

# Sayings from the Cross

WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

# Introduction



FOR MANY OF US, Easter preparation goes a little something like this:

- Run to the grocery store for the ham or the lamb to serve for lunch on Easter Sunday.
- · Make sure the kids have those cute little outfits for family pictures.
- Get a lily now or just bring one home from church?
- Set the alarm for the sunrise service?

Before we know it, the Easter holiday is behind us and we're left wondering if there shouldn't be more to our celebration of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

In this short devotional, pastor William Boekestein helps us prepare for Easter by focusing our attention on the seven sayings of Christ from the cross. Maybe you're familiar with him crying out, "It is finished!" while hanging on the cross, but have you ever realized that Jesus spoke seven times? In his final hours, our Savior spoke words of forgiveness, salvation, reconciliation, triumph, and reunion.

Take time the week before Easter to read and reflect each day, by yourself or with your family, on these seven sayings from the cross. As you do, I pray you'll be comforted and encouraged as you meditate on God's love and mercy towards us in Christ.

#### **HAPPY EASTER!**

Pastor Adriel

William Boekestein is the pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He has written several books and numerous articles. He and his wife, Amy, have four children.

# Even You Can Be Forgiven



"And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments."

LUKE 23:33-34

JESUS'S FIRST RECORDED SPEECH from the cross is a shocking prayer for the forgiveness of his executioners. The soldiers stripped him and pinned his naked body to a pole which they raised up so that people could mock him. They criminalized his goodness. How did the King respond? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

#### WHAT WAS JESUS PRAYING FOR?

We shouldn't assume that Jesus is welcoming into his kingdom all of his persecutors. God grants pardon and forgiveness to those who repent and believe (Mark 2:1–12). Jesus's killers are unrepentant and unbelieving. So his prayer is puzzling. "One would think that he should have prayed, 'Father, consume them,'" look at their sin and take revenge.¹ But he does the opposite. What is he asking for, and why?

Jesus asked the Father not to exercise immediate retributive justice against his murderers. Father, forgive this sin, the worst sin ever committed. Please don't let your wrath burn hot against them so that you consume them (Exod. 32:10). Christ considers the atrocity his father is witnessing and begs him not to do the most natural thing, but instead to glorify himself by showing startling forbearance. Imagine as a parent that you happen to see a bully beating your son who is curled up in the fetal position. You race to the scene with clenched fists. As you prepare to avenge the child he whispers, "Please, forgive him." He isn't asking you to adopt the bully any more than Jesus was asking his father to justify the Son's executioners. Jesus's request was for God to suspend his worthy wrath against sinners.

When vengeance is expected, lenience is surprising. Jesus's prayer doesn't fit our calculations. In fact, it might feel anticlimactic. In the days of Moses, the earth swallowed up traitors (Num. 16). God burned up the prophets of Baal in their contest with Elijah (1 Kings 18). Why wasn't God *more* aggressive when his Son was brutally murdered under false charges? Why wasn't Jesus as angry as the men crucified on his right and left hand Mark 15:32)?

Jesus's request teaches us something unexpected about the God of justice: he is shockingly forgiving. At the moment in which we least expect to see God's clemency, here it is! Isaiah prophesied that the Christ would make intercession for transgressors (Isa. 53:12). But who expected Jesus to intercede for those who transgressed against him? What better way could God show himself ready to forgive than by pardoning his murderers?

# RESPONDING TO JESUS'S PRAYER: REPENT OF YOUR SINS

With his prayer Christ invites the worst sinners to seek and find pardon through his blood. If Jesus pitied those who spat in his face and drove nails through his hands and feet, he can pity you. If Jesus's heart is inclined to show mercy even toward those who mock his salvation, who have no sense of the power of his blood, will he not be more merciful to those who seek his forgiveness? Jesus is far more willing to forgive than we are willing to be forgiven. We're used to grudging, half-hearted, conditional forgiveness. Jesus's forgiveness is the radical exception to that rule. God is mercifully patient with the ignorant. But we're not ignorant. When we sin against his will

# Even You Can Be Forgiven



"And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments."

