

The Seven Crowning Words

by Peter Masters

The sermon explores the significance of the seven words of Christ on the cross, highlighting their importance in understanding his sacrifice and our salvation.

Duration: 43:17

Scripture: Mark 15:34, Luke 23:34-46, John 19:26-27, John 19:30

Topics: "The Cross", "Atonement"

Description

This sermon delves into the profound significance of the seven last words of Jesus Christ on the cross, highlighting the immense sacrifice and atonement He made for humanity. Each word reflects a different aspect of Christ's mission, from forgiveness and salvation to the completion of redemption. The sermon emphasizes the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice, his divine power, and the unparalleled love demonstrated through his actions.

Transcript

What I propose to do now, in the brief time we have, is to look at the famous seven words of Christ upon the cross, seven glorious statements, and we cannot really do justice to them, but I felt it's so very many years since I presented all of them, just in one single brief study, and they are so marvellous, and they are so rich. So here, if we can manage it, I'll begin the time of the seven words of Jesus Christ on the cross. The first being, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

They had crucified him, they'd nailed him to that cross. He was to hang and suffer there, in order to bear away the punishment due to his people for their sin. As we constantly emphasise, not merely to suffer the physical punishment, terrible, terrible as it was, that was almost the least of his problems, but to suffer that invisible, indescribable, eternal weight of punishment, equivalent and more to all that should have been poured out upon us, lasting forever and ever, to bear all that punishment compressed into the space of six hours, in order to make an atonement for his people, to pay the debt that they owe to God, to take the divine wrath, the justice, the punishment of God upon all our sin, if we belong to him, if we're among his people, if we depend upon Christ alone for salvation.

And this is what he began to bear, especially from the moment he was nailed to that tree. But you remember that he'd been through the terrible experience in the garden of Gethsemane, when he had even just a preview of this, in order to demonstrate to us his complete obedience, where he would pray to the Father, saying, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless thy will be done. Well, not for a

moment did he waver, not for a moment did he mean to ask to be excused from what he was about to do.

He had agreed it before the world was made, with his Father and with the Holy Spirit, the triune Godhead in their eternal counsel, had determined that Christ, the second person of the Trinity, equal with the Father, would come and die for billions of people. No, not for a moment would he go back on that undertaking within the Godhead, but for our benefit. If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless thy will.

It was a demonstration of his perfect obedience. But his being was already tortured and wrecked. And then, of course, there were the trials and the abuse he suffered, and the punching and the suffering.

And then there was the scourging, a terrible Roman scourging, with thirty-nine lashes, but more in all probability, with thongs, with bone and metal attached to them, thrashed and thrashed until the wounds lay open. And in that state and condition, he was nailed to Calvary's cross with huge nails, massive nails, the experts tell us. Nailed, probably not through his hands literally, but through his wrists, so it is believed, and through his ankles.

And it was in that state and condition, spat upon, spurned, rejected, humiliated, the creator of the world, that he looked down upon the people with their faces filled with hate, and he says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. There had never been such a prayer offered, never before this time. Afterward there would be others, but not of the same order.

Dying Stephen would say, lay not this sin to their charge. But, of course, he was not suffering anything like as much as Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. But you see him reflecting the very character of the Saviour, one of his earliest followers.

And a noble army of martyrs in the succeeding centuries have prayed for their persecutors. So he produced generations of people to some extent reflecting his own wonderful character and capacity to love, even in terrible affliction. But there was never suffering like his, and never a prayer before or since offered quite like this.

Well, the prophet said he would go silently to his sufferings, and so he did. As far as any rejuvenation were concerned, any reviling of his attackers and his enemies, no, he was silent in that respect, as a lamb to the slaughter. But on the cross, his first words were in prayer for God, and they were the beginning of his wonderful intercession for lost souls.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. He was solely engaged in the work of redemption from the outset of his suffering. Why it's been argued in the past did he pray this prayer as those terrible nails were hammered in, or did he pray it in the early moments after he hung on Calvary's cross, of course we do not know.

