

BIBLE EMPOWERED TEACHING

Series: Jesus Christ The Son Of God

Lesson 5

JESUS' LAST WORDS

In a TV show a scenario of destiny was established by a supposedly dying man. The man was lying in a hospital bed with his immediate family and church family gathered around. The preacher was holding the dying man's hand. The preacher asked if the dying man had any last words for his family and friends. The man uttered, "Yes, I did not get all my business done!" And then he expired.

Jesus gave some last words from the cross, which words communicate a great deal. However, He did get His business done, and so, it was time to relinquish His spirit into the hands of the Father. He could confidently give up His spirit on the cross because He had finished His business for which He came into the world.

The last words of a passing loved one are always precious. They are words that the living remember throughout their lives. And so it was with the last words of Jesus from the cross. These are words the Holy Spirit wanted us to remember, and thus, He guided inspired writers to make sure that we remembered the last words of Jesus, for the meaning of the words carry with them some very profound thoughts.

A. Last words of forgiveness:

From the cross, Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**" (Lk 23:34). These are words that we would expect to hear from the One whose business it was to come for us in our sin. In our ignorance, we did not know how far away from God we had strayed. The cross will always be a reality check of our ignorance while we were steeped in our own self-righteous religiosity. Even in the actual act of crucifixion, those who drove nails through the hands of Jesus were doing so in the ignorance of their own sin to crucify the Son of God.

The self-righteous religious leaders who called for the crucifixion of Jesus were so caught up in their own religion that they called for the condemnation of Jesus because they thought they were preserving the "Jews' religion" from the influence of a rebel. But the execution of their deed was based on the fact that they did not believe that Jesus was who He said He was. Almost everything that Jesus was and taught was contrary to their self-righteous religiosity (See Rm 10:1-3).

To the Roman soldiers who did the actual deed of crucifixion, Jesus was just another malefactor who had to be executed. Every blow of the hammer was an indication of their ignorance of the incarnate hands through which they drove sharp nails. Nevertheless, while the incarnate flesh of Jesus strained against the nails of the cross, Jesus was still thinking of the business for which He came into the world. Forgiveness was His business, and thus in His last moments on the cross, He was still doing His business.

The preceding words of Jesus concerning forgiveness,

reveal that He understood why they wanted Him on the cross. They truly did not know what they were doing. They were as one of their leaders who launched a vehement persecution against those who later gave their allegiance to Jesus as His disciples. This leader (Paul) later wrote after finally relinquishing to the power of the testimony of Jesus' disciples, "*I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*" (1 Tm 1:13). Jesus knew that many of those who cried out that He be crucified, would later, as Paul, believe that He was the Christ and Son of the living God.

Those who nailed Jesus to the cross did so, because at the time, they had no interest in who Jesus really was. The Jewish religious leaders were caught up in their own religiosity. The Roman world of idolatry was fascinated with the gods they had created after their own imaginations. It was of this religious world that Paul later wrote: "*This wisdom [about the Son of God] none of the princes of this age has known, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*" (1 Co 2:8).

Nevertheless, the disciples who truly followed Jesus after the resurrection emulated the spirit of the last words of forgiveness that Jesus uttered from the cross. When Peter later stood before some of the people in Jerusalem who had aided in the crucifixion, this spirit of forgiveness was revealed. "*And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers*" (At 3:17). On his mission journey to the city of Antioch of Pisidia, Paul also reminded the people of the ignorance of those in Jerusalem who crucified Jesus:

For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor the voices of the prophets who are read every Sabbath, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him (At 13:27).

Jesus, who was executed out of ignorance was actually God working through the ignorance men to accomplish the salvation of all those who would eventually confess Jesus as Lord and Christ. We must not misunderstand what was happening behind the scenes at the time of the crucifixion. During the trial and execution of Jesus, Satan thought he was having his best day. He had used well the ignorance of men. But in his deed of deception, God was actually revealing the mystery of salvation that had been held in secret since the garden of Eden (See Ep 3:3-5; 1 Pt 1:10-12). Therefore, we must not forget what Jesus said in His plan to lead Himself to the cross:

My Father loves Me because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again (Jn 10:17,18).

Jesus gave His life voluntarily for us. **The cross was no accident.** It was planned and executed by Jesus. He willed that the nails be driven through His incarnate flesh. While on the cross, Jesus could have called on ten thousand angels to deliver Himself from the fate that He had set for Himself. In the garden of Gethsemane at the time of His arrest, He reminded the disciples, *“Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me more than twelve legions of angels”* (Mt 26:53). We must never come to any conclusion that would bring us into doubt concerning the predestined purpose of the cross. We can sorrow for His suffering while there, but we must rejoice that He was there. Any theology that would presume that the cross as an accident, afterthought, or miscalculation on the part of God in His eternal plan of redemption, must immediately be discarded as false.

