

The Last Words of Jesus

A study on Jesus' last words on the cross.



52 Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.

53 When Jesus left there, the teachers of the law began to persecute him and to besiege him with questions, so that they might catch him in something he said.

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For any questions or additional information,
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Last words spoken by someone on their deathbed are very serious and significant. Last words are something we take note of. They are intentional. Those who have experienced sharing in the last words of someone they love before they passed know what a treasure that is. Last words are precious. Last words stay with us. The last words of Jesus, the Savior of the world, are no exception and should hold an even greater significance to those for whom He died, the sinners, of whom we all are.

Jesus' deathbed was a cross. As He hung on the cross, not only did His choice to die for us display His love for us, but also the last words He spoke revealed His character and His love for His heavenly Father and for us. Romans 5:7-8 states, *"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* That love is on full display in the seven last sayings Jesus spoke while in excruciating pain as He was actively dying on the cross. Each time He spoke, He revealed the reality of His love.

As Jesus struggled to breathe, He didn't just hang in silence. He spoke to those around Him, to strangers, to His family and friends. Showing again that Jesus did not come to earth for Himself but for us. Each of His last sayings points to the work He was accomplishing for His Father.

All four of the Gospel writers contribute to the recorded last words of Jesus. Not only do His last words point to His mission and love for us, but several of Jesus' final words complete the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies about the death of the world's Savior. As we study the final words of Jesus, we will encounter themes of forgiveness, restoration, relationships, abandonment, distress, triumph, and reunion; each revealed in the words Christ spoke while He hung on the cross.

Forgiveness

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

As the soldiers cast lots to divide the garments of Jesus, He prepares to clothe them with so much more. Jesus is preparing to clothe them with righteousness by offering His forgiveness, made possible through His death, which will occur because they have hung Him on the cross. In this statement made by Jesus, we see the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12 fulfilled, *“because he poured out his soul to death and numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”*

In these words, Jesus also says that they did not know what they were doing. The men who lifted Jesus to the cross most likely did not believe what they were doing was wrong; they were following orders. Why would they think what they were doing was wrong when they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah? We see this mentioned in 1st Corinthians 2:7-8, *“But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* As He was taunted and ridiculed, Jesus responded in a way most men would not. Instead of defending His honor or responding with insults, He pleads with the Father on their behalf for forgiveness.

In pleading with the Father for their forgiveness, Jesus also acknowledges that there is something to be forgiven. He implies there is condemnation. Yet His love for them moves Him not to leave them in their condemnation, but to offer forgiveness. In doing so, He releases them from both condemnation and shame. This is the very reason God sent His Son: to save the world, not condemn the world.

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17

Restoration

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43

Jesus spoke these last words to one of the criminals who hung on a cross beside him. Jesus spoke them in response to the criminal rebuking the other for not fearing God. He acknowledged that while they were receiving the due reward for their deeds, Jesus was innocent. The criminal then asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom.

If we look at the accounts in Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32, we see that both criminals initially reviled Jesus. What occurred that could have changed this man's view on who Jesus was? Perhaps he heard Jesus' earlier prayer to His Father, asking for their forgiveness and showing compassion toward those who mocked Him. Maybe, in Jesus' refusal to reciprocate with insults to his mockers, the thief began to see that the man hanging beside him was indeed who He claimed to be. This event shows that when we are near and in God's presence, it is hard not to see that He is who He says He is. Once in Jesus' presence, the man who initially reviled Jesus had a change of heart. His insults toward Christ turned to faith when he realized his need for Him.

Jesus' response, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise,”* immediately fulfills the plea of forgiveness Jesus had earlier prayed for on the cross. It reveals how generously that forgiveness was given, even to the most unlikely recipient. These words show the heart of God and the depth of His love. He responds with compassion and assurance. Jesus did not respond to the insults the criminals hurled at Him, but instead, He responded to repentance. Psalm 51:17 states, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* He is ready to restore the repentant heart.

The word “paradise” Jesus uses here does not merely refer to the afterlife. It points to something deeper: the

Garden, restoration, and a renewed relationship with God. In the Septuagint, the word translated as “paradise” meant the Garden of Eden, the place where we had a perfect and right relationship with God. Jesus is speaking about restoring this sinner to a right relationship with his Creator.

A man on the brink of death and eternal separation was given hope because of Jesus’ work on the cross. Jesus’ words extend an invitation to the infinite joy of a restored relationship with the Father. Though death loomed, paradise awaited. In Christ, death becomes the doorway to eternal life in His presence. This same invitation is offered to each of us. Will you allow Christ to restore you?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Do you see yourself in the words of the thief, mindful of your sin and in need of God’s mercy?
2. Do you mercifully view others as Jesus saw this man as a potential child of God?
3. Read Hebrews 7:25. How does drawing near to God reveal Him to us, and what can you do to remember His promises and love daily?

