

What Jesus' Dying Words Can Teach Us About Heaven-Focused Intimacy

As our attention is drawn this month to the passion of the Christ, I've been reflecting on our Savior's final words spoken from the cross. By all accounts, Jesus didn't do a lot of talking. He was almost silent during those painful hours as He hung suspended between earth and heaven. These significant "seven last words," as they've come to be identified, provide a window into Jesus' soul.

The cruel torture of crucifixion would have virtually pressed the very life's breath out of Jesus' lungs, requiring Him to push on his feet, straighten His legs and relieve the weight of His body that paralyzed the pectoral muscles to utter these words. Christ's important, final expressions ultimately reveal not only His humanity and incredible determination, but also His extravagant, demonstrative love for us and His intimate relationship with the Father.

We tend to pay close attention to the words spoken by a dying loved one and hold them as treasured memories. How well do we remember and treasure the deeper meaning of these words of our Savior?

"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)—Jesus knew what it meant to be wounded in the house of His friends—the deepest hurt you can experience (Zech. 13:6). Yet, He prioritized His forgiveness of others, which preceded His petitions as our intercessor, who would be eternally at the right hand of the Father in heaven (see Matt. 6:14, 15).

"Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43b)—Not only did Christ demonstrate love and forgiveness toward His accusers, He interacted in a personal, relational way with the

criminal who was hanging on a nearby cross. Regardless of the intensity of the raw agony He was enduring, our loving Lord demonstrated compassion and care for the one who was being punished justly when asked, "Lord, remember me when You come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Paul described this amazing concept of being with Christ in heavenly places as a present reality for believers: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up and seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4–6).

"'Woman, here is your son. ... Here is your mother'" (John 19:26-27)—In His final moments, Christ's enduring love for those nearest Him was not diminished. Staring death in the face, He spoke of the continued care for His mother and the reciprocal parental affection that the beloved disciple would enjoy. How easily we become absorbed in our day-to-day lives and especially in our times of difficulty. Our intentions are good. We want to minister to the needs of others, especially the family of God or household of faith, but may God help us to remember not only these words, but the relational principle behind them

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34b; Matt. 27:46)—Jesus was one with the Father and the Word made flesh, who came and lived among us (John 1:14). Yet, to reconcile fallen humanity to God, He experienced this time of separation from deep, intimate fellowship with His Father. What great punishment this must have been to be wounded, bruised and abandoned for us as the guilt of our sins was laid upon Him (Is. 53:4–6).

"I thirst" (John 19:28b)—Not only did the living Word long for fellowship, but the one who offered living water to an ostracized woman by a well (John 4:14) cried out in thirst. Surely, the Father hears His children, who are supposed to embody springs of salvation and rivers of everlasting water

flowing from our bellies, when we exclaim, “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh faints for You, in a dry and thirsty land with no water” (Ps. 63:1).

“It is finished” (John 19:30b)—In those final moments at the very point of death, when the one being crucified would normally not have the strength to cry anything aloud, Christ’s cry of victory still resounds today. He fulfilled what was required to “save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He at all times lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25b).

“Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46b)—Just as Christ was able to release Himself into the Father’s hands, Holy Spirit empowers us to completely abandon ourselves into the hands of a loving God. Although it may sound paradoxical, the reason we can endure the honor of suffering unashamedly for Christ’s sake is because we have the assurance that He “abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). We can say with Paul, “for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Perhaps as we reflect upon our “loved one”’s dying words, we might benefit from looking through the lens of Galatians 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Sharing in the experience of the cross with Christ is one of the highest and deepest dimensions of intimacy we can know with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bob Sorge so vividly describes it this way, “The cross’s shadow is the saint’s home.” We must always remember this is not a one-time accomplishment but rather an ongoing process as we join with

the apostle Paul and “die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31b).

Consequently, the profound death that comes through being crucified with Christ brings unparalleled affection from our loving heavenly Father and transformational resurrection hope. “For if we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, so shall we also be united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).

These are some powerful words to remember! {eoa}

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