Regardless of the torment of pain on the cross, Jesus was practicing that which He had preached throughout His ministry. *“And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple”* (Lk 14:27). And when we take up our crosses, we too must be willing to make the same statement from our crosses that Jesus made. Jesus would remind us, *“Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you”* (Lk 6:28). It was as if Jesus were practicing what He preached when He prayed that those who crucified Him be forgiven. At the time, they did not know who He really was, or what they were doing.

The prayer of Jesus from the cross was answered fifty-three days later by about three thousand people. When the apostle Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, he announced to those who had crucified Jesus, *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36). The message cut the people to the heart (At 2:37). That day, *“those who received his word were baptized ... about three thousand souls”* (At 2:41). They were cut to the heart, because in their own ignorance, they had crucified the Messiah (Christ) of Israel who was now Lord of all (At 2:36).

From that day of Pentecost, those who were informed of the incarnate God who was crucified in ignorance, became obedient to the gospel that was set in motion. *“So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (At 6:7). There is always forgiveness waiting for those who respond to the gospel of Jesus. The following words of Joy Tidwell express well our thinking:

An angry mob milled round the town,
There was violence in the air;
A man was tried and guilty found,
A cross he had to bear.

Up the hill and down the road,
So heavy it became;
People scoffed, and laughed, and joked,
And revelled at his pain.

He faltered, and a helping hand,
Relieved part of the load;
But no one there could help remove,
What waited down the road.

A crown of thorns upon his head,
Was mockery to the king;
They nailed him high upon the cross,
Their voices they did ring,

“If you be who you say you are,
Come down and prove it true.”
“Forgive them Father,” was all he said,
“They know no what they do.”

The mob that still lives on this earth,
Is just as bad as then;
His cross is just as heavy now,
We load it down with sin.

Up the hill and down the road,
Until his back is sore;
We laugh and joke and gaily live,
And forget the pain he bore.

Oh, we might help him for awhile,
To carry his heavy load;
But we get weary and get tired,
And take off down the road.

We leave him there alone to face,
Again the crown of thorns;
We mock him as the others did,
When his flesh was ripped and torn.

As he did then, he looks down now,
In compassion tried and true;
“Father, forgive them,” he still says,
“For they know not what they do!”

B. Last words of hope:

With forgiveness still on His mind in His last moments on the cross, Jesus turned to the repentant thief and said, *“Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Lk 23:43). In this life, we will never know this man to whom Jesus spoke these comforting words. All we know is what the repentant thief said to the other criminal who was crucified along with him, *“Do you not fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?”* (Lk 23:40).

We could say that the one to whom Jesus promised Paradise was a God-fearing man who was caught by the authorities while in the wilderness of criminality. He knew that he was receiving just punishment for his sins of a wayward life. But on the cross, his mind was turned toward meeting the God against whom he had sinned in leading a wayward life on earth. He then turned to Jesus in remorse of repentance, and asked for a last possibility of hope against the One whom he had sinned. In remorse, he asked Jesus, *“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”* (Lk 23:42).

We do not know how long he had known Jesus, for he called Jesus by name. But we do know that he understood that Jesus was coming into His kingdom, though he did not know all that this kingdom entailed. He was not a nonreligious person. So Jesus, that we might be reminded of the authority He had even in His last hours on earth, expressed to us through His words to the thief what He had previously said, *“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...”* (Mt 9:6).

The announcement of the angel at the time of the birth of Jesus was correct: *“For to you a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord”* (Lk 2:11). Jesus was *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (Jn 1:29). And in His final moments on the cross, Jesus was doing His business for which He came into the world, that is, bringing forgiveness of sins to the world.

While on earth, Jesus had the divine authority to forgive sins between man and God. He was on the cross in order to seal the deal between God and man. *“He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose wounds you were healed”* (1 Pt 2:24). So just as a last reminder while on earth, Jesus wanted us to remember why He was there that day nailed to a “tree.” He was there on our behalf.

What the repentant thief realized the moment he drew his last breath, is what all those who believe in Jesus will realize when they, too, do the same. They will in that same day be with Jesus in Paradise. It is for this Paradise of God that we all hope.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life that is in the paradise of God (Rv 2:7).

C. Last words of maternal responsibility:

While hanging in torture on the cross, Jesus was still thinking of others. It would be only natural for Him to make sure his aged mother was in the capable hands of another. So to the young son of Zebedee, who at the time was probably still a teenager, or in his early twenties, John inscribed the following words of Jesus from the cross:

Therefore, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved [John] standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour that disciple [John] took her into his own household (Jn 19:26).

