THE 7 SAYINGS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS





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SAYING #1

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
LUKE 23:34

The prayer for their forgiveness does not guarantee that those who put Jesus to death are guiltless, because forgiveness does not come without repentance *(Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 13:3)*. In fact, Peter preaches this very truth in Jerusalem. Those who put Jesus to death can be forgiven since they acted in ignorance, which means that they did not fully grasp what they were doing in crucifying the Son of God *(Acts 3:17-20; 1 Cor.2:8)*.

Ignorance does not excuse evil done, but the ignorant are given an opportunity to turn away from their wickedness. We should recognize that Jesus does not forgive them here but asks God to do so. He has a heart of forgiveness and mercy toward those who put Him to death. Stephen has the same spirit as his Lord when he is killed *(Acts 7:60)*. Hatred, revenge, and bitterness do not lodge in Jesus' heart toward those full of rage against Him. Neither should they be in our hearts.

SAYING #2

"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."
LUKE 23:43

Two criminals were crucified beside Jesus. One begins to revile Him and the other reproves the first for not fearing God, which is the heart of Old Testament faith *(Deut.6:2; Job 28:28)*. The second criminal explains that he should fear God because in his death he is facing judgment, a judgment that is deserved and righteous since it fits the evil he has committed. But Jesus, he points out, has done nothing wrong. He deserves no punishment.

Of all the people present, the one with true spiritual perception is one of the criminals hanging on a cross. He recognizes that he deserves punishment, and he returns to one of the central themes of the passion narrative: Jesus is innocent and guiltless, His punishment is completely undeserved.

He speaks to Jesus as if He were God, who remembers people in His covenant mercy *(Ps.106:4)*. He asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom. Jesus replies with a word of assurance. The assurance is immediate and based upon the word of Christ alone—*"Today, you shall be with Me in paradise."* Here we see the grace of God for those who repent and put their trust in Jesus. They are saved. The saved criminal has little time to show his repentance, but one evidence of his repentance is rebuking those who revile Jesus and publicly testifying to the world that Jesus is King. Do you have the assurance that if you died today, you would be in paradise with Christ?

SAYING #3

"Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother."
JOHN 19:26-27

The King of the world is dying on the cross for the sins of His people. The soldiers executing Him are stealing his clothing. And the King is thinking not of Himself but of His mother. Peter has fled and is nowhere to be found, but the mother of Jesus is there with her friends. People knew who Mary was, and they probably pointed, whispered, and wagged their heads—"This woman loves her son too much to let Him die alone."

But what a son this mother has! There He is, dying on the cross, yet He looks after His mother. Jesus lives out the meaning of the commandment to honor father and mother *(Deut.5:16)*. Those who would be like Jesus will be more concerned about others than themselves. Those who would be like Jesus will see that their mother's needs are met. That Jesus provides for His mother by entrusting her to the care of John indicates that Mary's husband, Joseph, has died.

What about the other brothers of Jesus? Why didn't our Lord entrust his mother's care to them? The brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him *(John 7:5)*. Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to his brother James after He rose from the dead *(1 Cor.15:7)*. James, Jude, and the others were not converted until after the resurrection. Jesus entrusts His mother to John, indicating that she is to be cared for by those who belong to the family of faith. Believers have a responsibility to pray for one another, encourage one another, and bear one another's burdens. What a beautiful example of obedience and love!

SAYING #4

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
MATTHEW 27:46

The scene is one of utter darkness as the earth becomes midnight at noon. After three hours of darkness, Jesus cries with an anguish that defies human comprehension. "Why the anguish?," some ask. Is Jesus despairing? Is He momentarily blinded by pain? Is He doubting? The answer to all these questions is no. He knew this hour would come. He expected to die. He knew the Father would never abandon Him. So why the cry?

Contrary to what some Bible students suggest, Jesus is not saying these words simply to fulfill Psalm 22:1. No, His cry is genuine. He truly feels abandoned—let no one water it down.