LUKE 23:33-34

we can't say, "I know not what I do." We know that we're polluted by sin. We also know that, though God can overlook ignorance, "he now commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). So repent. Accept Jesus's offer of forgiveness now; don't squander the day of grace and end up standing before the just judge lacking the covering of Jesus's righteousness.

# RESPONDING TO JESUS'S PRAYER: LOVE THE IGNORANT

Penitent followers of Jesus-those who are transformed by his Spirit-develop a new Christ-like attitude toward those who "know not what they do." Generosity doesn't erase sin. Ignorance is not innocence. The Old Testament commanded repentance even for sins committed unwittingly (Lev. 5:17). But the truly wise person refuses to judge others on the basis of what they themselves know. Paul understood that the rulers of Jesus's day crucified the Lord of glory because they misunderstood God's wisdom (1 Cor. 2:8). Ignorance is powerfully blinding. Knowledge is good, but it can also be the ammunition by which we judge those with less of it. Who are your enemies? Which of your neighbors have aligned themselves with "the wrong movement"? Do you have friends who, from your perspective, are making ill-informed decisions? We follow Jesus by showing such people grace, mercy, and pity.

Jesus harbored no ill-will toward those who completely misunderstood him. He loved them. He was unwilling to write them off, to cancel them simply because they had a lot to learn. *And*, he insisted that his followers teach the world to observe all that he has commanded (Matt. 28:20). Jesus never affirmed ignorance. In his

first, short sentence from the cross, Jesus invites us to receive God's amazing grace and extend it to others.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- Why do we struggle with forgiveness?
- 2. How does Jesus's prayer to his Father encourage you to seek and give forgiveness?

NOTES:

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Father, forgive our sins; those we have committed in ignorance and those we are fully aware of. In the meantime, help us to forgive others as you in Christ have forgiven us. Amen.



# Jesus Isn't Iffy on Your Salvation



"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

LUKE 23:39-43

LUKE 23:39-43

CHRIST'S CROSS WAS A STAGE from which he prayed and preached, drawing people to himself (John 12:32). But Jesus wasn't the only one speaking from a cross. One criminal, lacking the fear of God, railed at him with demanding and self-serving last words: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39). The other criminal confessed his sin and his total need for God's mercy. He asked Jesus—a man clearly committed to clemency (Luke 23:34)—to remember him in kindness (Luke 23:42). Luke lets Jesus speak last: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Three speeches from three condemned men. You and I also are under a death sentence. Two examples—one good and one bad—teach us to repent of our sins and trust entirely in Jesus so we too might own Jesus's promise as we transition from this life to the life to come.

#### **JESUS PROJECTS CONFIDENCE**

Christ was not a helpless victim. Hear Jesus's authority: "Assuredly, I say to you." From the cross he issued infallible decrees as the king of the earth. In Christ's reply, "Calvary becomes a palace, the cross a throne of the Judge of all worlds." Imagine the penitent thief's guilt and regret; feel his pain and panic. Jesus spoke with the conviction this dying man needed—no ambivalent encouragement would do. What we expect to happen after we die doesn't really matter if it differs from what Jesus says. To penitent believers, Jesus decisively declares peace and pardon.

#### **JESUS PROMISES CLOSENESS**

The thief's request sounds like what one might say to a friend who is moving away, or who is rising to success: Remember me. Christ abundantly surpassed what was asked of him. By day's end this man would be with Jesus. The grammatical emphasis in the Lord's reply is on his presence with the penitent thief: "With me you will be."

Jesus refocuses our expectations of eternity. The penitent thief wanted a piece of God's kingdom. He wanted relief from the penalty of his guilt. And those are fair desires. But the promise of the gospel is not simply eternal comfort or deliverance from sin but also everlasting intimacy with God. Jesus's answer invites us to want him above all else.

### JESUS COMMUNICATES CONCRETENESS

Jesus's promise was about a specific day and place. Today. In Paradise.