This statement implies that the husband of Mary, Joseph, had already passed on by this time. The Holy Spirit deemed it unnecessary that we have a record of the passing of Joseph, for there is no statement in Scripture concerning the death of Jesus’ earthly father. The death may have occurred before the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, which thing we might assume happened because only Jesus’ mother was at the marriage feast early in the ministry of Jesus (See Jn 2:1-11). At least by the beginning of His ministry, Joseph is not mentioned with the mother, brothers and sisters when He came into *“His own country”* in the early part of His ministry (See Mk 6:1).

So in His last hours on the cross, Jesus wanted to assign the custody of His mother over to a specific person. If He had not done this, then the disciples themselves would have had to assume this responsibility, for the brothers and sisters were not believers at the time. We would assume that Jesus was thinking that throughout the burden of their duties as Christ-sent apostles, His mother may have been neglected.

We might wonder why the care for the mother of Jesus

was not assumed by the children of Mary, specifically James, Judas (Jude), Joses or Simon, and the sisters (Mt 12:46-50; Mk 6:3; Jn 2:12; 7:3-5). In the Jewish culture, it was the responsibility of the firstborn to make sure the mother was cared for in society. As the firstborn, therefore, Jesus was assuming His responsibility to make sure that His mother was never neglected, which thing would be true of a believer who had accepted Him as the Son of God.

At the time these words were spoken by Jesus, the earthly brothers and sisters apparently still did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. Many would later become disciples, particularly James and Jude. But at this time, Jesus wanted everyone to know that He was entrusting His mother specifically into the hands of a believer. He was thinking spiritual, and not in reference to earthly family responsibilities.

D. Last words of despair:

It was the ninth hour according to Jewish time (3:00^{pm} in the afternoon Roman time) when *“Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is to say, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”* (Mt 27:46; Mk 14:34).

These last words were a quotation from a prophetic statement made in Psalm 22:1. It may have been that Jesus wanted everyone present to recall in their minds the prophecy of Psalm 22, which prophecy was a prophetic plea for the help of God in times of trouble. It was one of those times in the last moments of Jesus’ ministry to the world when He approached God from the standpoint of a truly incarnate human being.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, every time He addressed His Father in prayer, He used the word “Father.” But at this moment on the cross, He refers to the Father as “God.” At the moment of death, His relationship with the Father had now changed. It had changed from Father to God. The father/son relationship during the ministry had now moved to the human/God relationship, for it was now time for the Father, as God, to take over in the death and resurrection of the Son (See Ep 1:20).

Jesus was not on the cross at this time in reference to a father/son relationship, but to turn the wrath of God from man. He was there as Moses stood before God on behalf of the people who were at the brink of being totally destroyed by God for their rebellion. God said to Moses, *“Let Me alone so that My wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them”* (Ex 32:10; see Dt 9:13,14).

The annihilation of all humanity was nigh unto happening when Jesus was on the cross. In the fullness of His own humanity, Jesus in His incarnate state was an eternal offering for sinful humanity who would be doomed without the cross. He was there to appease the wrath of God in order that God not wipe all humanity from the face of the earth as He did in the days of Noah (Gn 6:7; 7:21). So in these last words, Jesus was not only making the plea of Psalm 22 for Himself, but also for humanity in order that the wrath of God be turned away from those who had a spirit of rebellion, which included all humanity. Paul enlightened us concerning this burden of sin that Jesus took with Him to the cross:

... whom [Jesus] God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God (Rm 3:25; see Hb 9:15).

The psalmist was in a time of despair when the words of Psalm 22 spilled forth from his heart. And so in this last moment of darkness on the cross, Jesus too wanted to call to those who heard these last words, and later read them in Holy Scripture, that the finality of redemption was being paid by Him with an extreme price. Jesus' cry was a statement of eternal sacrifice which revealed that after the incarnation, it would never again be as it was when the Word was in eternity with God, and as God, before the incarnation. There was a permanency in the incarnation that He would continue throughout eternity in order that He truly be in a personal relationship with His brethren.

It was sin that necessitated such a sacrifice of the One who became sin for us. Through an incarnational sacrifice, God did eternally separate Himself from the form God. For the cause of the cross, the Son gave up being equal with God (See Ph 2:5-11). If we could realize the full impact and extent of His sacrifice, we too should cry out, "Our God, Our God, why have You forsaken Him?" Then we are brought to our knees with overwhelming gratitude because He was forsaken for us.

