

GCCSI DEVOTIONAL



LENT

2020

Week 5

Jesus' Statements on the Cross

Day 1: "Father Forgive Them"

Luke 23:32-38

This week we will be meditating on the cross and we will be focusing specifically on Jesus' seven statements on the Cross. The statements of Jesus are significant because they tell us what Jesus was thinking and helping us to understand what was going on as Jesus was on the cross.

Today's passage brings us from the trials and the condemnation of Jesus to his crucifixion. The first set of Jesus' words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", staggers the mind. How could Jesus say something like that in the midst of such torture and pain? Why did he say it? What did he mean? Before we answer those questions, it's important that the context in which these words were said and who it is that was saying it.

First the context. Jesus' request to the Father was not made in a moment of ease or comfort. The passage tells us that the night before, Jesus had been abandoned by his closest friends, sentenced by people who already presumed his guilt, and was beaten and harassed by soldiers who treated torture like a sport. But even after Jesus' beating the suffering didn't end. Jesus was forced to carry a heavy wooden beam, the very instrument that would be the cause of his death. He was so weak from the suffering that he collapsed and needed help to carry the cross up the hill. Even after he made it up the hill it was not over. While he was hanging on the cross, the religious leaders continued to humiliate him. The soldiers around him joined in mocked him, while others were casting lots for his clothes. Above him was a sign posted by Pilate to mock his claim that he was the King of the Jews. It is at this time when Jesus prayed for the Father to, "forgive them".

How could Jesus do such a thing? From a human perspective, Jesus was just a man. For the leaders who sought his death he was just another Messianic pretender. To the soldiers, he was just another Jewish criminal sentenced to death by the Roman government. But the Gospels tell us that he was something more. Jesus wasn't just a normal human being. Jesus was God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity. He is the one angels' worship and God the Father takes delight. The Gospel writers tell us that God come down and make himself known. Jesus' role is to be the mediator between humanity and God the Father. Jesus took on human flesh in order to be able to identify with us and show us what God is like. But he also took on flesh to represent us to God. But Jesus was not just God's representative, he was God himself. When Jesus was put on the cross, humanity didn't just put God's ambassador on the cross,

we put God himself on the cross. But amazingly, while Jesus was on the cross, he continued to play the role of mediator. He asked the Father to "forgive them for they know not what they do."

What people didn't know was that something was happening at this moment they could not see. Jesus was accomplishing what no human in their sin could do. Jesus was reconciling people back to a right relationship with God. Even while he was suffering and being abused, Jesus was asking for forgiveness for those he represented. He was asking for the Father not to hold this act of sin and rebellion against not only his torturers, but against humanity itself. Why? In representing humanity before the Father, Jesus was saying in effect, "These humans don't know what they're doing. Don't hold it against them." Jesus is not making an excuse for the people causing his suffering. Nor was he saying that the people who crucified Jesus are in a state of forgiveness apart from repentance. But whoever would turn from sin and turn to Christ, there is Good News. Your sin is not so great that Jesus would stop interceding for you. While you still draw breath, you have time to repent.

Jesus of course would not stay dead. He would rise from the dead. And even now Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, mediating between us and the Father. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father in heaven interceding for us. So when we wrestle with sin and guilt, let us turn to the one who loved us even to the point of dying for us on the cross.

Questions for Meditation:

1. How does Jesus' pleading on behalf of humanity make you feel?
2. How does Jesus' request help you when you doubt God's love and forgiveness?
3. How does Jesus' request help you when dealing with people who have wronged you?

Day 2: "Today You Will Be with Me in Paradise"

Luke 23:32-33, 39-43

Jesus' crucifixion was not meant to be a noble one. The cross was meant to be humiliating. For people in the Roman world, to be associated with someone crucified was shameful. In line with this shame, Jesus was crucified in between two criminals. We're not told what their crime was, but Rome reserved crucifixion for the most serious offenses. Jesus was put there to show what kind of person Rome considered Jesus to be: a criminal deserving of death. Jesus was mocked by those who saw him. Luke tells us that even one of the criminals next to Jesus spoke disdainfully mocked and yelled at Jesus. "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us! (39)".