Two things happened on that particular "today" that forever bound the Lord of glory to a lowly criminal. First, the man was dying. This was his last day. He was beginning eternity. He needed the promise to take effect now. Second, Christ was dying. By his death Christ began to defeat death and remove the separation between God and his chosen people. That is how salvation works. Those who come to Christ receive him that instant. Jesus also mentions a concrete place. Paradise is God's dwelling place (cf. Rev. 2:7; 22:2), a place without death, sorrow, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4). It points back to the paradise of Eden and forward to the paradise of heaven.

# Jesus Isn't Iffy on Your Salvation



"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

LUKE 23:39-43



The way to Eden was blocked because of human sin (Gen. 3:24). Through his death Christ opened the way to the greater paradise of heaven. With this lovely name—paradise—Jesus triggers our imagination and desires. Who wouldn't want to be in paradise? The wretched thief who hung on a cross of shame would by day's end be reigning with Christ in heaven (Rev. 22:5). But first, death comes.

All three crucified men died that day. The impenitent thief tried to gain the world but lost his soul (Matt. 16:26). Jesus also died and descended into hell. He bore the hellish curse for those whose names are written in the book of life. Only one of the three men never descended to hell. The repentant and believing thief never drank to the bottom the cup of God's wrath. He sought and received Christ's blessing.

The one criminal warns us of the eternal folly of refusing to find refuge in Jesus. The other encourages us that even the worst sinner can be united with Jesus now and enter his paradise at the moment of death. The prayer of the penitent thief should become our prayer. Jesus's answer to that believing request is always the same: "Assuredly, I say to you, when your life is over, you will be with me in paradise."

#### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- 1. How does the penitent thief's confession— "We are receiving the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23:41)—relate to Romans 6:23 and our own experience of death?
- 2. How does Jesus answer—"Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43)—relate to 2 Corinthians 5:8 and our own experience of salvation?

NO	ΓES:			
•••••		 •••••	 	
•••••		 	 	
•••••		 •••••	 	

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, King of kings, as you stand before your Father and present him with your broken body and shed blood, remember me. And because of your rich mercy, receive me to yourself in paradise at the end of my earthly journey. Amen.

# A *New Family* Under the Cross



"But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

JOHN 19:25-27

AS JESUS HUNG ON THE CROSS, his strength drained away and his organs failed. While enduring physical torment, he also suffered from an acute sense that God had deserted him. Suspended between earth and heaven, he appeared rejected by both. His feelings of not belonging must have been overpowering. Crucifixion was intended to be dehumanizing.

In his agony, Jesus noticed "his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby" (v. 26). The author wants us to see Jesus connecting with them, noticing their needs, feeling their pain. Jesus became especially mindful of the grief of his mother. Imagine watching the execution of a loved one. Mary had labored for Jesus's birth and nursed him through infancy. She had worried about him, prayed for him, and supported him through severe opposition. She had come to trust in him. How precious was the relationship between the perfect child of the most blessed mother! Now she watched as her boy writhed and moaned, bled and suffocated. At Jesus's birth Mary was warned, "A sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). At his death it happened.

In that terrible moment, Jesus loved his mother. When we are in trouble, our thoughts turn inward. But Jesus is always more mindful of our needs than we are. He came not to be served but to serve. So he gave his mother a new son, like a judge effecting a reverse adoption for an aging woman. And he gave her the best son she could hope for, the disciple Jesus loved, the only disciple to venture to the cross, proving his love and loyalty. John would love Mary the way he had loved Jesus because of Jesus's love for him.

What wondrous love is this? And what lessons should we learn from it?

### CHILDREN MUST CARE FOR THEIR PARENTS

This isn't the central lesson of the text. But it might be the most obvious. Being born under the law (Gal. 4:4), Jesus had to honor his parents. Presumably Joseph had passed, and now Mary's firstborn was dying. As the parent/child roles begin reversing it is easy to forget the debt children owe for their parents' care. Jesus never forgot.

