings** of abandonment and separation from Father-God but He still knew to trust Him.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

His is a human question.

It must have sounded positively dreadful. In Mark's Gospel we read of a man offering Jesus wine (Mk 15:36). He must have heard the immense suffering in Jesus' tone to offer something medicinal to relieve Him. How atrocious it must have felt rolling off those lips! And how painful to God's ears!

There is no **greater** suffering by far than being separated from our Creator-God. And it is that very fear that should drive us into His arms! Regardless of how we **feel**.

How many suffering souls ask if God has abandoned them?

But has He?

Does He?

Can He?

We **feel** like it and we wonder . . . and we ask. But, has He really?

In the face of horrendous tragedy, wickedness, and disaster how often we blame God. And unjustly so!

There are many questions when it comes to suffering. But never perfect answers.

Job comes to mind...

In his suffering, Job himself lamented; "Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11).

Job's wife blamed God.

Job's friends blamed Job.

God never gave an outright answer. God answered Job's questions with more questions.

And Job's final response? "I **know** that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (42:2).

He came to the resolute conclusion that God is able, in control, and infallible.

God rarely answers "Why?" But what He does do is affirm us with the knowledge of His character. And that character declares emphatically that God is infinitely great and ever-present.

Answers to "why" do not remove the pain or solve the problem or make it easier to bear. Therefore "why" is not the right question. The right question is "Who – Who is present in suffering?" And that answer is always God. For we know the promise of the 23rd Psalm (*the very next Psalm*) that attests: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for **God is with me.**"

Many assume suffering is the absence of God. But aren't those times primarily when we find God present? When, in compassion, He comes near to comfort, with grace and strength sufficient to persevere?

How desperately we want answers to the question of suffering! It is a mystery only God can fathom!

But it is not theology – which is often errant – that helps us in times of suffering...but trust. And we **know** Jesus trusted God as a good Father. He went to the Cross in complete and perfect obedience and trust. Jesus foretold the events of His death three times over the course of His ministry and each time He spoke of His resurrection. He was filled with a confident hope in the surety of God's promises.

Here on Calvary, there may have been silence from God, but does that signify absence?

Did He fear? I would have to offer a "yes."

Did He doubt? I doubt it.

Would Jesus lament of His suffering in quoting this Psalm if He didn't **trust** God? Trust that He was there to hear Him? A Psalm that speaks prophetically to much of the crucifixion scene. A Psalm that goes on to say:

“In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.”

Jesus cried out in anguish and torment from His unimaginable suffering but His faith trusted God was there to hear; that God would indeed deliver Him; and that He would be victorious over death.

I do not doubt that Jesus trusted God’s sovereignty, God’s goodness, and God’s faithfulness.

Neither do I doubt God’s uninterrupted omnipresence.

Jesus pointed to a prophetic Psalm that was coming to its fulfillment. No matter what He **felt**...He **chose** to believe.

Therefore, so can we.

Your ways, Merciful God and Father, are too wonderful for me. But we can trust You, our ever-present and steadfast God. Your unfailing love is evident and Your sovereignty sure—all praise be Yours now and forevermore!



We all know thirst.

And in our thirst how we complain, saying things like; "I'm parched," or "I'm *dying* of thirst," or "I'm so dry I could soak up a sponge," or how about; "I'm so thirsty I could drink Canada *Dry!*"

You might remember toiling the hard ground in the noonday, southern sun. Or the drought we experienced a few years ago that caused great concern. But Americans – with our designer bottled water – rarely know *real* thirst for long.

Ethiopia, Somalia, Australia, Afghanistan, and the Sudan, on the other hand, know real thirst. More than 3.4 million people die annually from drought related causes. Approximately 1 in 9 people world-wide lack access to good water sources. 1 – in – 9 !

The chosen people of God knew thirst.

As far as the eye could see before the newly delivered Egyptian slaves was arid desert. And under the scorching heat of the parched wilderness they grumbled against God.

And our Lord?

He knew *real* thirst, as we see in our reading today, which comes from John's Gospel, Chapter 19, verses 28-29: "Later, *knowing* that everything had now been finished, and *so that Scripture would be fulfilled*, Jesus said, '**I am thirsty.**' 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" (emphasis mine).

Jesus had not had anything to drink since the previous night at His last supper with His disciples. It is now approximately 3:00 in the afternoon—He’s been on the Cross **six** hours now. A. T. Robertson wrote that thirst “is one of the severest agonies of crucifixion.”