But the other criminal rebuked his fellow criminal. "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 for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." This criminal recognized his own misdeeds and how he had wasted his life in sin. But as this criminal approached death, he recognized that his standing before God was not good. He had heard of Jesus and that Jesus was merciful to sinners. All this man could do was to fall on the mercy of Jesus. Then this criminal acted in great faith by asking, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Instead of Jesus saying, "Sorry I can't help you," or, "let's trust in God", Jesus said to the man, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." There are several things we can observe from Jesus' statement:

First, even though Jesus himself is dying on the cross, he is still insisting that he has the power to promise eternal life. When Jesus says "Truly, I say to you", this is not a statement of uncertainty or wavering. Jesus was bold and audacious in life. He claimed this ability while he had popular support from the people. But now that his support was gone and he was dying on the cross, Jesus still held onto this claim. He also says, "I say to you". This is a promise based on his own authority. He didn't need to consult with someone, Jesus claimed that authority

Second, Jesus' claim was a strong promise of assurance. "You will be with me in paradise". Jesus made this claim with boldness. He didn't say, "I hope you'll be with me." He didn't pray to the Father that the man would be with him in paradise. Jesus declared what would happen.

Third, Jesus pointed to the hope of eternity after death for those who trust in him. Jesus said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise". Jesus

was talking about the place of comfort and blessing for righteous people. Jesus will also be there.

How is this statement Good News for you today? First, it tells us who Jesus is. Jesus was not just a religious teacher who taught people morals and "how to love each other." Jesus claimed even to the point of death that he was the one upon which eternal life depended. If a person trusted Jesus, he could give eternal life. He was consistent with his testimony even while on the cross. These are not the claims of a nice teacher- these are the claims of a Messiah. You can call him a liar, crazy, mistaken or true. But you cannot just call him a nice moral teacher. This means that you should genuinely evaluate Jesus' claims.

Second, it shows that there is mercy those who may be the vilest of sinners. The criminal came with no sense of entitlement. Nor with a sense that he deserved mercy. All he could do was depend on the mercy of Jesus. And in simple faith he asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into his kingdom. And Jesus freely gave him grace. This criminal truly had nothing to boast about- only in Jesus' kindness.

Lastly, there is hope even in death. In our circumstances today when unseen viruses stop huge economies and death can come suddenly, let us remember Christ's promise. Even on our deathbeds, let us trust in Christ- the one who can guarantee eternal life.

Questions for Meditation:

1. In what ways do you relate to the criminal on the cross?
2. Examine your thoughts and the actions of your life. Do you sometimes feel as if you are too far into sin that you cannot receive God's grace? Do you sometimes feel as if you are entitled to God's blessings?
3. How does Jesus' promise to the criminal give you comfort?

Day 3: "Woman, behold your son! Behold your mother!"

John 19:25-27

In today's passage, we see a glimpse into Jesus' relationship with his mother. Luke tells us that when Jesus was a baby, Mary was told that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35)- meaning that she too would experience deep sorrow because of this child. Truly as Mary saw her son on the cross, she was able to understand what that prophecy meant.

As Jesus hung on the cross, people mocked him. Soldiers were dividing up and casting lots on his one earthly possession, his clothes. But off to the side, he saw a group of women. His mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Among them there was also John the Disciple and the writer of the Gospel. It is in this moment where Jesus tells his mother, "Behold your son" and he tells his disciple, "Behold your mother!" John tells us that, "from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home."

Culturally speaking, one of the most vulnerable people in that society at the time were widows. There was no social security and many did not have access to banks. Mary certainly was a widow at this point since Joseph has not been mentioned since his childhood. Therefore traditionally, the eldest son had the responsibility of taking care of the family. In asking John to care for his mother, Jesus was not only fulfilling cultural obligations, but fulfilling the obligations of caring for his mother.