The same John who would care for Jesus's mother later wrote: "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6). Do we? Are we committed to helping our parents finish their lives with the same love and devotion that good parents show their children? Jesus fulfilled the fifth commandment his entire life, but most dramatically near his death. He has left us an example to do likewise.

#### THE CHURCH IS GOD'S FAMILY

Mary had other children who surely could have met her physical needs after Jesus's death. But Mary needed the kind of spiritual companionship that is only found in God's family, and her other sons did not yet believe in him (John 7:5). In the church believers treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters (1 Tim. 5:1-2), doing God's will together (Mark 3:35).

Jesus reconfigures how we are to think about family. His real family is defined along spiritual rather than biological lines. We become part of his family when we follow the will of God. It is our spiritual orientation

# A *New Family* Under the Cross



"But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

JOHN 19:25-27

rather than our physical birth that now becomes ultimately defining.<sup>3</sup>

God's people are your closest kin.

### THE CROSS MEETS OUR GREATEST NEEDS

It is telling that Jesus waited till the cross to unite his grieving mother and friend. He could have made this arrangement at a more "convenient" time. But the imagery is stunning, helping us to sing with the old hymn, "I take, O cross, thy shadow for my hiding place." What do you need from the cross? Help for huge challenges you can't face alone? Relief from guilt over imperfect parenting? Courage to press on? Jesus bore the heavy burden of the cross to give us the light burden of the Christian life. He said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

When we need assurance of God's love for us, his gift of an honored place in his family, and help for our greatest needs, we look to the cross and hear the love-drenched words he spoke to his mother and well-loved disciple: "Behold your son...behold your mother." And we hear Jesus addressing us.

#### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

 How does Jesus's compassion shown at Calvary differ from the actions of his disciples (Mark 14:50), the soldiers (Mark 23:36), and the crowd around the cross (Mark 15:29-30; John 19:15)? 2. What are some ways Christians can demonstrate that the church is their spiritual family?

NOTES:

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, thank you for thinking of your adopted family even as you suffered on the cross. May we be known as your brothers and sisters by doing your holy will. And may we love your family with the love you have poured into our hearts. Amen.



# Jesus Was Forsaken So You Can Be Accepted



"Now from the sixth bour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 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?' And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, 'This man is calling Elijah.' And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

MATTHEW 27:45-49

WHEN MARTIN LUTHER once studied this passage, "He continued for a long time without food, and sat wide awake but as motionless as a corpse." Finally, he cried out, "God forsaken of God! Who can understand it!" Jesus's cry of God-forsakenness—though hard to understand—offers rich comfort for those who look to Christ for acceptance.

#### **CHRIST FORSAKEN IN DARKNESS**

During Jesus's crucifixion, at what should have been the brightest part of the day, "The sun's light failed" (Luke 23:45). God judges through darkness. The ninth plague against Egypt so darkened the land that the people "did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days" (Exod. 10:21-23). It was as if Egypt's moral shadiness became palpable as a sign of God's displeasure against them. In the same way, through the darkness at Calvary, God announced his hatred of sin.

But Jesus was in that darkness. He described hell as "the outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30). When John saw an angel open the bottomless pit, smoke belched out and darkened the sun (Rev. 9:2). God wants us to know that "Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead." God turned his radiant face away from Jerusalem, where the curse-bearer hung, and darkness reigned (Luke 23:53).

From a place of eerie, disorienting blackness, from the deepest night of the soul, Christ cried out: "My God, you've totally abandoned me. Why would you do that?" Under incredible duress, the Son lost sight of the Father's abiding love, the way airplane pilots have crashed simply

because darkness obliterated their sense of vertical orientation. From all appearances, Jesus had become overmatched and outwitted by his opponents, rejected by his God and Father. "The Father had really withdrawn Himself from His inward consciousness," and in the capacity of sin-bearer, Jesus was truly forsaken. He cried out in anguish.