But Jesus still has His wits about Him. He is still aware of God’s plan, God’s purpose, and what Scripture has foretold. The text declares; “Jesus knew that all was now finished” (RSV). He knew this final act was “in order to fulfill Scripture.”

Jesus had His faculties about Him. John is sure to make a point that Jesus’ next words—though only two—were packed with meaning. For they were “to fulfill Scripture.”

The prophecy he refers to is nestled in Psalm 69:

"You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed;
all my enemies are before you.
Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless;
I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.
They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

All signs pointed to Jesus as the Promised Messiah. Every minor detail came to be...right down to the vinegar.

How this testifies to the timeless truth that the Word of God accomplishes His set purpose. Jesus perfectly accomplished God’s will and God’s Word. And, as we’ll soon discover, His very next words are “It is finished.”

I’d like to share something I read in the IVP NT Commentary: “The great significance John attaches to the saying ‘I am thirsty’ would then make sense because it would symbolize both Jesus’ commitment to obey God’s will and the fulfillment of suffering.”

Jesus knew real physical thirst. He experienced everything we have. And being the very Word, He knew all of Scripture had not yet been fulfilled. So He spoke of His thirst to fulfill God’s works to perfection, and thus next declared; “It is finished.”

This phrase serves two purposes: to fulfill Scripture; and to prove His identity that He was both fully human and fully divine. He endured the intense agony of physical suffering to prove His humanity. This would counter the gnostics, who were bent on teaching a false doctrine that denied His flesh...His humanity.

The Lord has made a promise to those that cry out in their thirst: “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them” (Is 41:17). (Which speaks to yesterday’s thought, in that this verse also addresses the promise of God **not** to forsake.)

Here Jesus takes the sour drink offered. Earlier He rejected the merciful myrrh offered to relieve His suffering (Mt 27:34/Mk 15:23). But this sour vinegar He accepts...to fulfill all Scripture.

I don't find it coincidental that the sponge was extended at the tip of a hyssop branch. It was hyssop that was used to paint the lamb's blood on the doorpost to protect God's people from death's plague (Ex 12:22). And it is the hyssop branch that is mentioned for rites of purification (Lv 14:4; Ps 51:7; Heb 9:19).

When we come to fully realize this particular aspect of Jesus' suffering upon the Cross, it adds a whole new depth of meaning to the promises He has made that are recorded for us in Revelation. For these He has spoken from first-hand experience.

- "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life" (21:6).
- "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life (22:17).

I believe Jesus' thirst was a physical one. If only our spiritual thirst for God, however, matched His physical thirst! Then we could truly worship with the psalmist:

- "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Ps 42:2).
- "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps 63:1).

And if we thirsted after righteousness to the same degree, we would receive His promised blessedness of satisfaction.

In our thirst we can turn to the Fount of Living Water (Jn 4:10ff; 6:35; 7:37-38), for there is no thirst He cannot quench. Because Jesus is the Water of Life, those that drink deeply from the Fount of Jesus Christ thirst no more.

Here—from the Cross—we see Jesus drinking deeply of the cup of His Father's will and so fulfills **all** Scripture.

The Scriptures had become reality . . . actuality.

Jesus made this clear even after-the-fact. When He appeared to the Emmaus-bound disciples post-resurrection, He stated; "This is what I told you while I was still with you: **Everything** must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of

Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Lk 24:44) . . . *including the seemingly insignificant detail of the Messiah's thirst.*

He thirsted, that we might thirst after Him . . .

. . . *and so be satisfied.*

Refresh us, O Fount, with Your life-giving water.



"It is finished"
(Jn 19:30)

Tetelestai—one word with one meaning. But person and purpose can determine if its meaning is ordinary or deeply profound.

It would not carry near the same weight were you or I to exclaim "Tetelestai!"

A disgruntled spouse could mutter "It's finished," with threat of divorce.

The defeated could cry "It's finished," in great despair.

Or in joyous celebration the teen grad could shout, "It's finished!"

"Tetelestai."

How was it used?

In Jesus' day, a priest would use this word when proclaiming a sacrifice was perfect.

A merchant would use this same word in declaring a debt paid in full.

Or a servant would say this to his master when his task was completed.

The definition might be the same but the meaning drastically changes in the context of the Cross, however.

“Tetelestai.”