Jesus says, *"Why have you forsaken Me,"* because He is forsaken at the moment which theologians call "the great exchange." Jesus bears our sins upon Himself and grants us His righteousness *(2 Cor.5:21)*. In redeeming us from the curse of the law *(Gal.3:13*), He became a curse for us, and the Father, in His holiness,

> *Turns His face away,*
> *As wounds which mar the Chosen One*
> *Bring many sons to glory.*[1]

The English Puritan Richard Sibbes once said, "Jesus is never more obedient, never pleases the Father more, than when He utters these words on the cross. Jesus rightly asks, *'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?,'* so that no believer can ever rightly say, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*"

SAYING #5

"I am thirsty."
JOHN 19:28

The fifth cross-utterance was heard by John. He was there. But he could not do anything to help His suffering Master. When Jesus declared His thirst, He knew the soldiers would offer Him sour wine in fulfillment of the pattern of a righteous sufferer in Psalm 69:21. This utterance tells us of *the intensity of what He had suffered*, *the awful severity of the conflict through which He had just passed*. It was this that made Him cry like the psalmist, *"My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (Ps.32:4)*. His suffering was *unparalleled* and so was His thirst. But it was not merely because of a desire for the relief of His body that He uttered these words from parched lips.

- *Could He who caused water to flow from the smitten rock in the wilderness not quench His thirst?*
- *Could He who turned water into wine by a word spoken from His lips not soothe His own burning throat?*

He could have spoken the same word of power and instantly met His own need. Why, then, did He hang there with parched lips? Because, in the volume of that Book, which expresses the will of God, it was written that He should *thirst*! He came here to do the Father's will, and He did it perfectly *(Heb.10:7)*. He thirsted to do the will of God. Do you?

SAYING #6

"It is finished!"
JOHN 19:30

This sixth cross-utterance is one word in the original, *tetelestai*! Jesus' work was done. All things had been done which the law of God required. All things had been established which prophecy predicted. All types foreshadowed were fulfilled. All the things that the Father had given to do were accomplished. All things needed for our redemption were performed. Nothing was left wanting. Nothing remained for Him to do. Nothing awaited His fulfillment. His work on earth was consummated.

[1] Stuart Townend, *How Deep the Father's Love*, 1995.

It is finished was not an expression of satisfaction that the end of His sufferings was now reached. It was a declaration that all for which He came from heaven to earth to do, was now done. The righteous life has been lived. The greatest demonstration of humility and love has been accomplished. Exact obedience to every righteous requirement of the Father has been maintained. The full measure of the Father's wrath has been poured out. The cup has been drained to the dregs. The penalty of sin has been paid. The substitute has taken the place of His people. Atonement has been made for every one of their innumerable transgressions. The stains have been made clean, the Father's wrath propitiated, the law's demands fulfilled, the pains of the people taken, guilt forgiven, old made new, salvation accomplished, love demonstrated, truth upheld, mercy lavished, brokenness healed, evil unplugged, Satan defeated, the promise of life made. It is finished. It's your move now.

SAYING #7

"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."
LUKE 23:46

The seventh cross-utterance reveals that Jesus did not expire. He did not reach a place where He could no longer maintain Himself. John's record indicates that He *"bowed His head" (John 19:30)*, revealing that up to this point, His head had been held erect. It was no impotent Sufferer who hung there in a swoon. Jesus is presented in the gospel record finishing His work, fulfilling the Scriptures, bowing His head, and giving up the ghost. The active verb is used to communicate that Jesus was the actor in His death.

He declared in John 10:18 that His life would not be taken from Him; He gave it up on His terms. One of the best summaries of the significance of Jesus' death is a little poem by S.W. Gandy. It is particularly appropriate here.

> *He hell in hell laid low;*
> *Made sin, He sin overthrew*
> *Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,*
> *And death, by dying, slew.*[2]

What response could there be to such an event? Believe in Jesus. Love Jesus. Repent of sin and hate the sin that brought the Father's wrath down. Two groups stood by on Golgotha that day. Those who mocked and shouted crucify Him, and those who loved Him so much that they would endure the cross with Him, despising the shame, and choose to live for Him the rest of their days. Which group are you in?

> *Living He Loved Me*
> *Dying he saved me*
> *Buried He carried my*
> *My sins far away*
> *Rising he justified me*
> *Freed me forever*
> *One day He's coming*
> *O glorious day.*[3]

[2] Samuel Whitelock Gandy, *His Be the Victor's Name*, 1838.
[3] Casting Crowns, *Glorious Day (Living He Loved Me)*, 2009.