Mockers answered him (Matt. 27:47-49). Whether out of misunderstanding or malice, the bystanders suggested that Jesus cried out for rescue, not to his God, but to Elijah. The man who claimed to be God's beloved Son should seek help from a long-dead prophet? How pathetic. Even Jesus's cry of dereliction added to his humiliation. Why is this happening?

Christ is not on the cross for his own sake but for those he came to save. He is *for* those forsaken in darkness.

#### **CHRIST BECAME SIN FOR US**

Christ is the "propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). At his death, as a vicarious sufferer, Jesus bore God's hatred of sin, what unbelievers will face on judgment day and for eternity. "Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord's substitution for us" that he could call himself forsaken by God. But his forsakenness brought about a glorious exchange. He became sin so that we might become righteous (2 Cor. 5:21). Believers trust not merely in a message but in a person who truly endured our curse and cancelled its claim against us!

# Jesus Was Forsaken *So You* Can Be Accepted



"Now from the sixth bour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 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?' And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, 'This man is calling Elijah.' And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

MATTHEW 27:45-49

### CHRIST GUARANTEES GOD WILL NEVER FORSAKE US

Sometimes we feel like Jesus did. "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Ps. 10:1) We hear no answer. To Jesus, too, God held back words to stress the atonement's seriousness.

But God *did* answer Jesus. In the resurrection God said, "My Son, My Son, I have not rejected you. I've never been prouder of you than when you suffered on the cross. Return to your honored place at my right hand." Jesus was "once forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by Him." By faith our standing with God is as secure as Jesus's union with the Father.

#### **CHRIST IS OUR LIGHT IN DARKNESS**

Behind the literal darkness that plunged Calvary into uncertainty, God's love blazed. He loved his Son who was glorifying his Father by doing his will (John 10:17). And he loved his people: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Christ's death is in the past tense, but God shows his love in the present. Because of Calvary, nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:39).

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- 1. Why did Jesus experience God's dark judgment on the cross? (See 2 Cor. 5:21.)
- 2. How are you comforted by Christ's willingness to face God's frown so we could enjoy his smile?

#### **NOTES:**

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord, none of us has ever known Jesus's sense of abandonment. Thank you, Jesus, for enduring hurt for us. And thank you, Holy Trinity that, through the unbroken unity of the Godhead, we can live with you through faith in Christ. Amen.

# Only a Thirsty Savior Can Satisfy You



"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth."

JOHN 19:28-29

PHYSICAL THIRST IS A CRAVING for fluids triggered by the brain upon sensing low body moisture volume or high blood salinity. Severe thirst can be maddening. Eventually, it's fatal.

But we can be thirsty in other ways. Entertainment, work, accomplishments, wealth, and many other worthy pursuits will never ultimately satisfy us. We're like the woman Jesus met at the well who tried to assuage her thirsty soul with romantic relationships but remained parched (John 4). God gave his Son to be living water for us. So how could Jesus, the bottomless well, thirst? And how does his thirst encourage us to be satisfied in him?

### JESUS THIRSTED TO "FULFILL THE SCRIPTURE"

Jesus had just spoken the first words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That same psalm later says, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death" (15; cf. Ps. 69:3). In response, Jesus received cheap sour wine—the kind consumed by those in the social margins (John 19:29-30)—again confirming the message of the prophets: "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Ps. 69:21).

Jesus announced his thirst to further prove that the Psalms testified about him. The saints in the Old Testament were physically and spiritually thirsty people. They were longing for the coming of the Messiah, the one who would lead them "beside the still waters" (Ps. 23:2). Jesus wanted them to know that the Good Shepherd had come! Despite the hellish agony Jesus faced, he was thinking about us—he wants us to know that we

can fully trust him. He is the savior God promised to send to thirsty people.