Relationship

“Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” John 19:26-27

Jesus spoke these words to his mother, Mary, and to His disciple, John. At the foot of the cross, Jesus formed a new family. Jesus connected Mary and John. This relationship was meant to provide comfort for His mother and to foster trust between Him and His disciple. Relationships matter to Christ.

The words Jesus used, “your son,” suggest that He would no longer fulfill the role of her earthly son and that John would now assume the responsibilities a son would have carried in that time. His use of the word “woman” reflects that He is more than a son to her; He was now to be her Savior. These last words of Jesus show His care not only for our spiritual needs but also for our earthly ones. Knowing the heartache His mother would face, Jesus made certain she was cared for. Even while dying on the cross, He provided for her in more ways than one: someone to comfort her after His death and, through His death, the gift of salvation.

These simple words also remind us of Jesus’ humanity. He had a real relationship with His mother. As a child, He would have relied on her to nurse Him, carry Him, and teach Him to walk and speak. He cared for her and loved her. Even in the midst of His deep suffering on the cross, Jesus was still thinking of others and considering the comfort His mother would need.

Jesus’ care for His mother during His final moments on earth demonstrates the importance of loving and caring for others. Our relationship with Christ is not just about us, but also includes our relationships with others. Our relationship with Christ is on full display through our intentional relationships with others. Even in our deepest pain, we should still show concern and love for those around us. Just as Jesus gave Mary and John comfort in the midst of His own suffering and reassured them that they were not alone, we should seek to do the same.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Read Luke 2:27-35. How does this prophecy about the sorrow Mary would experience point to Jesus as the promised Messiah?
2. How can your relationship with Christ influence the way you build and nurture relationships with others?
3. In what ways can you intentionally care for the people God has placed in your life?

Abandonment

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34

This cry from Jesus was spoken around the ninth hour, after darkness had fallen over the land at the sixth hour. The physical darkness that covered the land for those three hours symbolized the spiritual darkness of the abandonment Jesus experienced. The ridicule of men He could endure, but to be left in the dark and separated from the source of light must have been the most excruciating suffering of all.

This sense of abandonment came as a result of Jesus bearing the weight of the sins of the entire world as he hung on the cross. He was made to be sin for us as it states in 2nd Corinthians 5:21, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* In becoming sin for us, Jesus experienced separation from the Father, just as Scripture tells us that sin separates us from God in Isaiah 59:2, *“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”*

These words express the human feeling of separation from our Creator when sin enters our lives. Yet these words are a cry of distress, not distrust. Though Jesus felt forsaken, He did not forsake God. Instead, He cried out to Him, expressing the anguish of that moment. In doing so, Jesus shows that He truly understands what it means to be human and to feel alone, abandoned, and in the dark.

Though these were among Jesus' final words, they were not His last words before He breathed His final breath. These words were filled with lament, while His final words, as we will see, are filled with power, surrender, and trust. Through this, Jesus sets the example for us that there is a time for words of lament and sorrow, but we should not end there. Instead, we are called ultimately to place our trust in the Lord.

These words of Jesus also fulfill a prophecy about the Messiah's suffering found in Psalm 22. As He hung on the cross, Jesus quoted the opening line of Psalm 22:1: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" What is striking is that the very people mocking Him used the same psalm to ridicule Him. In Matthew 27:41–43, the mockers use language that closely reflects Psalm 22:7–8 as they ridicule Jesus. In doing so, they unknowingly helped fulfill the prophecy that pointed to Him as the Messiah.

By quoting the opening line of Psalm 22, Jesus was not only expressing the depth of His suffering but also drawing attention to the entire psalm. Psalm 22 begins with anguish and a cry of abandonment, yet it ends in victory and the declaration of God's deliverance. The final words of the psalm proclaim, "*He has done it,*" pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan.

In Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, Jesus uses the Aramaic word *sabachthani*, which is translated in English as "forsaken." However, the word in Aramaic can also carry the sense of being abandoned for a purpose. This reality suggests that Jesus' abandonment was not because He was unwanted, but that it served a greater purpose in fulfilling God's redemptive plan. By referencing the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus acknowledged the reality of His suffering and separation in that moment. Yet the psalm itself reminds us that the story does not end in darkness. The final declaration, "*He has done it,*" points to the purpose behind His suffering and the completion of the work He came to accomplish.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What might it look like for you to express honest lament to God while still choosing to trust Him?

