

## INTRODUCTION

Today, I begin a new series entitled, "Words That Shook the World: Final Words from the Cross." Throughout history, when famous people were dying, scribes stood by to record the last words they spoke. There is an air of finality and authority about the last words a person ever speaks before death. There are many famous final words. For instance, because of Shakespeare's drama, most of us know Julius Caesar was attacked in 44 B.C. and stabbed by some of his supposed friends. Shocked to see his friend Brutus holding a knife, his famous last words were, "You, too, Brutus?" (In Latin, "Et tu Brute?") Not all final words are serious; they may be rather humorous. For instance, there was a grammarian, Dominique Bouhours, who died in 1702. He was conscious of good grammar to the end, because his last words were, "I am about to—or I am going to die; either expression is correct." Conrad Hilton established a chain of hotels around the world (his first Hilton Hotel was built in Dallas in 1925). He's the great-grandfather of Paris and Nicky. While on his deathbed in 1979, he was asked if he had any final words and he said, "Leave the shower curtain on the inside of the tub." Some final words reveal a fear of death. Elizabeth I lived in luxury all of her life and as she lay dying in 1603, her last words were, "All my possessions for a moment of time."

Compare those words to those of one of my favorite presidents, Texas-born Dwight D. Eisenhower. He not only lived well, he died well. In 1966, in Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, his final words were: "I've always loved my wife, my children, and my grandchildren, and I've always loved my country. I want to go. God, take me."

Final words are important, and over the next few weeks, we're going to be studying the final words Jesus Christ spoke from the cross. We can't call these His final words, because unlike any other person, Jesus rose from the dead and spoke many more words and He still speaks today! That's why I'm calling these final words from the cross. Next week we'll consider "Words of Promise;" on March 25 our topic will be "Words of Anguish;" on April 1, we'll talk about "Words of Victory." Then on Easter, April 8, we'll conclude this series as we examine "Words of Life."

Whether you're a new Christian, or you've been following Jesus for decades, you should never stray far from the subject of the cross. During these next few weeks, I'm going to be calling our attention back to the details and impact of the crucifixion. There are multitudes of Americans who scoff at the idea that what took place on a Roman Cross 2,000 years ago is important today. Since we live in a modern world with modern problems like terrorism and global warming, what impact could a Roman execution have on us today? Many people who don't know Jesus would say what we're doing here today is nothing but an exercise in foolish futility. But those of us who have been changed by God's grace recognize that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was the pivotal event of all of human history. Paul expressed it this way, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (I Corinthians 1:18) As we approach the cross of Jesus today, I feel as though we should take off our shoes because it is indeed holy ground. As we stand before the cross, let's listen for the Words of Grace Jesus spoke. Luke 23:33-34 says, "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." Now turn to John 19:25, "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."

There are three scenes at the cross I want us to examine. First, we'll discuss the prayer of Jesus for God to forgive; then the words Jesus spoke to His mother, Mary. And finally, we'll talk about the directions Jesus gave to the disciple named John. In all three of these scenes, Jesus spoke Words of Grace.

## **1. JESUS DEFINED GRACE WHEN HE PRAYED FOR THOSE WHO CRUCIFIED HIM**

As He hung on the cross, the first words Jesus spoke were actually a prayer. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." In the original language, the verb "Jesus said" is in the perfect tense, which conveys continual action. In other words, it seems Jesus repeated this prayer several times. Picture Jesus being placed on the cross as it lay on the ground. Two Roman soldiers hold his arm outstretched as another hammers a huge spike through the skin and muscle tissue. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." Then as they place his other arm on the crossbeam and pounded that spike into the other hand, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." Next, they move to his feet, and cross one foot over the other and the soldier drives the final spike through both of his feet, pounding the nail deeply in the wooden cross. Again, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." Then, all five soldiers heave the cross into a vertical position and maneuver it near the hole chipped out of the rocky ground. As the bottom of the cross slides into the hole the cross falls and bangs to a sudden stop as it hits the bottom of the hole. The body of Jesus is jerked from the momentum and the fiery pain in His hands and feet is excruciating. As that first terrible spasm of pain passes, Jesus opens His eyes and gazes at those who are killing Him, and again He says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

What grace! John 1:14 says Jesus was "full of grace and truth." He is grace incarnate. We talk a lot about that word grace, but what is it really? You've probably heard the acrostic for GRACE that says it is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That's nice, but it really doesn't define grace. Years ago, I learned a simple definition for grace: Grace is something I need, but don't deserve. To me, that says it all. Grace and mercy are two sides of the same coin. Grace is God giving me what I need, but don't deserve—His unconditional love and His full and free forgiveness. Mercy is God withholding what I DO deserve: death and hell.

By praying this prayer, Jesus was proving He really was the Messiah. 750 years earlier the prophet Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities." (Isaiah 53:5) By the way, Isaiah wrote these inspired words predicting the Messiah would be "pierced" 300 years before crucifixion was even practiced as a form of execution! In the last verse of Isaiah 53, the prophet said, "He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:12) The word "intercession" means to pray for someone. That's exactly what Jesus was doing when He prayed for God to forgive those who were crucifying Him. He was making intercession for the transgressors.

Jesus was also practicing what He preached. In the Sermon on the Mount He taught us that we should pray for our enemies. That's not easy to do, is it? Jesus demonstrated how we are to show grace and forgiveness to those who are our enemies and have hurt us. Because He loved His enemies and prayed for them in the time of His death, He shows us that we can pray for our enemies, too. It wasn't very long after this the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was stoned to death by the same mob that demanded Jesus be crucified. In the moments before he died, Stephen did what Jesus had done. His final words were, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," Then just before he died he prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:60)

### **Personal Application: Jesus forgives me for my part in His death**

These words have a deeper and wider meaning than only being applied to the Roman soldiers who were crucifying Jesus 2000 years ago. They speak to us today. Here's the personal application: Jesus forgives me for my part in His death.

