

Special thanks to our content contributors:

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Preface

By all accounts Jesus didn't do a lot of talking on the cross. He was silent during the hours he hung there, except for a very few words. But these Seven Last Words provide a window into Jesus' soul, a way to understand what is ultimately important to this One who is dying on the cross.

This devotional is designed to study each of those Seven Words (or phrases), to meditate on the words of the Savior, and to better understand our Lord: his sacrifice, his incredible love, his determination, his humanness, his divinity, his intimate relationship with His Father, and his trust.

Take your time to read, reflect, answer the meditation questions, and pray. Involve everyone in your family.

Our prayer is that this seven-day devotional will bless you and draw you closer to the One who died for you and to the Father who sent his Son on this costly journey to redeem us.

*We hope to see you at our Good Friday Service,
"The Seven Last Words of Christ"
on Friday, March 29 at 6:00 pm.*

*Childcare is provided. Details can be
found on the back cover of this guide.*



THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

**Christ's Hope Ministries & Church
2024**

Friday, March 22

1. FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING

Luke 23:32-34

*Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”*

Crucifixions of criminals were not uncommon. The soldiers may have already conducted several in that week already. So many perhaps that they appear emotionless and calloused; unmoved by the brutality.

The soldiers nail Jesus to a cross, then hoist him up, placing a wedge beneath his feet. They sat and watched... watched for the men to die. They passed the time by casting lots to see who will be awarded with the victim’s last possessions.

Yet in the middle of this scene comes an astounding and powerful word from Jesus on the center cross:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

In His last hour, Jesus says a prayer for His enemies... not for Himself. Who was He praying for? The soldiers, Pilate, chief priests and scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, YOU AND ME.

Digging Deeper with David Rea:

In each of the seven sayings Jesus will leave us example to follow in our Christian walk. Jesus begins by asking forgiveness for his enemies, those responsible for his crucifixion. Jesus is concerned about how we will treat those who are evil and are our enemies. In Matthew 5:43-44 Jesus tells us to *“love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be the Sons of your*

Father in heaven.” In Ephesians 4:32 Paul tells us we are to *“be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as Christ forgave you.”*

In the 12th chapter of Romans we are reminded to bless those who persecute us, bless and to not curse (verse 14), do not repay evil for evil (verse 17), and do not take revenge my friends but leave room for God’s wrath (verse 19). In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus reminds us *“if we forgive those who have wronged us we will be forgiven by our Father in Heaven. But if we do not forgive those who sin against us we will not be forgiven by our father who is in heaven.”*

Meditation Questions:

1. Who was most responsible for killing Jesus?
2. What responsibility do you bear in his death?
3. In what sense was Jesus praying for you?

Prayer:

Father, help us to love our enemies. Help us to bless them and not to curse them, to never repay evil with evil and to forgive as Christ forgave! In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

2. YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE

Luke 23:39-43

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today **you will be with me in paradise.**' "*

On each side of Jesus hang two criminals sentenced to death. The word criminal in Greek is the word "kakourgos" meaning criminal or evil-doer. Other gospel writers use the term "lestes" or robber, highwayman, bandit. One of criminals joins the soldiers, mocking Jesus...*"You are the Christ, aren't you? Then save yourself and us!"* This is the epitome of teasing and insult.. attempting to pull Jesus down to their level. The criminal continues by insulting the title "Messiah" – *"Where is this talk of Messiah now?" he sneers. "You're dying just like us."*

Not only is the thief on the cross next to Jesus wicked, this verbal transaction is the fulfillment of scripture. *"He was despised and rejected by men", "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults..." Psalm 22:6-7a*

One criminal mocks Jesus, but the other does not. He attempts to stand up for Jesus saying "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

To the repentant thief, Jesus offers immediate grace. Even in His dying moments, the Savior welcomes a soul into the embrace of eternal love.

Digging Deeper with David:

On this day, the soldiers have made a crown of thorns for Jesus, they mocked him and spit on him. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the law have also mocked him saying 'he saved others, let him save himself...let him come down from the cross and we will believe him'. Jesus was crucified between two thieves, one of the thieves mocked him saying, 'if you are the Christ save us and yourself.' Then the other thief said to Jesus, 'Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus responded by saying, *"today you will be with me in paradise."* Only Jesus could grant this request. Salvation is only provided for us by the cross through Christ. Peter reminds us that *"there is no other name given under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:11)

In granting these thieves request, Jesus reminds us that, in our Christian walk, we must keep our eye on the prize. Paul says *"If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied above all men."* (1 Corinthians 15:19) In Philippians he adds *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."* (Philippians 3:20)

Meditation Questions:

1. Why is the thief's faith so astounding in this situation?
2. What did the thief receive that day?
3. What do we learn about salvation from this?