For Christians, it's always a fine line between caring for one's family and serving the Lord. Most times, the two are not in conflict. But sometimes they are and depending on the culture you may more closely associate, you may lean on one side more than the other. For those who are more western in their thinking, the tendency is to live independently and gain independence from your parents. For those who come from more socially dependent cultures, family obligations seem to be the most important. But how did Jesus do it?

Jesus shows us that while we are to care for our families, God's will is supposed to be the highest. This certainly does not mean that we neglect our families. God in fact calls us to honor our father and mother in the Ten Commandments. Jesus himself rebuked the Pharisees for telling people to use money that would normally go to caring for parents and use it to support the Temple (Mark 7:11-12). The Pharisees had put tradition before God's rules. But in another example, Jesus was also

distanced himself from his family. One time when Jesus was being slandered and people were saying that Jesus was demon possessed, his family came looking for him, presumably try to control him. Jesus said, that his true family members were those who hear the word of God and do it (Luke 8:19-21).

What do we make of this? Is Jesus being inconsistent? No. Jesus was putting the will of God the father above human traditions. He was being consistent by being obedient to God's will. And Jesus was still being consistent while Jesus was on the cross and taking care of the needs of his mother.

Questions for Meditation:

1. If you have parents: How do you often do things? Do you try to separate yourself from your parents or do you sometimes put family obligations before God?
2. If you are a parent: what is the culture of your family like? Do you desire ultimately for your child to obey God's will? What does the culture of your family teach your children?
3. How does Jesus' example challenge you?

Day 4: "Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachtani?"

Mark 15:33-39, Psalm 22

Most of the New Testament was originally written in Greek. Greek was the international language at the time and the writers were mostly concerned about getting the Gospel out. But there are a few lines in the New Testament that used Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke and taught. One of those lines was when Jesus hung on the cross. Near the end of Jesus' time on the cross, Jesus said these words, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus saying these words and both of them preserve Jesus' exact Aramaic words. There is a reason for this. In these words, we are able to see what Jesus was thinking while he was on the cross. We are also able to see that even in the end, people misunderstood Jesus.

Both Matthew and Mark translate the words of Jesus. Translated the words mean, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" What does this mean? On one hand, we can hear from these words what Jesus was experiencing and going through as he hung on the cross. Jesus was experiencing a sense of separation from the Father. It was a moment of great sorrow and pain. He felt as if he was cut off from his heavenly father. Many have understood it to be the separation Jesus felt as he bore the sins of the world. There is some truth to this. Theologically speaking, Jesus was being cut off and cursed by God while he hung on the cross. This was the punishment we deserved.

On the other hand, while Jesus was expressing his sense of sorrow, Jesus was also demonstrating faith at this moment. In Jesus' day, the Psalms were not numbered as they are today. The individual psalm was simply known by the first line of the psalm. Psalm 22 starts with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As a Jewish boy, Jesus would have had the psalm memorized and readily available in his mind. This was a psalm that David wrote to express his sorrow and his grief. David felt as if God had abandoned him and prayed this prayer. Jesus was expressing the same sentiment. But why do I say that the words express Jesus' faith? The psalm starts off by expressing David and Jesus' grief and pain. He talks about being surrounded and experiencing physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. Interestingly enough, the passage talks about his hands and feet being pierced. But the psalm doesn't end the way it began. The psalm talks about how great God asks God to deliver him. Then the psalm ends with hope that God will see David/Jesus and that the people of the earth will turn back to God.

What is interesting is the reaction of the people on the ground when they heard Jesus' statement. The people on the ground misunderstood what Jesus said. They thought he was calling on the prophet Elijah to come and rescue him. So someone got a sponge and filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick and gave it to Jesus to drink. Then they stood back to see if Elijah would rescue Jesus. At this point, Jesus uttered a cry and breathed his last.