How did others *hear* it?

In relief, the Pharisees thought “it” finished.

In remorse, Pilate thought “it” finished.

In discouragement, the disciples thought “it” finished.

In mourning, the Marys at the Cross thought “it” finished.

What some deemed finished crushed their hopes or created inconsolable sorrow.
And satan? He likely assumed victory.

With Jesus, “it” meant so much more! This statement, a blanket, covering **all** the duties foretold of God’s Messiah.

For Jesus, His finished work included many varied things.

His mission was complete—nothing left undone;
The battle of temptation over;
His suffering at its end.

Redemption accomplished;
Salvation secured;
Divine atonement made;
His sacrifice perfect.

The Law fulfilled;
The Old Covenant closed;
The sacrificial system obsolete.

The debt of sin paid;
Reconciliation made;
Justice satisfied.

All that—and more—completed, perfected...***finished***.

“Tetelestai!”

This, His victory cry of triumph.

What Jesus declared finished grants us an eternal beginning.

The end of His earthly life bought for us eternal life. His death opened the door to heaven for all who believe His salvation an accomplished fact.

The Father's will is done on earth, just as it was formed in heaven before the Word became flesh.

This instrument of torture became a tool for God's use. And though the evil plotting by man, it was overcome by God's plan.

The face of the Cross almost seems to soften. There appears a serenity that has settled upon Jesus. Confidence. I almost sense a glimmer of light piercing the shroud of darkness that cloaked the scene.

John says; "With this [Jesus] bowed His head and gave up His spirit." *He gave over His spirit.* Rising from the very depths of His agony toward blessed relief...*rest.*

All is finished.

"Tetelestai!"

Though written decades later, how appropriate the words of Paul: He fought the good fight . . . finished the race . . . kept the faith. Now was in store for Him the crown of righteousness (adapted from 2 Tm 4:7-8).

And how well-deserving He is of the great reward James describes: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life" (Jms 1:12).

The Victorious Finisher crowned in glory!

Tetelestai – the most profound word Jesus utters. For it is a declaration. A statement of success. *A promise.*

Jesus preached an entire sermon with merely one word.

Need any more be said?

How that one word encourages us in the faith, to know that You have done it all, paid it all, finished it all. May all eternal praise be Yours, the Author and Finisher of our faith.



At the day we now call "good," the *only* thing that has made it so is the God that turned our atrocity into glorious salvation.

He brought the good of redemption from our worst act inflicted upon His innocent, precious Son.

Here, we have come to the final saying of Jesus from the Cross: **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"** (Lk 23:46).

Having just declared; "It is finished," Jesus now lays down His life.

I examined two words more closely in this verse. The first: "Father." The Greek word used here is "pater," which means "protector, upholder."

Another unique word in this statement is "paratethame"—commit. It means to "entrust, to place down, commit to one's charge."

Jesus placed His life before God, an offering. He committed Himself to the charge of Pater, His Father...Protector.

This last word, 7 of 7 —perfection— is one of surrender.

Is this not a portrait: that when the absolute worst is surrendered to God, it is He that makes any good of it?

For what of man ever made anything of that day good?

No! We made it the worst history has seen.

Before Life-Itself gives His life, He has one last thing we must know.

Jesus has one last lesson to demonstrate: *trust in God*.

When life metes out injustice, however, the *last thing* we consider is surrender.

Our tempers flare and we yell, "**CHARGE!**"

We resist at all cost!

I once passed a billboard that read; "Power is control." How that reflects our mentality! We want control...to the point of idolatry. But control is surrender's antonym.

But here we see Jesus place His life into God's steady Hands.

The Servant of God—Servant of Man surrenders to death to serve both.

His final act one of absolute faith and devoted obedience.

But, for us, surrender can be a scary notion. Or radical, *to be sure!* But relinquishing control is a necessity of our faith.

These seven remarks of Jesus we have examined these seven days all took place in a span of six hours that fate-full Passover Friday.

His strength has now left Him,
His life ebbs away,
His breath grows faint,
His voice, weak;
but His trust in God remains rock-solid;
His determination, resolute.

The statement He makes is shared in one other sacred record: Psalm 31.

Jesus changes-up one word. One *crucial* word: "Father." The Son entrusts Himself **completely** into the care of His Father.

This psalm praises God as a mighty fortress. A Fortress that will undoubtedly encase the very tomb of His Son.