# JESUS THIRSTED TO SHOW HIS TRUE HUMANITY

Only a true human could pay the penalty for our sin. Jesus is not pretending to be thirsty to teach us spiritual principles about himself. "A man scourged, bleeding, and hanging on a cross under the Near-Eastern sun would be so desperately dehydrated that thirst would be part of the torture."9 "He had already hung nearly six hours on the cross. The blood vessels of His sacred body are almost dried up...His tongue cleaves to His jaws. His lips burn, and a drop of water seems a great refreshment to Him."10 Jesus truly sympathizes with all the pains and discomforts that come with living in a sin-afflicted world. And to prove this to us, he experienced the most regular, day-to-day trouble of thirst. If Jesus suffered the most common, mundane human discomforts, you can be sure: None of your troubles are foreign to his experience (Heb. 2:17). Next time you're thirsty, thank God that Jesus was willing to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).

# JESUS THIRSTED TO PROVE HIS ACCURSEDNESS

The Bible uses thirst to describe God's judgment. God swore to make unfaithful Israel a "dry land, and slay her with thirst" (Hos. 2:3; cf. Deut. 28.48). When God judged Jerusalem, people's tongues clung to the roofs of their mouths for thirst (Lam. 4:4; cf. Ps. 137:6; Amos 8:11). Jesus's most powerful parable about hell has a rich man

# Only a Thirsty Savior Can Satisfy You



"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth."

JOHN 19:28-29

pleading, "Dip the end of [your] finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

Christ's thirst indicates the hellish agony that he endured on the cross. Jesus's suffering was a cup he had to drink (Mark 14:36). He drank it. Now his throat burned, and his only comfort is bitterness. Every cell of his body was becoming a sickly, salty brine as he emptied the poisoned cup of God's justice. Jesus fully endured our curse for sin.

# JESUS THIRSTED TO QUENCH OUR THIRST

God's wayward people are "dried up with thirst" (Isa. 5:13). But God promised that, though "their tongue is parched with thirst," he will answer them and not forsake them (Isa. 41:17). By wondrous love, Jesus was "willing to suffer burning thirst in order that for his people he might be the everlasting fountain of living water." He had made this sure promise: "Whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). When Christ ascended to his Father's right hand in glory he declared, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (Rev. 21:6).

How shall we respond? Acknowledge to God your thirstiness. Admit forsaking God, "the fountain of living waters," and digging for yourself "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). Ask for the water of eternal life gained for us at the cross. And accept God's promise: You "shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore" (Rev. 7:16).

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- In which ways do you thirst?
- 2. How does it comfort you to know that Jesus thirsted?

#### NOTES:

	······
	······
	······
	·····
	······
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
	·····
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
	·····
	······
	······
	······

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord, as the old hymn says, "From fullest bliss that earth imparts we turn unfilled to thee again." "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (Ps. 90:14).

# What Jesus Finished *On the Cross*



"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), Ithirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Fesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

JOHN 19:28-30

environmentalist, and anarchist whose last words allegedly were, "I did what I could." These are noble words. Jesus says them about the woman who anointed him for death with costly oil—"She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). Don't you want to do what you can? Still, the words betray unmet goals and unfinished work.

Imagine if these had been the last words of Jesus. To some, Jesus seemed a failed revolutionary who claimed to be inaugurating an eternal kingdom which no eye could actually see. Some people still teach that Christ did what he could, and we must do what we can; we're saved through cooperation with Jesus. But Jesus didn't say, "I did what I could." He was much bolder. We get the sense that he requested a drink of sour wine (John 19:30) so that he could cry out with greater strength the powerful word: "Tetelestai!—It is finished." Jesus knew "all things were now accomplished" (John 19:28). The word for "accomplished" is also tetelestai. This opulent word means to conclude, fulfill, or accomplish. What did Jesus finish?

### CHRIST'S DEATH CONCLUDED HIS SUFFERING

When a loved one dies after a long, painful struggle, we often feel relieved: "It's all over. Her suffering is finished." The Book of Common Prayer offers this grave-side blessing: "We give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world." Life is hard. Death for God's friends is comforting.