Prayer:

Father, may we always remember that Jesus was the only one who could provide salvation for the repentant thief. Peter reminds us in Acts 4:12 that *"salvation is found in none other, for there is no other name given under heaven among men by which we can be saved."* Help us to remember that one day we will live and reign with Christ forever if we accept him as our savior. In Jesus' holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.

Sunday, March 24

3. WOMAN, BEHOLD YOUR SON. SON, BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER

John 19:25-27

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "**Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'** From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."*

John is the only gospel writer that records Mary's presence at the cross. It was an expected visit as recorded in Luke 2:41 *"Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover."* After Joseph dies, Mary travels with friends to Jerusalem. She is near Jesus now. Her heart is deeply broken.

As Mary's firstborn, Jesus is legally responsible for her well-being – to insure that she is taken care of after his death. Not only does Jesus grant this responsibility to John, but John in turn takes the duty seriously.

These words from the cross, and the actions to care for his mother, say something about the depths of Jesus's love. He is dying, in agony, gasping for breath. He is bruised and beaten. He has been taunted and insulted. But now, Jesus sees his mother at the foot of the cross. She is weeping, she is inconsolable... and in that moment He sees her pain, and cares for her needs. And, in turn, teaches us to care for one another.

Digging Deeper with David Rea:

On one occasion Jesus mother and brothers came to speak with him. He replied, *"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"* Pointing to his disciples he said *"here are my mother and my brothers, for whosoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and my mother."* (Matthew 12:48-50)

In asking the Apostle John to care for his mother, Jesus leaves us another example of how we are to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ and those who need help. James tells us we are to look after widows, over 60 (1 Timothy 5:9) and orphans (1 Timothy 1:26). In Galatians, we learn, *"As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith."*

Meditation Questions:

1. Why does Jesus make John responsible for his mother Mary?
2. What does this tell us about Jesus?
3. How should we apply this in our own lives?

Prayer:

Father, Help us to provide for our families as Jesus has done. May we also reach out to those who are widows and orphans and to remember the poor. May we do good to all men, especially those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Monday, March 25

4. MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

March 15:33-35

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' – which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.' “

Here, at the center of the seven last words, we read about what may be perceived as the theological high point of the crucifixion shadowed by what may have been the lowest point for Jesus. Darkness covered the area. Most of the people have left. Waiting for death has begun.

The two criminals are still alive, and may have lasted days before death. But Jesus is not as strong. He was severely beaten, he has lost a lot of blood, and the weight of being nailed to a cross begins to weaken him. And when the darkness comes, change occurs:

Luke 23:44-45a "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining..."

Three hours of complete darkness. What is the significance of this? It could be a reference to moral darkness, fulfillment of prophecy, the death of a King, the Father's anger, or the Father's judgment on the sins of the world. Maybe it refers to all of these.

In the ninth hour Jesus cries out in a loud voice. I can only imagine it is filled with pain, agony, pleading, and despair. He calls out to his Father. He asks why his Father has forsaken, or separated, from him.

Digging Deeper with David Rea:

God separated himself from the son he loved because of our sins. Isaiah 59:2 tells us *that "our iniquities have separated us from*

God, your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear you." Sin brings death upon all men. *"The soul that sins is the one who will die."* (Ezekial 18:4), *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), *"For the wages of sin is death"* Rom. 6:23.

Jesus set aside that curse and provided the remedy for our forgiveness. *"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23) *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."* (Galatians 3:13) God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, he did this because he had left sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did this so he could be just and the justifier of all who believe. (Romans 3:24-25).

Peter warns us that *"Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps."* (1 Peter 2:21-22) The apostle Paul told Timothy that *"all that live Godly in Christ will suffer persecution."*

Meditation Questions:

1. What separates us from God today?
2. What is the punishment for sin?
3. How can we receive forgiveness for our sins?

Prayer:

Father, You separated yourself from your Son because of our sins. May we remember that our sins still separates us from you today. Help us to remember that the wages of sin is death but the gift of your forgiveness comes through Jesus, our Lord. May we never forget that Christ redeemed is from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us and that he has left us an example that we should follow in his footsteps. In your holy name I humbly come, kneel at Your feet, and pray. Amen.