In this psalm David praises God's mercy and faithfulness. He even goes so far to say that he "rejoices in God's love for seeing his affliction and hearing the anguish in his soul."

Jesus closes His earthly mission consciously—with a deliberate choice to *give* His life freely.

Yes, "give." The most extravagant of all gifts, tossed before swine.

He did not die the death of a martyr . . . *but willing Savior*. No one took His life from Him. It was, rather, *given*. First by God. Then His Son.

"I lay down my life—only to take it up again"
(Jn 10:17).

Jesus has already been given the resurrection promise. *And He believes it!*

He surrenders His finished work – laid down on the altar of the sacrifice of His life—trusting God to do the rest.

In these pivotal hours, Jesus spoke of:

Forgiveness
Salvation
Relationship
Suffering
Thirst (with purpose)
Triumph
Surrender

Upon the Cross, Jesus gifted both His Father with faithfulness, and man with salvation. All the while teaching by the intentional, priceless words He fought to deliver.

A few short words—long on meaning. And eternal in duration.

The words He's given—along with the life He's given—are life and light.

Jesus endured the Cross by the power of His passion.

And our response should, too, be one of passion.

The Gospel accounts of the seven sayings glorify our Lord—and rightfully so! And they should instill a surrendered passion in us.

His dying words should propel us on to a greater, more active faith that lives out their underlying principles.

And they should so fill our minds with wonder and our hearts with authentic adoration as to resurrect our worship this Easter.

May we so believe Your resurrection promise, Lord Jesus, to the point of absolute surrender. Giving our life, to take up Yours, the gracious gift freely given. And may the message of these final words from the Cross resound in our hearts—rising to heaven's throne in one glorious "Hallelujah!"



“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”
(Heb 5:7-9).

“So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb” (Mk 15:46).



Silence.

Worse yet, dead silence.

It's the worst noise there is.

And don't you think God felt the same way?

He didn't want the creation of this wide-world of His filled with the silence of the dead. For that's what we were—the walking dead.

Don't you think that's why He came?

He knew we were dead in our sins.

But He wanted us alive in Christ.

That, and the dead don't talk.

Don't you think He aches for holy ears to be filled with our voices...*your voice*?

So He came.

He put on flesh like ours to restore the dead and the silent to the living—brimming with words of thanks and adoration.

Don't you think the silence that awful Saturday was deafening to hear? The dead silence of a dark tomb, where Creation's Glory lay stiff, hard on the ears?

Of all the noise that filled Jerusalem's streets that dark Saturday, I imagine the most dreadful noise came from a silent tomb...the tomb of a dead Jesus.

Even the thought of it makes your heart s-c-r-e-a-m!

Those that followed this Jesus now sat in small gatherings . . . in silence. Numbing...paralyzing...surreal silence. The silence of crushed hopes. The silence of mourning. Silence of unanswered questions and lost direction. Fear.

Ears strained, longing for the slightest sound from their Master's hushed voice. Ears fine-tuned, in case some distant drone just might be heaven's echo.

Nothing.

Deafening silence.

In the still quiet beat their aching hearts.

Pause to listen today to the dreadful noise coming from a dead-silent tomb.

Suffering Savior; May my faith never be cold, dead...nor silent.



Before the risen sun (*but after the Son had risen*) a dispatch of faithful women trekked to the sealed tomb of their Lord Jesus. Their sorrow quickly turned to alarm when they arrived at an empty grave.

In the gray of early dawn and the darkness of their grief, their steps of devotion were met by divine reversal.

Bowing in fear of the dazzling men on the scene, they were welcomed with words too wonderful to comprehend.

Witnessing the miraculous sent a shocking jolt straight through to their already racing hearts.

That glorious Resurrection Morning I imagine the globe crowned with heaven's halo—the ozone positively aglow in the radiance of God's joy.

People were scattering to and fro in mass confusion while Mary Magdalene wept.

“Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.
As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb
and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been,
one at the head and the other at the foot.

“They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’

‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said,
‘and I don't know where they have put him.’

“At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there,
but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

“He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?
Who is it you are looking for?’”
(Jn 20:11-15a)

That day—that unmitigated best-in-all-of-history day—another Mary was given heaven's good news of God's Son (Jn 20:17).

This Mary would be the first to proclaim the Risen Lord. That first Easter she could not contain what she knew of her Lord.

And you?