Mark tells us two significant events happened at this moment. First, the curtain in the temple was torn in two. This was the curtain that separated the holiest part of the temple with the outside part of the temple. The tearing of the curtain was significant. God's presence was now made available to the whole world.

The second thing was that the Roman centurion who saw how Jesus died said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" It is telling that a Gentile, a foreigner recognized Jesus identity while many of Jesus' own countrymen could not.

From today's passage, we see three things. First, we Jesus' suffering, his wrestling with God and his trust in the Father with his one statement. Second, we see how even in Jesus' death many were unable to recognize Jesus, while some unexpected people were able to see who Jesus was. Last, we are able to see how in Jesus' death we are able to come into a right relationship with Christ. The torn curtain shows us that Jesus has made a way so we can have access to God.

Questions for Meditation:

1. How does Jesus turn to the Father in the midst of suffering? How does Jesus demonstrate faith while suffering?
2. Consider the various reasons why you or someone you know have a hard time recognizing Jesus' identity? In what ways can a person acknowledge Jesus' identity with their mind, but not their life?
3. How does it make you feel knowing that because of Jesus you now have access to God? In what ways do you need to grow in this knowledge? What are some ways you can grow in trusting God?

Day 5: "Father into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit"

Luke 23:44-49

Luke tells us that the time of Jesus' death was about the ninth hour (3 PM). Although it was the middle of the day, darkness was over the whole land. This darkness was perhaps due to heavy cloud cover, but darkness was a sign of God's judgment and wrath. The curtain was torn in two, and Jesus let out a loud cry- "Father into your hands I commit my spirit!" After that, Jesus took his last breath and died.

As mentioned in Mark, there was a centurion who was present when Jesus died. He saw something different in Jesus' death. In Luke's version, the centurion gave glory to God and declared Jesus' innocence. This is not a contradiction. Luke here is emphasizing Jesus as a pure and righteous sacrifice. Other people who saw Jesus' death were likely wondering if there was any justice in the world. How could someone good and innocent be put to death in this way? Some of the women who were with Jesus in his ministry and other acquaintances watched from a distance. Some were beating their breasts as they went home.

What did Jesus mean by these words? There is a finality in death. In life, when facing life's challenges, there are other things we can turn to for help. If we lose a job, we can try to find another. If we get sick, we can try medicines. One of the difficulties is when we cannot find a resource we can use. But there is a finality in death. There is no other resource we can turn to. No one else can help us. Each one of us faces death alone.

As God, Jesus could of course see past death. Jesus knew that God would not abandon him and that he would rise from the dead. He predicted all of these things. But Jesus still had to experience death as a human being. It is like the breath taken in right before you go into the water for the first time. Although Jesus was God, his faith was tested like any other human. In his death he declared his faith and trust in the Father to the end.

Scripture reveals to us that the problem of obedience to God is not just sin, it is our inability to trust in God. We don't obey God because we don't trust Him. We trust in our own reasoning, our own way of seeing things and our own way of doing things. This was true from Adam and Eve who failed to trust in God's command not to eat the fruit in the garden. Even the best heroes in the Bible failed. Abraham lied about his wife in order to protect himself. The Israelites didn't trust God

and constantly rebelled against Moses. King David didn't trust that God's plan was good and committed adultery. Even Jesus' disciples failed to fully trust God.

Most of us know that we need Jesus to pay for our sins. But did you know that your faith and trust in Jesus is weak as well? How often do we act out because of our own fear or lack of control? How often do we sin because we don't believe God's commands are better than what we can see? We need someone to be faithful to God for us. We need someone who trusts in God for us. We need Jesus' perfect record of trust to be made right before God. Our unfaithfulness was put on the cross with Jesus. Jesus' record of trust and faith has been given to us.

With Jesus' words, we see Jesus trusting the Father to the end. Take some time today to thank Jesus for trusting in our heavenly Father. Thank the Lord for being faithful when we were faithless. Take some time to humble yourself and realize that your faith is not enough, but that Jesus' faith is more than enough to make you right.