But his intercession begins for so many people, and his intercession therefore wasn't just with the voice, Father forgive them, the voice of the eternal Son of God, God and man, but also something else spoke as well as his voice. His blood spoke, his blood ran freely, and the voice of the Son of God, coupled with the suffering and the blood, why that is intercession, that is prayer, which is going to be effective for all eternity to a vast number of lost souls. Father, he says, Father, he is still in submission to the Father, he's come to represent us.

He laid his divine authority aside to come down into the world to be as one of us, subject to the law of God, and here even on Calvary he's acting in obedience to the Father, and he voluntarily subordinates himself as he prays. Father, what a prayer of grace, Father forgive them, they've done so many good things in spite of what they're doing now. No, nothing like that in the prayer, just forgive them.

Of course they deserve nothing, we deserve nothing, we have no merit, nothing to offer at all. The great intercessory prayer of grace, just forgive them freely and graciously. He seems, if we're careless in our reading of his words, he seems to offer an excuse for the people.

Father forgive them for they know not what they do. Can they be excused on account of their ignorance? No, the ignorance is no excuse, the ignorance is willful ignorance. Has he not performed before them amazing miracles, and even raised the dead, and of course sight for the blind? Astonishing things, they should know he is divine.

Has his character not spoken volumes? Even now it is on the cross, no reviling, no hostility, just concern for them. Why he fulfills prophecy perfectly, this ignorance of theirs that they are putting to death, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, their expected Messiah, even the superscription written over him reminds them of this. It's inexcusable ignorance, it's willful ignorance.

So why does the Lord say, Father forgive them for they know not what they do? And the answer is that their ignorance is not an excuse, it is that their appalling ignorance stirs the mercy and compassion of God. It's as though the Saviour says, Father forgive them for look at their state and condition, their minds are so blinded, they're so hostile and prejudiced. On that account the divine mercy is stirred, and millions will be saved through mercy and grace alone.

The reason for mercy, not the excuse for their conduct, the reason for mercy is look at them, how pathetic, how tragic, how sad, and that's why Christ died for us. He pitied us, he looked upon us in our madness and our rebellion and our ignorance and our blindness afar from soul, and his divine pity is aroused. And that's his example for the church.

We are to be praying for the lost as he did on Calvary's cross. We are to declare the message of forgiveness, Father forgive them. We are to be enlightening them, they know not what they do, so let us dispel the ignorance and preach the gospel and spread it far and wide, even to his enemies, even to our enemies.

The example of Christ for us. And don't we learn wonderful things from this as Christ looks down upon that great crowd and the hatred and the hostility that even the worst of people, and that includes us, can be forgiven and can be saved. And so we also learn that he never pleads in vain.

And when Christ says, Father forgive them, the result is that almost at once, within a period of a few weeks, thousands of people are saved. We don't know, but we think the centurion was saved. His profession in this passage is very strong, his heart is stirred, his eyes seem to be opened, maybe the detailed soldiers were with him, some of them.

We see immediately the people going away from the site when the crucifixion is over, and they're stunned, and they're beating their breasts according to their culture, and they're amazed at the standing and stature of Christ. And surely the work of God is in their hearts already, and certainly when Peter gives the first sermon on the day of Pentecost, three thousand are saved, and very soon afterwards within days another

five thousand. So the prayer of Christ is answered, he never pleads in vain.

Well I must hurry, look at the second word from Calvary's cross, Luke 23 and verse 43. Here it is, and Jesus said unto him, to the one of the dying thieves, verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise. Well according to Matthew and to Mark, both the thieves that were crucified with Christ, murderers, insurrectionists, professional mercenaries, young men who'd chosen a life of crime and violence for their living, to enrich themselves, hiring themselves out for the anti-Roman insurrection and so on, well they both raged at Christ, and they both hurled insults and worked their own pain out of their bodies by unleashing abuse upon him.

But one of them was changed by the power of the Spirit of God, and we read about it in Luke's gospel. And as he appeals to Christ, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom, Christ dying on Calvary's cross acts as God and answers his prayer. There we see him, even in his atoning death we see his divinity.

