

The First Word

“*He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.*” That’s how Isaiah describes what happened to Jesus on Good Friday. He who was God made flesh, who earned every bit of God’s grace and blessing, who alone lived up to the standard of holiness that none of us could ever hope to – he was spit on, he was beaten, and he was subjected to what might be the greatest bodily torture this world has ever known or devised. Crucifixion was so cruel that it was reserved only for the worst of criminals, it wasn’t even legal for a Roman citizen to undergo, and it was so disturbing and taboo that it was most often addressed only in euphemisms and even hinting at it in common company was avoided at all costs.

So how did it ever come to this? Jesus only ever loved and cared for the people around him. He never committed any crimes, never fell into any sins, certainly never did anything worthy of punishment, much less this! But yet as he was nailed to that cross and hung up to die, he suffered the worst that not only mankind had to offer, but even God himself, because he was there dying under God’s wrath for our sins.

And yet he prayed not for vengeance, but for forgiveness for everyone who put him there. *They don’t know what they’re doing*, he said. But don’t we? Maybe those Roman soldiers didn’t that day, but don’t we Bible-believing Christians know better when we fall into sin? Friends, Jesus didn’t just pray for the soldiers just because they didn’t know what they were doing. Jesus prayed for all of us because *he* knew exactly what *he* was doing. Don’t miss the rest of what Isaiah said: “*He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*” Dear friends, there is no sin that God’s grace and forgiveness cannot overcome, and that day Jesus proved it. So for all your sins of habit and of choice, both known and unknown, hear the Word of the Lord: in the name of Jesus Christ, I forgive you. ***Jesus’ first word from the cross.***

The Second Word

It wasn’t enough for the Jewish religious leaders to attack and abuse Jesus for speaking only what was true and right. It wasn’t enough for all the passers-by in and out of Jerusalem to mock and insult Jesus as he hung there naked and exposed. No, even the criminals who were crucified with Jesus spewed blasphemies against him and accused him of being a careless, loveless, powerless liar.

But as the minutes ticked by, one of those criminals had a change of heart. As he saw Jesus hanging there on the cross bearing the sins of the world and willingly suffering under the punishment that we deserved, he finally saw what Jesus wanted him to see all along. Jesus wasn’t an earthly king; he was a spiritual king, a heavenly king, and what he was doing there on that cross wasn’t suffering defeat. It was winning ultimate victory, because he was throwing open the gates to heaven for everyone who would come. Jesus was on that cross right next to him suffering the punishment that *he* deserved, to snatch *him* out of the flames. All those

people who mocked and jeered Jesus to save himself and others, they didn’t understand that that’s exactly what Jesus was doing there on that tree. He was saving us from our sins and an eternity of torment in hell. Yes, that criminal’s sin was great; but Jesus’ salvation was greater.

So when that criminal looked at Jesus, with tears in his eyes he choked out, “*Jesus – Savior – remember me.*” But Jesus did him one better, and he makes that same promise to us: when we look to him in faith, our Lord doesn’t just remember us like some fond memory framed and hanging on the wall. No, Jesus went to that cross and suffered all that pain and humiliation in our place and with us on his mind, so that one day he could take us to be with him in heaven forever, with a crown of glory at his right hand and all the pleasures and joys of paradise.

Jesus’ second word from the cross.

The Third Word

What could possibly have been going through Mary’s mind as she stood at the foot of the cross, watching her son dying in agony and torture? I can’t imagine. Maybe she thought about Simeon’s prophecy when she first presented baby Jesus at the temple: “*A sword will pierce your own soul too.*” I’m sure that’s how it felt. How did this all happen? When that angel told her way back when that she was going to have a son named Jesus who would bring joy to the world, peace on earth, goodwill toward men, and salvation from sin, was this what she imagined? No amount of comfort and companionship could console her as her son was executed for no crime but preaching what people needed to hear.

And as if the pain of the moment weren’t enough, what would she do from now on? Could she care for herself? It seems like she was a widow, and now her son was convicted and crucified for blasphemy against the Jews and treason against Rome. Usually that meant the families paid for it, too. Would she have to live out the rest of her days on the streets begging, always in danger of being abused and taken advantage of? That kind of unthinkable end for the mother of God might have seemed inevitable to her right then.