Questions for Meditation:

1. How do you respond when you feel that you do not have control over a situation? Think about a time when you were angry- why were you angry? Was it because you wanted that you were not getting?
2. What are some ways you need to grow in trusting God? What is something that God may be calling you to obey that you are resisting?
3. How does it bring you comfort knowing that Christ's record of trust is given to you when you believe in Jesus? How does it humble you knowing that your faith is weak?

Day 6: "I Thirst" "It is Finished"

John 19:28-30

It's easy to start something. It's hard to finish. It's the mark of a mature character to start something well, go through something well, and finish something well. In today's passage we are looking at John's account of Jesus' last words while on the cross. They are one of the most comforting words of Scripture.

One of the themes in the book of John is Jesus' awareness of time. Throughout the book of John, Jesus is keenly aware of the right and proper time especially around the time of his crucifixion and death. Jesus, knowing death was near, said two sentences. The first statement, "I thirst", tells us that Jesus thirsted. Crucifixion forced water in the body to go to many of the wrong places. This reminds us that Jesus was fully human when he died. He was not a spirit or a ghost as some wrongly claimed in the first century. But John tells us that Jesus said this not just an expression of physical need, but in order to fulfill scripture. Psalm 69 tells of how David suffered at the hands of people and that they gave him poison to drink in his time of need. In a similar way, Jesus was given a sour wine to drink before he died.

The second statement, "It is finished" is hugely significant. It is hard to underestimate the importance of these words. Jesus' suffering did not just begin the night he was betrayed. Reformed Theologians like to talk about Jesus' active obedience and passive obedience to the Father. Obedience is not just the things you do (active), but it's also the things you don't do (passive). It also involves the ways you respond to God's will. You can obey God and do God's will in difficult situations, or you can resist. Jesus' suffering involved his whole life. From the moment Jesus was born, Jesus lived his life in a way that actively obeyed the Father's will. As anyone knows, this is hard especially in a world of sin. This is Jesus' active obedience.

Although Jesus had power not to go to the cross, he willingly allowed himself to be put on the cross and suffer. This describes Jesus' passive obedience. The Father willed this event to happen and Jesus allowed it. So when Jesus says, "it is finished", it means he fulfilled the task that was given to him by the Father.

How is this good news for us today? When Jesus said it is finished, Jesus is saying that his mission was completed. He was successful with his lifelong burden and now it is done. There was nothing else that needed to be added for our salvation.

A few years ago, I was in a conversation with an elderly gentleman while I was on a cruise. The gentleman noticed I was reading a Bible and was interested in a conversation and so we talked. He was Catholic and wanted to talk theology and the topic of purgatory. Purgatory is a Catholic doctrine that taught that if a person was not perfect in life, they would spend more time in purgatory to "pay off" their remaining sins. Heaven is perfect, so in order for imperfect people to go to heaven, they need to be made perfect. We discussed that this teaching has no merit in Scripture but that there was a bigger problem with this.

If there is purgatory, then God is not just. Purgatory means that a person has to pay for their sins. That means that God is requiring a double payment for sins. Jesus needed to pay for our sins, but so do we. But what does it mean when Jesus says, "It is finished"? It means that Jesus' payment was enough for all of our sin.

Christian, do you hear Christ's declaration to you? When Jesus says, "it is finished", it means his blood was enough to pay for your sin. You cannot contribute anything else. You cannot do enough good so that God will let you into heaven. In this lifetime, some of us struggle with Christ's forgiveness. We feel as if we have not done enough. The truth of the matter is that we have not. We cannot. Nor will we ever have done enough. But what should we do with our guilt? We don't hide it. Nor do we blame others or excuse ourselves. We need to embrace our weaknesses and look to the cross and hear his promise, "It is finished."

Questions for Meditation:

1. What does it look like in a person's life who believes that they have not done enough to pay for their sin?
2. How are you tempted to look to your performance for your standing before God?
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you comfort in Jesus' words that Jesus' work was enough for your failures.