Now centuries ago, one great divine made this comment or words to this effect, that Christ's last companion on earth was a criminal. That is to say, the one in close proximity to him, who interacted with him, who identified with him, was in sympathy with him, exercised faith in him, spoke to him, his last companion on earth was a criminal, a dying thief, and probably one of the first companions in Christ who can tell in paradise this day. He said, you will be with me in paradise, and what a message there is even in that for us.

So many things we can derive from that, we've hardly time. But you know, if Christ so spooked and condescended in his kindness to make his final earthly sympathetic relating companion, a dying criminal and a vicious and violent man, well, don't anyone here ever think, Christ will never save me? Why will he deal with me? Why should he hear my prayer? What a demonstration of the readiness of Christ to save anyone, including the very worst that he identified in that way. And then you may think, well, how can I be sure if I trust in Christ that I will make it to eternal glory? On Calvary's cross, you see the youngest imaginable believer newly saved today.

Thou shalt be with me in paradise. The wonderful forces of comfort and information, even in these last words of the Savior. That dying thief recognized him, who he was.

This man has done nothing amiss. He repented of his sin. You can see it in what he said to his fellow insurrectionists.

We are receiving a just reward for our deeds. You can see it in his prayer of yielding and repentance and submission to Christ. Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

And Christ looked upon him and said these words, verily, certainly, even though you've only just prayed, here is a certainty. One of the strongest things Christ could say. Verily, assuredly, certainly, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

The word means a garden, in the garden of heaven. That paradise of Christ to which all who trust in him go, immediately they die, waiting the final day of judgment, when of course there'll be a renewed heaven and earth, and we shall receive our resurrection bodies, and the final eternal chapter will come into being. We are in the paradise of Christ, which is so much better.

And you see here, Christ saving to the end. He's nearing his own death. The three hours of darkness only are before him.

And yet, he's saving souls, assuring a man of salvation, receiving his repentance. Verily, this day, today, shalt thou be with me in paradise, our saviour and his dying love. If ye can love an evil man and save him, and give him words of compassion and comfort and assurance, in the terrors of Calvary, what a saviour he is, and what kindness he has.

The salvation of that man transcended all his own suffering. Well, that man, he was going to suffer one more test. His legs would be broken, but his eyes would be on paradise, upon Christ, and he would die a happy and a forgiven man.

Let me take you to the third word very quickly, because our time is going. It's in the Gospel of John, chapter 19 and verse 26. And we should be brief with this.

I wish we had all day, but we haven't. Chapter 19, verse 26. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciples standing by whom he loved, that is John, they had approached nearer to the cross as time went by, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son.

Then saith he to the disciple, John, behold thy mother. And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. This is the third word of Christ from the cross, and it is his provision for his mother, his provision for all his people is seen here.

He is the son of man who hath not where to lay his head, but he's provided for his mother. He has planned for Mary as he does for us also. He has a sovereign will for our lives, and even in his suffering and death, he's exhibiting his will for his people towards his mother.

He addresses her as woman. No doubt he says it most tenderly, most kindly, but why woman? Why not mother? Does that seem callous within the culture of the days and among those people? He should by rights have addressed her with that reverence as mother, but he didn't. Woman.

And he says to her, behold thy son, John, the disciple is now your son. And he says to John, behold your mother, and he passes her into the care of John. But it's more than just passing her into his care.

Don't you see what he's doing? He is saying, you must not look at me as your son. From now on, you are not my mother and I your son, because if you look at me like that, from today onwards that will bring you unfulfilled suffering. You will be mourning the loss of a son.

You will be weeping over one who to your mind showed such promise and did such amazing things for thousands of people, and yet was so cruelly taken and executed and hung on that cross. Why, that would be a mother's sorrow beyond description. But the way you must look at me, he says in this word, woman, is not as your son, but as the saviour of the world.

I'm going to suffer, I'm going to die, and you, like every other Christian believer, must say, he purchased salvation for billions. He came and he saw through the most amazing accomplishment imaginable to the human mind. He's risen from the dead and he's conquered for a vast host of people who will inhabit eternity in happiness and in bliss.

He is the glorious saviour who's accomplished redemption. So if not mother, there will be a word that denotes suffering. It's woman.

Look upon him as your mother, and the implication is, see me as the saviour of the world. And that's the sense behind what he says and how he addresses us. And he's our Lord, our saviour, and our provider.

