

Good Friday 2022: Jesus' Seven Sayings on the Cross

Jesus hung on the cross for only about six hours, from about 9 am until about 3 pm. Typically, a crucified victim might persist for two or three days on the cross. You may recall that Pilate expressed his surprise when informed that Jesus had died so quickly.

During those six hours on the cross, Jesus said several things. These final statements have become some of the most well-known of all the things that Jesus said.

The NT records seven final statements that Jesus made as he hung on the cross. These statements are recorded throughout the Gospel accounts, although not any one single Gospel record contains them all. And we don't know with certainty the precise order in which Jesus said these things. When we put together all four Gospel accounts and try to put these sayings in order, we find these seven statements.

Today I'd like to look at those statements and consider what they tell us. What does Jesus teach us from the cross?

I. He teaches us to love our enemies.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” — Luke 23:34

- A. Many have recognized that this is a fulfillment of a prophecy found in Isa 53:12, where it says that the suffering Messiah will make “intercession for the transgressors.” That’s what Jesus is doing here—he’s praying for those who are directly responsible for killing him.
- B. One of the most famous teachings of Jesus is the command for us to love our enemies. It’s one thing to *say* that we should love our enemies; it’s quite a different thing to suffer at their hands and then ask God to forgive those who are putting you to death.
- C. Jesus states the reason he is asking God to be merciful to those who were responsible for crucifying him: “they know not what they do.” That begs the question...
 - 1. Who was responsible for crucifying Jesus? Several people were directly responsible.

- a) Judas betrayed Jesus.
 - b) Caiaphas, the chief priest, pursued Jesus' death, along with many of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - c) Pontius Pilate gave his permission as the Roman governor for Jesus to be crucified.
 - d) Of course, the Roman soldiers did the dirty work of crucifying Jesus.
2. Did any of these people know what they were doing? Did they truly understand the monumental importance of this act?
- a) They all knew that their intent was to kill Jesus.
 - (1) Judas certainly would have known that. Later on, he describes his action as betraying "innocent blood" (Mt 27:4).
 - (2) Caiaphas and the Jews certainly wanted Jesus dead.
 - (3) Pilate didn't really want to kill Jesus, but he gave in to pressure from the Jews. Still, he knew that his action would result in Jesus' death.
 - (4) The Roman executioners knew their job—their duty was to kill Jesus.
 - b) I think most of them knew that what they were doing was *wrong*. They are all morally culpable/responsible for their actions.
 - (1) Judas regretted his betrayal of Jesus. He realized that it was wrong, but he never found forgiveness.
 - (2) Pilate tried to prevent Jesus' death. But eventually he capitulated/caved in to political pressure.
 - (3) I'd guess that the Roman soldiers didn't give it much thought; they did this work routinely.

The Romans had virtually no understanding of who Jesus really was. They saw him as another Jewish troublemaker, not as the savior of the world.

If Jesus' words apply to any one group of people—that they truly did not know what they were doing—it would be the Roman soldiers who actually put him to death. Of all those who were responsible for his death, these Roman soldiers really did not know that they were killing the Son of God.

- c) The Jewish religious leaders bear much more culpability for Jesus' death than anyone else. They knew who he was; Jesus had given them plenty of reasons to believe that he was the promised Messiah.

In fact, they were very bold in taking responsibility for their actions:

When Pilate washed his hands of responsibility, the Jews said "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt 27:245). They were taking direct responsibility for his death.

- d) Further, the Jews knew that Jesus was innocent of all of the allegations they made against him; they knew that their charges against him were fraudulent and empty. And that makes them guilty of murder; they put an innocent man to death, and they knew it.
- e) But they did not realize that they were crucifying their own Messiah. They didn't believe he was the Messiah. None of them realized the full impact of what they were doing.

1 Cor 2:8 ... none of the princes of this world knew [that Jesus was the Christ]: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

f) Many of the Jews did finally realize what they had done a few weeks later, when Peter and the other disciples preached on the Day of Pentecost. Cf. Acts 2:22-24, 37-38, 41.

D. Jesus' request is for God to forgive these people because they did not understand what they were doing. So we have to assume that they did not understand the true/full meaning of their actions.

E. In any case, what Jesus shows here is love for his enemies. Jesus wants what is best even for those who are crucifying him; he wants God to show mercy to them.

App: The natural human tendency is to seek revenge against our enemies. But Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies and to forgive them.