Paul later wrote, "*For He [God] has made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Co 5:21). Peter concurred, "*He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree*" (1 Pt 2:24). We have difficulty understanding the metaphor of the moment. Jesus' atoning sacrifice was an eternal assumption of our sin upon Himself who knew no sin. He assumed our punishment for our sins. He was executed on our behalf. It was a time on the cross to let the world know that there would have been a certain eternal separation from God for every individual of humanity if it were not for Jesus who took upon Himself our punishment.

In order that we be reconciled to God, the cross was a moment when Jesus had to be separated from God through His assimilation of our sins in Himself. Only when we stand in the presence of God ourselves will we fully understand the implications of what Jesus meant in being "forsaken by God." But until that time, we will understand what the Holy Spirit revealed through both Paul and Peter that Jesus assumed the sins of mankind in order that all those who believe might have life in the name of Jesus (Jn 1:12).

E. Last words of humanity:

"*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had now been accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst'*" (Jn 19:28). We reflect on John 1:14 when John revealed that the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us as a man. "I thirst" are words that reveal the incarnation of God the Son who became in all ways as a man in order to deliver us from our destiny of doom.

In His suffering as a man, it would only be natural that He would thirst. But there was more in the preceding statement than the natural thirst of one who was in great suffer-

ing, and nigh unto death. The statement is a fulfillment of the words of Psalm 69:21. In these last words, Jesus wanted to remind us again that He fulfilled all the prophecies concerning Himself and His kingdom reign. Every detail of prophecy was fulfilled, and thus, in the miracle of fulfilled prophecy all honest people, who would be seeking the true God beyond this world, would indeed conclude as the guard who was standing at the foot of the cross, "*Truly this was the Son of God*" (Mt 27:54).

F. Last words of finality:

"*When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished'*" (Jn 19:30). What was finished was the plan of redemption. He completed His business. The One who was crucified in prospect before the creation of the world had accomplished His destiny. After Jesus had created the world (Cl 1:16), He rested from His creating work (Gn 2:1,2). And now He had finished His redemption work for those whom He had created. All the prophecies from Genesis 3:15 to the cross had been fulfilled in reference to the eternal plan of redeeming those of His creation who believed.

After the resurrection, and before His ascension, Jesus walked and talked with His disciples in order to remind them of the finality of His eternal plan of redeeming those who believed. Before His ascension, He said to the disciples,

These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me" (Lk 24:44).

At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus revealed His purpose in reference to the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning His destiny. "*Do not think,*" He reminded His audience, "*that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill*" (Mt 5:17).

Once all the prophecies were fulfilled, He brought to finality the Sinai law. It was set aside when the purpose for which it was given was accomplished. So at the time He was on the cross, the Sinai law, as well as all presumptuous and meritorious religious ordinances of men, were terminated. In being nailed to the cross, "*He has made [us] alive together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses*" (Cl 2:13). In order to do this on the cross, He wiped "*out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" (Cl 2:14). He took away all meritorious religious laws that resulted in sin, for no man could keep law perfectly in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). And so, the words of Paul are true:

Therefore, my brethren, you also became dead to the [Sinai] law through the body of Christ, so that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, so that we should bring forth fruit to God (Rm 7:4).

In the last words of Jesus from the cross, He had accomplished what He had said only a few hours earlier when He was in prayer to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane:

*“I have glorified You [Father] on the earth. **I have finished the work that You gave Me to do**” (Jn 17:4).*

G. Last words of trust:

*“And crying out with a loud voice, Jesus said, ‘**Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!**’” (Lk 23:46). Jesus again quoted from the Psalms in order to remind the people that He had fulfilled prophecy (See Ps 31:5). He not only fulfilled prophecy in reference to what He did in His ministry, but He also fulfilled prophecy in reference to statements that were said in prophecy.*

This statement infers that Jesus lived in compliance with the will of the Father throughout His ministry. He was confident in His obedience. He could thus confidently relinquish His spirit into the hands of the Father, whom He trusted could take it from there. We read the same sentiment in the words of Stephen when he was stoned to death by an angry mob:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (At 7:59). After Stephen said these words, “he fell asleep” (At 7:60). And Jesus, after He had uttered His last words, “breathed His last” (Lk 23:46). Both trusted that the Father and Son could assume responsibility of their destiny in eternity.

We see in the final words of Jesus and Stephen their confidence in their final destiny. Such assurance should be characteristic of every disciple who nears his final breath. In our final hours, we seek to have the same confidence as Paul after he had endured tremendous hardships in order to finish his business:

*I have fought the good fight. **I have finished my course** [business]. *I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day, and not only to me, **but also to all those who have loved His appearing** (2 Tm 4:7,8).**