It's rather like the Lord's Supper. When we gather for the Lord's Supper, do we mourn the death of Christ? Is it like a funeral service? Of course not. We don't even lament the sufferings of Christ at the Lord's Supper.

Strictly speaking, what we sorrow at is that our sin caused it. We sorrow at our sin necessitating the death of Christ. But we don't mourn him because it's an amazing accomplishment, and he's risen from the dead, and it's saved so many people down the centuries, and is still doing so, and will do so until Christ comes again.

When I go to the fourth word, and it's in Mark 15, and this is so important and so valuable. In verse 34, at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabaxerai, which is being interpreted, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Well, it's a quotation from Psalm 22 and verse 1, which goes on to say, why art thou so far from helping me? And this cry, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me, shows us that he must suffer alone. Father and Holy Spirit cannot help him.

He must suffer as a man would suffer, as we would suffer. He must not be excused any part of the suffering of our sin, because then he would not be making a perfect atonement for us. He must suffer separation from his Father in the deepest and most profound sense, that separation from the Father which we should suffer forever and forever.

And he says, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? That troubles people. Why, he asks. It's not a why which is asked as if he did not know the answer.

Of course he knows the answer. It's a why that is said firstly to express the depth of desolation which he suffered, the depth of the abandonment by the Father which he suffered for us, the breathtaking shock to his system, the dismay, the agony, the gloom, the anguish. Why is the great gasp which expresses the depth of his separation from the Father? The answer, of course, why is human sin.

Oh, so much we could derive from this. But you know through his life Christ frequently asked questions that were not asked because he needed the answer, but they were asked for our benefit. For instance, the demon possessed young man.

How long, he asks, has he been like this? He knew the answer, but we were to know the answer. Since he was a child, says the parent, he asked the question so that we would have the answer. He asked the question for our benefit.

And when he says why, why am I so forsaken? It is to put the question into our minds. Why was he forsaken by the Father? Because he was atoning for our sin, because he was suffering the eternal separation from God and all goodness and happiness that we should suffer. That's why.

Why? So that he could reconcile us with himself. The why is asked for us, dear friends, entirely for our benefit. Well, I go on to the fifth word, and it's from John chapter 19 again, and this time verse 28.

After this, this is after the hours of darkness, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst. All prophecy is fulfilled on Calvary's cross. I thirst.

He is God, but he is also man, and in the terrible suffering he thirsts. Psalm 22 is fulfilled once again, but he bore our eternal thirst. We deserve to thirst and thirst and thirst forever with endless longing and anguish and pain, never to be satisfied.

We've lived for our lusts and desires in this life, on and on, wanting, wanting, aspiring, but in hell our lusts will never be satisfied. Nothing but remorse and horror and dying craving, and all that punishment for that was borne by Christ. I thirst.

Remember Christ's parable, send Lazarus, the rich man says in hell, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. And that tormenting flame had to be concentrated on Christ, and he bore the punishment for us. I thirst.

He suffered that terrible inner and outer thirst, so that we could receive and be a fountain of living waters, the wonderful work of Christ. And I come to the fifth word from Calvary's cross, also from this 19th chapter of John, and it's there in verse 30. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, it is finished.

And there was one more word to come, not recorded in John, we'll look at it in a moment. It is finished. And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.

It is finished. Finished. Oh friends, the Greek word translated finished, Christ would have used an Aramaic word, but in the New Testament of course it's in Greek.

And the Greek word that represents the Aramaic word he would have used, actually means more than finished. He didn't say just it is finished. He said, it is completed.

That's a little bit different. It is discharged. It is consummated.

It's one word in the Greek. Completed, consummated, discharged. There have been receipts found from time very near to the New Testament period.

In Greek, receipts which have written across them this one word, completed, discharged, finished. Of course, on a receipt it meant paid in full. And that's exactly what Christ meant, finished, paid in full, discharged.

The righteous indignation of the Holy God poured out upon sinners. And Christ stood voluntarily in our place and he bore it away. And his six words from the cross, finished, discharged, paid in full.