We also see here that God is willing to extend forgiveness to even the greatest of sinners. The murder of Jesus is likely the single greatest sin ever committed, and yet Jesus himself asks God to be merciful to those who are murdering him.

We love our enemies because Jesus calls us to do so. We show mercy because God is merciful. We are kind to the unthankful and the evil because God is. We behave this way as followers of Jesus, not because we feel like it, but because Jesus teaches us to love our enemies.

II. He teaches us that heaven is the immediate destination of believers when they die.

“Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” — Luke 23:43

A. This was Jesus' response to the repentant criminal who was crucified next to Jesus. This man admitted his sin and looked to Jesus in faith. Jesus assured the man that he would be saved and enter heaven that very day.

B. Even while suffering the agonies of the cross, Jesus still was seeking the lost, still offering hope and salvation to those who trust in him. He was still proving himself to be the friend of sinners (Mt 11:19). Instead of saving himself, he's saving others.

Quote: Tax collectors, prostitutes, the poor, the blind, and even criminals being executed for their crimes are able in the eleventh hour to find in Jesus an all-sufficient Savior.¹

Maybe someone here today needs to do what the thief on the cross did—turn from your sin and put your faith in Jesus. That's the only way you can be assured of eternal life. Even if you are deeply sinful like this criminal was, you can still be saved. Jesus offers forgiveness and an eternal home in heaven to anyone who will repent of sin and trust in him.

III. He teaches us to care for others, especially for family members.

“Woman, behold thy Son...Behold thy mother.” — John 19:26

- A. The “woman” in view here is Mary, Jesus’ mother. Jesus spoke these words to John, one of his disciples. In saying these words, Jesus seems to be entrusting his mother into the care of John. Why was that necessary?
- B. It seems that Joseph, Mary’s husband, must have died long before this. There is no mention of him after the accounts of Jesus’ childhood. Jesus, as eldest son, was responsible for the welfare of his mother.
- C. Jesus had other brothers, but they likely were not believers at this point, and they probably were not in Jerusalem.
- D. Jesus appoints John to take care of Mary, and John fulfills this responsibility.

App: Kindness or concern for others is a basic Christian virtue. Care for family members is especially important.

Christian obligation requires that parents care for their children, and then as the years go by, that children care for their parents. It’s unfortunate today that many adult children do not care for their aging parents. Jesus gives us a good example here to follow. He made sure that his mother was taken care of after his death.

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 593.

IV. He teaches us that Jesus endured the wrath of God for us.

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” — Mark 15:34

- A. This cry of agony—“the cry of dereliction”—suggests that Jesus was fully experiencing the wrath of God against the sin that Jesus was bearing on our behalf.
- B. This statement is a quote of Psalm 22:1, a messianic psalm. The writer expresses his feelings of separation from God, but eventually reflects on the fact that God had not ultimately abandoned him. In spite of his suffering, the writer trust in God. And that was true of Jesus as well.
- C. Jesus had that feeling of separation/isolation because it was during this time that Jesus was made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21) and became a curse (Gal 3:13-14).

Isa 53:4-5 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

- D. This shows us the reason that Jesus died on the cross. He didn't die because of his own sin. He didn't die merely as an example. He died as a substitutionary sacrifice. He was “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” by his death in our place.
- E. And as that sacrifice, he took our sins upon himself. He bore the wrath of God against our sins.

1Co 15:3 ... Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

1Pe 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...

- F. The biblical word for this is propitiation. God was propitiated/satisfied with the death of Jesus as a payment for our sins. Jesus death was a sufficient payment for the sins of the whole world.

This cry of agony does not mean that there was some kind of break or rift in the Trinity; God's triune nature is unchangeable and unbreakable. But it does show us that Jesus was suffering the wrath of God poured out on him as he was bearing the sins of his people.

V. He teaches us that He was fully human.

“I thirst.” — John 19:28

- A. A man scourged, bleeding, and hanging on a cross under the Palestinian sun would be so desperately dehydrated that thirst would be a large part of the torture.

Jesus had not had anything to drink for at least 12 hours by this point. He had already suffered arrest, abuse, and scourging. So he had lost a lot of blood, and no doubt, his thirst was very intense.

- B. What does this experience of thirst tell us about Jesus? The Second Person of the Godhead occupied a fully functioning, normal human body. He was fully human; and in this human capacity, Jesus suffered and died for us.