"I have seen the Lord!"
(Jn 20:18)

Now, she *actually* saw Jesus, but have you been *shown* enough to believe He lives? Oh, how I pray this Easter you have! But if you woke this morning, as those women did that first Easter, in disbelief of a resurrected Jesus, venture out to seek Him. Don't linger in darkness and sorrow, but run to where His people are gathered to find all the Answer your heart needs. Run, with great haste, to your first Easter—and do not delay.

Twice Mary was asked why she wept — first by the angels (Jn 20:13), then by Jesus (Jn 20:15). Even she was so consumed by the immediate she didn't quite get it the first time. Is your heart heavy with sorrow, beloved? God tenderly asks; "Woman, why are you crying?" The tears shed today need only be tears of joy. The days of mourning a dead Lord have past. Today, this gifted holy-day, is one for rejoicing.

Everything changed for Mary in that remarkable moment she heard Jesus speak her name. Life rocketed from worst-case scenario to only-God-possible. And in exuberant love, she lunged—desperate to cling to her Living Lord.

Grasp firmly the truth that He lives. And cling tightly to the truth of His love for you . . . that He knows your name, as well.

Let Easter be the day God breathed life into your soul, faith into your heart, and hope in a Better Day inevitably coming. We are the forgiven sinners, the captives freed from death's sentence. We are the redeemed for resurrection. So celebrate an empty tomb and a risen Savior and join in singing a rousing hallelujah chorus of praise.

The awe and adoration of Mary of Magdala that first Easter can be ours, for the resurrection announcement is just as glorious and amazing as ever....***because He lives!***

Christ is risen! Alive! He has been glorified, as it is written! And my heart greatly rejoices in such glory divine. What a Savior! What a Savior is mine!

FOR THE DAYS AFTER EASTER



Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter, it has been called the "birthday of the church."

It's a great day to celebrate the birth of the church with a hearty *Happy Birthday, Church of Christ!* It can well be a day to celebrate by remembering yet another miracle of the Trinity in our redemption.

Jesus said to them:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth."

(Ac 1:8)

Ten days after Jesus' ascension, the church in Christ was birthed with power by God. The Holy Spirit descended from heaven - from the Lord, as promised - accompanied by a violent wind, fire, and the speaking of tongues. The Third Person of the Godhead made a miraculous entrance in the intricate plan of salvation.

Pilgrims had migrated from the north, south, east, and west to Jerusalem, speaking their own native languages. Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for "power from on high." Assembled in prayer was a group of 120 believers, including the apostles, His mother, and many of the women that followed Him during His earthly ministry.

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”
(Ac 2:1-4)

With this baptism of the Holy Spirit, those in attendance were able to speak in languages not their own—aiding in the understanding of others in order to carry this message back to their homelands and begin spreading the Lord's life-saving gospel.

Peter delivered the first sermon - and best of any to date - filled with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He pointed out that the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit substantiated the resurrection of Jesus and His return to the Father. This coming had been prophesied by Joel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and foretold by John the Baptist (ref Joel 2:28-29; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Matthew 3:11).

The members of the church of Christ would become Jesus' message in the flesh (just as God's message was spoken through Jesus in the flesh). Oswald Chambers wrote: "The purpose of Pentecost was not to teach the disciples something, but to make them the incarnation of what they preached so that they would literally become God's message in the flesh."

I am certain of the fact that the apostles would not be able to complete the mission laid before them as commanded by Jesus without this Divine Empowering. Nor would the church realize the growth and endurance through ages of persecution and division without Him. I agree with what D. M. Dawson said: "Without the power of the Holy Spirit all human efforts, methods, and plans are as futile as attempting to propel a boat by puffing at the sails with our own breath."

Let us praise the Holy Spirit for He is:

- Unifier
- Sanctifier
- Comforter
- Guidance Counselor
- Warrior
- Illuminator
- Strengthener

He is accomplishing things for the church and individual believers to this very day.

My impassioned plea for us living in this Age of the Spirit is borrowed from an old song:

"Get Right Church

and

Let's Go Home"

Most Excellent Holy Spirit; Breathe new life in us. The Lord's church is in desperate need of an invigorating stirring of renewal. May Your heavenly waters flow, bringing forth blossoms of fruitfulness in this dry and weary land. Embolden us to speak and teach in Jesus name. Encourage us to live resurrected lives for Your glory until our Lord returns. In Jesus holy name I pray, Amen.