Tuesday, March 26

5. I THIRST

John 19:28-29

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips."

Nearing the end of Jesus' earthly human life, he senses that the time is near. He is exhausted and asks for something to wet his lips. A fulfillment of *Psalms 69:21* "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

The soldier's had access to "posca", a popular and inexpensive drink made from wine vinegar exposed to oxygen. This process turns the wine into a bitter vinegar bereft of its alcoholic properties. The Roman soldiers would drink it primarily to quench their thirst while on duty. While the soldier's weren't required to share their drink with criminals in their care, they had never seen anyone die like Jesus.

1 Peter 2:22-23

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

In this word, we see Jesus' humanity and his determination to complete his task.

Digging Deeper with David Rea:

Jesus was nearing completion of what his heavenly Father asked him to do. After what Jesus has been through, he would certainly be thirsty. I believe Jesus words go beyond his physical needs and that he is concerned about the spiritual welfare of those who follow him.

In Psalm 63:1 David writes, "O God, you are my God, how earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus tells a Samaritan woman that "whoever drinks the water I will give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water that I will give him will become of water welling up into eternal life." In John 7:37, Jesus says, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water, will flow from within him." In Acts 2:38 we learn that Jesus is referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit which would later be given to his followers.

Revelation 7:17 tells us that the Lamb (Jesus) at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water.

Meditation Questions:

1. What are the reasons that Jesus would have been thirsty?
2. What is the significance of the sponge being offered to Jesus on a branch of hyssop? (John 19:29)
3. How is the willingness to suffer vital to finishing one's mission?

Prayer:

Father, No one could go through what your Son did without being thirsty. These words also express a loving concern for our spiritual needs as well. May we earnestly seek you and our souls thirst for you as King David did, and that these needs can only be filled by a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, March 27 _____

6. IT IS FINISHED

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

From a humble manger bed to a cruel cross... now it was finished. Jesus came to take away the sins of the world. He came to love, to serve, and to redeem.

The cross in all its horror – and in its redemptive power to bear the sins of the world – hung heavily on Jesus during his last days in the flesh. His struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane was the climax, the point at which he surrendered ultimately to the Father's will. And now the cup had been drunk and the work completed. It is finished.

Digging Deeper with David Rea:

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul describes the mission of Jesus in these words: *"God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* In his final words, we learn that Jesus faithfully finished the mission that God had sent him to do.

On the night, before he was crucified Jesus earnestly prayed *"Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will but your will be done."* (Luke 22:42) Throughout his mission on earth, Jesus never failed to do the Father's will. Jesus always did what the Father asked him to do. Jesus has asked us to remain faithful to him as well. Jesus' last words to the church at Smyrna were *"be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life."*

Meditation Questions:

1. What do we learn from the sixth word about purpose? About focus? About obedience?
2. How is the willingness to suffer vital to finishing one's mission?

Prayer:

Father help us to remain faithful to you as your son was. He finished the work you called him to do. May we fight the good fight of faith, keep the faith and finish the race so that we may receive the crown of life. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 28

7. FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

Luke 23:44-46

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last.

These words connect to a Psalm written by David in Psalm 31:5
"Into your hands I commit my Spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth."

Jesus has endured hours of agony, and with his last breath he is determined that his final words be heard. Even with a loud voice, he speaks to his Father with intimacy – he knows his Father is with him. He trusts his eternal destiny to his Father's everlasting arms. He surrenders his human life and will to his Father.

Digging Deeper with David Rea:

In 2 Timothy 4:7, as Paul nears the end of his life, he writes "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." In the next verse, he tells us that we receive the crown of righteousness along with him if we remain faithful to him.

How shall we accomplish this goal? The writer of Hebrews tells us "we must lay aside everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and protector of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:2-3)

Meditation Questions:

1. What might the curtain of the temple represent?
2. What does Jesus mean when he says "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"?
3. Why does this saying bring comfort?

Prayer:

Father, may we always be concerned about your will and plan for our lives. May we lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, so that we can persevere the path that you have planned for us. May we always look to Jesus the author and protector of our faith and remember that he endured this opposition from sinful men, so that we will not become weary or lost heart on our journey. In the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Please join us...

Good Friday Service
Christ's Hope Ministries & Church
Friday, March 29 | 6 pm

The Seven Last Words of Christ

This service has been purposely designed to be very quiet, meditative, somber, and contemplative.

Because of this, we recommend and encourage the use of provided childcare for children.

Help us plan by registering for childcare on the Church Center app or at the Hub in the lobby.