Jesus's last words anticipate relief from

matchless pain. In his whole earthly ministry Jesus was battered like the ark in Noah's flood (1 Pet. 3:18-22). He described his coming death as an awful baptism: "And how distressed I am till it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). In the garden he prayed in anguish, "Let this cup pass from me!" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus's whole life was suffering. But his crucifixion left hardly a shred of dignity. Now Christ's disgrace is nearly over; his ascent to the throne is near! Christ came both to suffer for us and to reign over us.

# CHRIST'S DEATH FULFILLED THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Scriptures, said Jesus, "Bear witness about me" (John 5:39). Before his death, Jesus told the twelve that in Jerusalem, "Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31). "Scripture must be fulfilled in me...for what is written about me has its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37). After Jesus's death, Paul could say, "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb" (Acts 13:29 NKJV). In Christ' incarnation, sinless life, and sacrificial death, he fulfilled all the purposes of the prophesies, shadows, types, ceremonies, laws, and figures. With his death Jesus didn't cancel the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17). Instead, he brought to life what was written in it.

# CHRIST'S DEATH ACCOMPLISHED OUR SALVATION

As the matriarch Rachel was dying in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son. And as her soul was departing (for

# What Jesus Finished *On the Cross*



"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Fesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

JOHN 19:28-30

she was dying)" she named her son (Gen. 35:16-19). So too, in Christ's death he births beloved children of God whom he will see in glory (Isa. 53:10-11). To use another image, in his death the wages of sin have been paid from an infinite account. By death Christ seals a promise that frees us from Satan's grip. The power of death—which had exercised an unmitigated reign of terror since Adam—is broken! "By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Charles Wesley put it this way: "He has our salvation wrought, he our captive souls has bought, he has reconciled to God, he has washed us in his blood."14

When was the last time you truly finished a job? We hardly know what that means! At the start of his public ministry Jesus told his disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus was sustained throughout his ministry by that great goal. Nearing the cross, Jesus prayed to God, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4). When Jesus says, "It is finished," he's saying—as Paul later would—"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Finished all the types and shadows of the ceremonial law;

Finished all that God had promised; Death and hell no more shall awe: "It is finished! It is finished!" Saints, from hence your comfort draw.<sup>15</sup>

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- What might the people around the cross have felt and thought about Jesus's loud cry, "It is finished"?
- 2. How can Jesus's words comfort people whose best intentions often result in unmet goals and unsatisfactory work?

#### **NOTES:**

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, thank you for finishing your saving work on the cross. Thank you for doing the works of righteousness that we couldn't even begin. Help us to trust entirely in your blood and merits. Amen.

# You Can Die *Like Jesus*



"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last."

JOHN 23:44-49

HERBERT RICHARDSON WAS about to be electrocuted by the state of Alabama. "Most people," he told his attorney, "don't get to sit and think all day about it being their last day alive." What if, like Herbert, you knew the exact minute of your death? As the moment drew near, how would you prepare? Most of us won't have this exact experience. But all of us should "number our days" (Ps. 90:12). The hourglass of our lives has been flipped.

Though innocent, Jesus knew the hour of his execution (John 16:32). Just before he drew his last breath he said something that can help us all live and die well: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46)

#### JESUS IS FULFILLING SCRIPTURE

David writes Psalm 31 as a man caught in a net (v. 4), with no hope but God. Like Jesus, David could say, "My eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. My life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing" (vv. 8-9). Both men heard "the whispering of many" as enemies schemed and plotted murder (v. 13).

But Psalm 31 is also a song of trust and devotion. "I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors" (vv. 14-15). "Into your hand I commit my spirit" (v. 5). David and Jesus committed their spirits into God's hands because they truly had no one else. David prayed that God would deliver him from death. Jesus prayed that God would deliver him through the resurrection from the dead (Mark 8:31). On the cross, Jesus was like a besieged city (Ps. 31:21) whose walls were

crumbling (John 2:19, 21), but he trusted in God's steadfast love (Ps. 31:21). All believers read and sing the Psalms in harmony with Jesus.