Distress

“I thirst.” John 19:28

These words are the only one of the seven sayings from the cross in which Jesus directly refers to His own physical suffering. Jesus spoke these words to fulfill Scripture. In John 19:28, we read, *“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’”* By stating His thirst, Jesus fulfilled Scripture and prompted the Roman guards to give Him sour wine, fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 69:21: *“They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”*

Jesus’ thirst once again showcases His humanity and the vulnerability of His flesh. It expresses the distress He was in. It leaves no doubt that He was fully human. Our response to Christ’s humanity should be to boldly approach His throne with confidence, knowing He understands our weakness and suffering. As Hebrews 4:15-16 reminds us, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

There is also a striking irony in this moment. Earlier in Jesus’ ministry, Jesus described Himself as the source of living water. Yet here, on the cross, He thirsts. The one who offers living water becomes thirsty so that we might never experience a thirst that cannot be quenched.

Through His thirst on the cross, He will satisfy our thirst.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Matthew 5:6

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.’” John 7:37

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. In what areas of your life do you currently feel spiritually thirsty?
2. How can you intentionally come to Christ this week to satisfy the areas where you feel spiritually thirsty?
3. How does knowing Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses encourage you to approach Him with your needs and struggles?

Triumph

***“It is finished,”* John 19:30**

These words of Jesus, recorded in John 19:30, declare: *“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”* These words reinforce the prophecy’s closing line in Psalm 22: *“He has done it.”*

The Greek word translated “It is finished” is **tetelestai**, a word that carries the meaning of fulfillment, not merely an ending, but the completion of a mission.

So what was fulfilled when Jesus spoke these words?

Not only was the debt for the sins of the world fully paid, but the long night of suffering had come to its end. Jesus completed the full course of obedience. Jesus won the battle with the enemy. The work of atonement had been accomplished. Jesus fulfilled his mission.

Through His death on the cross, Jesus finished and perfected our faith. These passages in Hebrews explain this truth:

“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Hebrews 10:11-14

“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

All that remained now was for Christ to give up His life so that He could rise triumphant. Nothing since His death can be added to the work of Christ for salvation, for He

declared it finished. With this final vocal fist pump of victory, Jesus signaled the end of His earthly life, but the beginning of new life for all who would follow and trust in Him.

What joy there is in knowing that Jesus perfected our faith, so that one day we too can stand with Him and proclaim, "It is finished."

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Are there places in your life where you still carry guilt or shame that Christ has already paid for?

2. Do you truly rest in the victory Jesus secured on the cross, or do you live as though the battle is still yours to win?

3. In what ways can you live with deeper gratitude for the sacrifice that secured your victory?

Reunion

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”
Luke 23:46

In His final words, Jesus quotes part of Psalm 31:5, *“Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.”* He knows the cross is not the end. He trusts that He will be redeemed from death and reunited with His Father. This statement also confirms what Jesus had already declared in the gospel of John.

“For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”
John 10:17-18

Jesus died willingly. His life was not taken from Him. He freely gave it. This final statement reveals that He remained sovereignly in control throughout His whole crucifixion. He chose to die for us. He committed His spirit to the Father. The nails did not hold Him to the cross; His love did.

Both in life and death, Jesus submitted fully to God’s will. Even in the midst of His suffering, He continued to trust in His Father and what He had planned for Him. In this final act, Jesus took the ultimate step of submission so that we might be saved. In Hebrews, we are reminded that Jesus offered Himself willingly and that God accepted His sacrifice.

“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Hebrews 9:14

So what should we do with the knowledge of the significance of all of Jesus’ last words from the cross?

Our response should be one of surrender. Not in the same way Christ surrendered, because only He could

bear that burden. Our surrender looks like Jesus calling us to follow Him and walk in His ways.

As His followers, we are called to take up our own cross and live lives of submission to Him.

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

Matthew 16:24

We are to lay down our lives.

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

1st John 3:16

We are to commend our own spirit to the will and work of the Father.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 7:21

All seven of Jesus’ last words from the cross have been preserved for us in God’s Word. In John 6:63, Jesus says, *“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”* His last words are no exception and speak life to us now.

These are not words meant to be remembered only with sorrow. Rather, they direct our attention to the finished work Christ accomplished on the cross. In them, we see His love poured out in its fullest measure. Yet, we know the story does not end with the crucifixion. We cannot remember the cross without also remembering the resurrection and the joy that followed what once seemed a moment of deep sorrow.

When we truly understand the last words of Jesus, the first words He speaks to His disciples after His resurrection take on even deeper meaning. In John 20:19, Jesus greets them with the words, *“Peace be with you.”* And that is exactly what His finished work brings, everlasting peace.



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