

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

(Luke 23:34)

The word of forgiveness

Forgiveness is beautiful in theory but far more difficult in practice. Rather than forgive, we entertain angry, vindictive thoughts in response to the smallest slight against us. Yet Jesus taught his followers that we must love even our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, and forgive those who sin against us, no matter how often they do it. And after he had been beaten, whipped, spat upon, mocked, and nailed to the cross by the Roman soldiers, Jesus asked his Father to forgive them, because they didn't know what they were doing.

In one sense, of course, they did know. They were carrying out a brutal form of capital punishment at the command of the Roman governor. But they didn't understand that they were killing the Son of God, and what that meant. Nevertheless, even from the cross, Jesus modelled the radical nature of the forgiveness he taught, not just as an example but also as an encouragement to us when we're conscious of our sin.

QUESTION: *How does this verse challenge our own understanding or natural tendency of forgiveness, particularly in difficult circumstances?*

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

(Luke 23:43)

The word of salvation

All four Gospels mention that Jesus was crucified between a pair of criminals. But only Luke adds that one of the men turned to Jesus in faith during his final moments, and that in response, Jesus promised him they'd be together in paradise that same day. The Greek word Luke uses to describe these men is *kakourgos*, literally evildoer. They weren't petty crooks but hardened felons who, unlike Jesus, would've been considered worthy of crucifixion under Roman law. And yet, God worked in the heart of one of these criminals to call out to Jesus for salvation, which the Lord granted.

This monumental act of grace is a comforting reminder that the door of salvation remains open, even for the worst offenders in their final hours. It also demonstrates the deity of Jesus. Even on the cross, he knew what was going on, what he was accomplishing, and he had the authority to grant salvation to anyone who came to him for it.

QUESTION: *Do you think salvation & forgiveness are available to anyone regardless of their past actions or circumstances?*

“Woman, behold, your son! . . . Behold, your mother!”

(John 19:26-27)

The word of relationship

According to each of the Gospel accounts, there was a group of faithful women who stayed with Jesus while he died on the cross. This group included the well-to-do women such as Mary Magdalene who had financially supported Jesus’ ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem, as well as the mother of James and John, and a few others, plus Mary, the mother of Jesus. Meanwhile, all of Jesus’ male disciples had fled and abandoned him, except for John.

It’s hard to imagine what Mary must have felt, watching her son die like he did, but there’s a hint of it in Simeon’s prophecy to her when the infant Jesus was brought to the temple: “a sword will pierce through your own soul also.”

And in the midst of this grim scene, Jesus turned to his mother and said, “look at your son” and told John, “look at your mother.” Mary was a widow by this time, and Jesus was telling her and John that they were now family. It’s a heart-melting moment in which Jesus cares for his mother and also shows his concern, even to the end, to provide loving family relationships and community for those who follow him.

QUESTION: *What can we learn from Jesus’ example of caring for others and the importance of community, even as He is facing death?*

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

(Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Psalm 22)

The word of abandonment

This is the only one of the seven words recorded by Matthew and Mark, and the only one recorded in Jesus’ native Aramaic language. Matthew renders it “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” and Mark, with a slight variation in dialect, as “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” They both translate it as “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus, already abandoned by his closest friends, had been on the cross for hours when he uttered this heartbreaking cry. It’s also a direct quote from Psalm 22, in which David prophesied about the sufferings of the coming Messiah. On the cross, Jesus bore the awful punishment for all the sins ever committed by his people, and for the only time in all of eternity, he experienced his Father’s righteous wrath and abandonment.

Even though he knew he would soon rise and regain his loving relationship with his Father, the horror and anguish of the moment overwhelmed him. Small wonder that just a short while earlier, he had prayed in agony, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” It was both a human and a divine outcry, an astounding mystery that drives us to repentance and worship of our Saviour.

QUESTION: *How does Jesus’ cry of abandonment speak to the love of God for each of us?*

What is the significance of Jesus quoting Psalm 22 when He says these words?

“I thirst.”

(John 19:28; Psalm 69:21)

The word of distress

During crucifixions, it was customary to offer the condemned wine mixed with myrrh as a means to dull their suffering to a small degree. On his way to the cross, Jesus refused this offer, committed as he was to drink down the full cup of God’s wrath against sin on behalf of his people. But once he knew his work of atonement was finished, he called out, “I thirst.”

After so much horrific trauma, Jesus would have been severely dehydrated and in acute physical distress. In response, someone filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on stick and held it up to his mouth. And this time, Jesus drank it. Unlike the earlier beverage, this one had no pain-dulling properties and was offered to Jesus out of mockery. Nevertheless, Jesus called for it in order to fulfill another messianic prophecy from Psalm 69. In his real human distress and near death, Jesus was still aware of his prophetic role as the Messiah.

QUESTION: *What significance does Jesus’ physical suffering, including his thirst, have in understanding the reality of his sacrifice for us?*

“It is finished.”

(John 19:30)

The word of triumph

This brief word follows hard after the previous one, equally brief. Knowing that his atoning work was complete and his ordeal almost over, Jesus drank the sour wine out of the sponge and exclaimed in triumph, “It is finished.” There’s a sense of joy and release in this cry. As Isaiah had prophesied 700 years earlier, “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”

As a man, Jesus rejoiced that his awful suffering was nearly over. But as the divine Son of God, he rejoiced even more than any human could comprehend. He had accomplished the mission given him by his Father, for which he had been sent into the world. It was a mission planned before the creation of the universe, a mission to redeem a people from their sin, by his death, to the glory of God the Father.

QUESTION: *How might the phrase “it is finished” invite us to reflect on the God’s plan of salvation for us that was set in motion in Genesis 3?*

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

(Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5)

The word of reunion

Jesus’ final word before his death is a statement of confident resignation to the will of his Father. It’s also a quote from Psalm 31, yet another of David’s prophecies that foreshadow the coming Messiah. Throughout his time on Earth, Jesus demonstrated his dependence on God the Father, both in words and actions.

As members of the Trinity, the Father and the Son, along with the Holy Spirit, have enjoyed an equal, loving relationship for all eternity. But at the right time, the Son laid aside his glory and humbled himself, becoming a man dependent on God. This dependence extended until his final breath when he commended his spirit into his Father’s hands.

It’s a sublime moment in which Jesus voluntarily relinquished his life, and a model for how we should entrust our lives to God, even in the face of death. But more than that, it’s also an ecstatic moment in which Jesus anticipated his reunion with his Father. It’s the fulfilment of his desire from his high priestly prayer: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” Having died for our sins, Jesus would soon be raised for our justification and ascend to the right hand of the Father, from where he rules and continues to intercede for us.

QUESTION: *In what ways does this final prayer of Jesus demonstrate His surrender to God’s will? How does it point to Him being fully God & fully man?*