#### **JESUS IS REVEALING GOD**

In Psalm 31 David calls God a refuge (vv. 1, 2, 4) and a fortress (vv. 2-3). God helps all who seek him, and Jesus too could trust God to receive his spirit through death. Jesus used the image of God's hands to symbolize the refuge he sought from his Father. They are strong enough to create the world (Ps. 8:6; 95:5; 102:25), good enough to accomplish justice for the oppressed (Ps. 10:14; cf. 111:7), and kind enough to take away our heaviest burden (Ps. 81:6). By appearances, Jesus had fallen into wicked hands. But stronger, holier, kinder hands held him up.

Even on the cross, Jesus commanded his destiny. How else could he cry out his last words in a loud voice (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37) and then die? Jesus laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:11, 15). "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down" (v. 18). The savior of the world had to be a willing victim killed in the place of traitors. As the champion of his people, Jesus deliberately engaged death. Abraham Kuyper used creative grammar to show that "in his departure he is no longer passive. In dying he dies himself." Death didn't take him.

Jesus is a king (Luke 23:3) in complete control of even the last enemy, death. He entrusts himself into the strong, just, gentle hands of his Father. People like us who are frail as dust need just this message.



# You Can Die *Like Jesus*



"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last."

JOHN 23:44-49

#### JESUS IS TEACHING US HOW TO DIE

Death can be frightening. But, united to Jesus by true faith, we can say with him at our last moment, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Not long after, the deacon Stephen used Jesus's words at his own execution. "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit'" (Acts 7:59). In his greatest need and as life slipped away, he firmly believed God's promise: "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8).

What's the alternative? Without the hope of being with the Lord, what do you say as you leave this life? Those who believe in no afterlife hope that death is their annihilation. In reality, at death, those who waste their life in disbelief lose their soul (Mark 8:36). Many people fear death no matter how secular or religious they claim to be. Fear of death enslaves mortals. When Jesus died, he conquered death and released from bondage those whom the fear of death had tyrannized (Heb. 2:15).

In later Judaism, Psalm 31, from which Jesus's last words come, was used as a bedtime prayer. If you trust in Jesus, you can close your eyes and commit yourself to God, believing that he will care for you whether you awaken in this life or in the next.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- How does Jesus's last saying from the cross shed light on Hebrews 2:15? He died to "deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."
- How are you preparing to die?

#### **NOTES:**

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Father, we are frail, dying creatures. Strengthen us with the life of our Savior Jesus and, at the right time, receive our spirits into your hands, and keep us safe until the glorious day of resurrection. Amen.



# **Endnotes**



- 1 Matthew Henry, Matthew to John, vol. 5, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (Old Tappan, NJ.: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 826.
- 2 F.W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior: Meditations on the Last Days of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1947), 364.
- 3 Sam Allberry, Seven Myths of Singleness (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019), 64.
- 4 Krummacher. The Suffering Savior, 377.
- 5 William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Mark, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 660.
- 6 Krummacher, The Suffering Savior, 384.
- 7 J.C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Matthew (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859), 394.
- 8 "Celebration of the Lord's Supper, Form 2" in *Liturgical Forms and Prayers* of the United Reformed Churches in North America (Wellandport, On.: United Reformed Churches in North America, 2018), 46.

- 9 D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 619.
- 10 F.W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior*, 389.
- 11 William Hendriksen, The Gospel of John, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 434.
- 12 James Bishop, *Epitaph for A Desert Anarchist: The Life and Legacy Of Edward Abbey* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 193.
- 13 The Book of Common Prayer, 4th ed (Standing Liturgical Commission of the Reformed Episcopal Church, 2005), 531.
- 14 Charles Wesley, "Jesus Comes With All His Grace."
- 15 Jonathan Evans, "Hark! the Voice of Love and Mercy."
- 16 Kuyper, Abraham. In the Shadow of Death: Meditations for the Sick-room and at the Death-bed (1893; reprint, Audubon, NJ.: Old Paths Publications, 1994), 238.