The punishment taken for every single sin of every redeemed person, paid in full. It is completed. It is finished.

A Greek word translated finished, well, it's telos. It means goal. It means the end in the sense of the objective.

All is attained. All is achieved. He says, it is finished.

I have obeyed the law on behalf of all who will be redeemed. I have paid their punishment of sin. Only Christ could say this.

Only Christ. When you and I die, even if we're saved, we will never be able to say at the end of life, it is finished, in the sense that all is complete. We will go gladly to heaven but we will say to ourselves before we die, if only I could have done this.

If only I could have done that. If only if we die young I could have completed providing for my family. If only if I could have completed my duties.

Everybody dies incomplete. Nothing is ultimately and finally achieved. Only Christ could say, it is finished.

The greatest human being in history, well, the greatest human being in history is a man or woman with much sin, totally indebted to Christ, saved if he is saved only by Christ's grace. But imagine the greatest head of government, monarch, prime minister. Can he say at the end of his office, it is finished.

We now have a perfect and a happy society. We've now achieved perfect fairness and everything. Of course he can't.

Nobody can say I'm a country. I finished it. Young people think of the greatest athletes.

Maybe he got eight gold medals at the Olympics. Maybe for sprints, maybe for swimming. Can he say, I've done it, I've achieved all.

Amazing though it seems, within years at most somebody will break all those records somebody will do better and the decades will go by and very few people will even remember his name. He cannot say, I've accomplished everything I could have accomplished. If there is a scientist, a technologist, an inventor and you invent a great machine and everybody gasps and it's amazing.

Within 20, 30, 40 years it'll be on the scrap heap and probably in a museum and there'll be far better machines and the computers will no longer fill a room. They'll come down and they'll fill a laptop, even a palm held computer and smaller still and on things go on and on. Only Christ could say what I came to do is fully accomplished.

If you have him, you have friends not only the savior of the world but you have the only one who has achieved everything that he set out to achieve. He's purchased salvation for billions. He's paid to be the lord of the universe and to end this world of time and bring in his own glorious eternity.

It is accomplished. It is consummated. It is finished he says and now with the dignity of that cry you can't supplement that.

There are foolish people who think they've got to pay something for their salvation. They don't like us talking about salvation by grace alone. Surely there's got to be some ritual, some ceremony.

Surely I've got to be a much better person and earn it myself. You can't add to an accomplishment which is as perfect as Christ's. He has accomplished salvation and that's the only way but the seventh word and our last word from Calvary's cross is from Luke's gospel chapter 23 and verse 46 and I can only really refer to it.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice it is finished presumably. He then said father into thy hands I commend my spirit. That's an interesting word.

I commend my spirit. I think it's wonderful. But you know what that word means in the Greek? I commend my spirit.

Into thy hands I present, I place, literally I place alongside. Father he says. His last words from the cross right to the end.

He is the subordinate son. He's doing it all on our behalf. He's taking our place.

Soon the father will be his equal once again in every sense. Now for this dying moment it is still father. He's our representative to the end.

I commend. I present. He hath power for his spirit to take flight into the presence of the father and to place himself alongside his heavenly father.

Why doesn't this tell you more forcefully than almost anything else that everything he's done was voluntary. All that he's been through right to the very end he saw it through and then demonstrated his divine power. I commend.

I deliver. I present my spirit. Everything has been accomplished.

He made his soul an offering for sin. It was voluntary. He gave his life voluntarily as he said a ransom for many.

Take me he said to the father for them. Take my obedience and punish me and I will be their representative. What love.

The love of Christ. The love of Christ that he should do all this so voluntarily for us. The dying words of greatest dignity of our Lord and our Saviour.

You must know him. You must have him. You cannot go through this world, through this life and stand at the end of life's journey without Christ, without having him to be your Lord and your Saviour and your sender.

Let's pray together. Oh God our gracious heavenly father help us all take these words inadequate and feeble as they are oh Lord and grant to every mind a deep realization of the wonder and the glory and the kindness and the love of Christ and the price that he paid to bear away our sin. Lord come descend work in our hearts and help us all that none may be left out but that all may know him and have him.

We ask it in his name for his sake. Amen.

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