- C. The true humanity of Jesus is an important biblical teaching. Jesus had to be a human to suffer as our substitute. He is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses because he experienced those human weaknesses himself.

VI. He teaches that the work of redemption is complete; it stands finished.

“It is finished.” — John 19:30

- A. Archaeologists have found receipts for taxes from this era with the word (*tetelestai*) written across them, meaning ‘paid in full.’ The debt has been paid.

- B. It means that Jesus had completely finished His work of providing redemption and that it presently stands finished. Nothing more needed or needs doing. This finished work of Jesus Christ is the basis for our salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).²

²Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Jn 19:30). Galaxie Software.

- C. The grammar of that word suggest an action completed in the past that has continuing results. Jesus' earthly mission stands completed; nothing needs to be added to that work. It is sufficient to do everything God intended for it to accomplish. We believe in the finished work of Christ on the cross.
- D. Notice several things that Jesus "finished" on the cross: (M Henry)
1. His natural, physical life is finished. He has come to the end of his life.
 2. His pain and suffering on the cross were finished.
 3. He had fulfilled the purpose for his earthly life—to suffer and die for the sins of man. He had by himself "purged our sin."
 4. All the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, which pointed at the sufferings of the Messiah, were accomplished and fulfilled.
 5. The OT law is finished/brought to an end. The substance is now come, and all the shadows and types are fulfilled. The veil in the temple will be torn in half, the wall of partition is taken down, and the OT ordinances put to rest.
 6. The power of sin is finished. The Lamb of God has been sacrificed and the sins of the world have been taken away. We are no longer slaves to sin.
 7. God's wrath against believers is finished. The price for salvation has been fully paid. God's justice has been fully satisfied by the adequate payment of the price of redemption.

Isa 53:10-11 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put [him] to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin... He shall see of the travail of his soul, [and] shall be satisfied

App: There is nothing we can do to add to the finished, sufficient work of Jesus. In fact, it would be wrong for us to attempt to add anything to that work. Our own good deeds don't add anything to Jesus' work. Jesus' work was perfect and complete. All we do is accept it and trust in the person and work of Christ to save us.

The sacrificial death of Christ was a single, one-time event that can never be repeated. We must deny the idea that we need to reenact the death of Jesus or extend it in any way. Jesus' sacrifice was not perpetual or on-going. It happened once and only once. We need to remember it, but not reenact it or extend it.

VII. He teaches us to have complete trust in God for salvation.

“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” — Luke 23:46

- A. When he said these words, he was quoting from Psalm 31:5. In that passage, the psalmist entrusts himself to God's care. Jesus does the same by using these words. These were apparently his very last words on the cross. So Jesus died with the words of Scripture on his tongue.
- B. To commit your soul/spirit into God's hands at death means that you have total trust in God.

App: It is inevitable that we all will come to a point of death— “It's appointed unto man once to die” (Heb 9:27). When that point comes, what is most important is that we are trusting in God.

For believers, we can be confident that the human spirit/soul is absent from the body and present with the Lord at the point of death. This body is like a tent, and at death, the soul leaves the tent. The spirit departs and goes to be with God. But this is true only for those who know God as their “father.”

Only if you know God as your Father can you commend your soul into his care. We come to know God as Father only through faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew the exact time of his death. In fact, his death occurred about the same time as the Jews were slaughtering the lambs for the Passover meal. The time of Jesus' death had been planned in the mind of God for thousands of years. Jesus' death was the culmination of all of history to this point.

But most of us will not know the exact time of our deaths. Some people plan to make a deathbed conversion; they'll take care of their soul when they are close to death. But many people do not have the opportunity to make things right with God just before death.

E.g., the quarterback for the Steelers—recently killed in a highway accident. I'm sure he was not expecting to die that day. I hope that he was ready.

We have to prepare for eternity here and now, the sooner the better. We have to make reservations in heaven in order to have a place prepared for us. Jesus promises to prepare a heavenly home for us, but we have to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus in order to qualify for that eternal home.

These were Jesus' final words on the cross, and they all teach us some important principles:

1. Love your enemies.
2. Believers go to heaven when they die.
3. Care for others, especially those of your own family.
4. Jesus' death was a satisfactory, substitutionary sacrifice; he endured the wrath of God for us.
5. Jesus was fully human.
6. Jesus' work of redemption is complete; it stands finished.
7. We can have complete trust in God to welcome our souls at the time of death. If you know the Son of God by faith, then you can commend your soul into the Father's hands.