But then Jesus spoke, and he put those fears to rest. Even as he suffered unspeakable agony under the sins of the world, his thoughts – always selfless – turned to his mother. Jesus wanted to make sure his mom was taken care of, so in love he entrusted her wellbeing to his dearest and most faithful friend. See, that’s the kind of Savior we have – one who cares about us, body and soul, more even than himself and more than we will ever know. And so also in love he says to you: cast all your cares on him, because he cares for you. ***Jesus’ third word from the cross.***

The Fourth Word

Are you afraid of the dark? A strange question to ask, perhaps. But everyone is – maybe not in the security of your own bedroom, but when that darkness is so thick and deep that it gets into your head, you understand why darkness really is something to be scared of. Darkness is cold and unforgiving and dangerous, it's where evil lurks, and more than anywhere else it's where you feel vulnerable and alone.

Jesus knew that as well as anyone. As darkness crept in upon the Light of the World, it meant only one thing: he was being abandoned by his heavenly Father. God the Father turned the gracious light of his face away from Jesus, and left him with only the dark reality of judgment. How could this be? Jesus, who so famously proclaimed, "*I and the Father are one*" in spirit and in purpose and in their very being, how could the very Son of God be abandoned by his heavenly Father? How sad and how backward. But as we see there Jesus suffering the very pangs of hell on the cross – separation from God and all his goodness and grace because of us and our sins – know that he did that in place of you, for the sake of you, out of love for you. He suffered abandonment for you so that you'll never have to and so that when you close your eyes in the darkness of death, you will never be alone, because you will open them again to the bright dawn of eternal life in your heavenly Father's presence forever. ***Jesus' fourth word from the cross.***

The Fifth Word

All throughout his life, his ministry, and especially this holy week, Jesus had fulfilled God's plan of salvation down to the very last detail, and that didn't change even this close to the end. Jesus knew that in order to be the Messiah and our Savior he had to perfectly fulfill everything that was written about him in Scripture, so he choked out a few words that King David prophesied in Psalm 69, "*They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*" The hospitality was none too impressive that the Roman soldiers showed to Jesus by giving him this rancid wine to drink that wasn't any good anymore, but Jesus needed only a sip to wet his dry throat so he could speak clearly and strongly, because the last two words about to come from his mouth were much too important not to be heard. In fact, never have greater words left the mouth of man than the ones that Jesus was about to speak. ***Jesus' fifth word from the cross.***

The Sixth Word

Tetelestai, "*It is finished.*" One word in Greek, three in English, but what this word from the cross may lack in quantity, it more than makes up for in significance and power. What does "it is finished" mean for you? Finished is the work of your salvation. Finished is the devil's power over this world. Finished is the influence of sin and evil over God's people. Finished is the reign of death and hell forever. Finished are all your doubts and fears about your relationship with God. And finished are all your sufferings, your sorrows, your guilt and all the consequences of sin in your lives, because finished is Jesus' job of redemption as your substitute. All your struggles, all your battles, all your failures are finished because Jesus said so there on the cross. No, never have greater words been uttered than *tetelestai*, "*it is finished,*" the words of our triumphant Savior proclaimed around the world for every nation, race, and language and that will echo forevermore in the hearts of God's people. ***Jesus' sixth word from the cross.***

The Seventh Word

About six months earlier, Jesus spoke about this day to the crowds in Jerusalem: "*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.*"

Here, as Jesus hung on the cross, he made good on that promise. He had lived the perfect life we needed as our substitute, and the only thing left to do was willingly die an innocent death as our atoning sacrifice. There on that dark Friday afternoon, the Lamb of God was taking away the sins of the world. His work finished, the Father reached down to take into his hands the soul of his beloved, only-begotten Son, for whose sake also our souls will one day meet that same warm embrace when he finally calls us home to himself. The darkness of sin and sorrow and death that covered the land that day could never overcome the light of faith and hope and love that beamed so brilliantly from the cross as Jesus gave up his life for us to reconcile us to God and win us eternal life in heaven with him forever. ***Jesus' seventh and final word from the cross.***