You can still go to a hill outside Jerusalem today that many believe is Golgotha, which means "place of a skull." There is a rock cliff that still looks hauntingly like the face of a skull. Years ago, the famous preacher R.G. Lee, was visiting Jerusalem for the first time. When his tour group was nearing the site of Golgotha, Dr. Lee ran ahead of the rest of the group. When the group arrived they found Dr. Lee bowing on his knees as he stared up at the hill that looks like a skull. The tour guide said, "Dr. Lee, have you ever been here before?" Dr. Lee said, "Yes. I was here 2,000 years ago, because I was in the heart and mind of Jesus when He asked God to forgive sinners." Even if you've never been to the Holy Land, you were there 2,000 years ago. It is because of us that Jesus went to the cross. The Bible says, "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree. (I Peter 2:24) He was wounded for OUR transgressions; He was bruised for OUR iniquities. The Bible says "God laid on Him the iniquities of us all."

Even though we didn't hold the hammer that drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet, we are reason He went to the cross to die. And the good news is when you put your absolute trust in Jesus, He still prays that prayer for you, "Father, forgive (your name) for he/she didn't not know what they were doing." Jesus is still speaking those words of grace!

## **2. JESUS DISPLAYED GRACE WHEN HE TOOK CARE OF HIS MOTHER**

After Jesus looked out at those crucifying Him, His gaze fell on the first face His human eyes had seen 33 years earlier in Bethlehem. He saw His mother, Mary standing there with three other people. At this point, He only had eyes for His mother. In a tremendous display of grace, Jesus said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." (John 19:26)

John was standing next to Mary and Jesus was telling His mother John would now assume the role of taking care of her. After the mention of Joseph when Jesus was 12, there are no further references to Mary's husband. Most scholars infer Joseph died. As the eldest son, Jesus had the responsibility of caring for His mother. And in the same moment in which Jesus was dying for the sins of the world, He still was taking care of His mother.

Put yourself in Mary's sandals for a moment. Her life radically changed 33 years earlier when God sent Gabriel to tell her she would give birth to a little boy who would be the Son of God. Her shocked reply was, "Impossible!" She explained to Gabriel she was a virgin, so how could that happen? Gabriel said, "Nothing is impossible with God!" (Luke 1:37)

When He was eight days old, Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the Temple for His circumcision and dedication. An old prophet named Simeon was there. The Bible says He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and took Jesus in his arms and said to Mary, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:34-35)

From the start, Mary had been warned something would happen to Jesus that would hurt her so deeply it would be like a sharp sword plunging into her soul. As she stood at the cross, she finally came to understand what Simeon was talking about. Her pain can be understood by any parent who has had to stand by and watch their child suffer. John Gerhard has written about Mary's feelings at the cross: "She sees Him suspended, but cannot touch Him; she sees Him nailed, and may not loose Him; she sees Him dripping with blood but cannot remove it; she sees Him wounded, but cannot bind up his wounds; she hears Him cry 'I thirst,' but may not give Him to drink." Moms and dads, if you've ever had to watch your child suffer, wouldn't you have gladly been willing to take that child's pain upon yourself if you could? Certainly. I'm sure Mary felt the same way. But the amazing thing about Jesus is He was actually taking Mary's pain upon Himself.

My favorite Christmas song is "Mary, did you know?" In it Mark Lowry asks, "Mary did you know that your baby boy would some day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you." And that's exactly what Jesus was doing. He was delivering Mary from her sin, sorrow, and grief. He bore her pain and sorrow and made it His very own. In the moment of her deepest agony and pain, Jesus cared for her as only Jesus can.

### **Personal Application: Jesus cares during the most painful experiences of my life**

What does that mean to me? The personal application is this: Jesus cares during the most painful experiences of my life. When your heart is breaking, and your pain is overwhelming, you may wonder, "Does anyone know the pain I'm going through? Does anybody even CARE?" I'm here to tell you Jesus is aware of your pain and He cares for you. The Bible says you can "cast our cares upon the Lord, because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) Jesus said every hair of your head is numbered, and if God notices every time a sparrow falls to the earth, you can be sure He is watching over you! Are you going through a painful time right now? Does it feel as if a sharp sword has been plunged deeply into your soul? Just as He did for Mary, Jesus has opened His arms wide on the cross to let you know He cares for you.

Another of my all-time favorite songs was written by Twila Paris. She says, "For the young abandoned husband; left alone without a reason; For the pilgrim in the city where there is no

home; for the son without a father, for his solitary mother; I have a message: He sees you; He knows you; He loves you; For the precious fallen daughter, for her devastated father; For the prodigal who's dying in a strange new way; For the child who's always hungry; for the patriot with no country; I have a message: He sees you; He knows you; He loves you; Every heart that is breaking tonight is the heart of a child that He holds in His sight; And oh, how He longs to hold in His arms every heart that is breaking tonight."

There is another person who was standing at the cross and another lesson we can learn from this amazing Words of Grace. Finally,

### **3. JESUS DEMONSTRATED GRACE WHEN HE RESTORED JOHN AT THE CROSS**

Jesus said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." We know this to be John, because he often identifies himself as "the disciple whom he loved." Jesus was doing more than simply assigning a task of taking care of His mother to John—He was actually *restoring* John. Rewind with me to the evening before the cross. Jesus was with His disciples in the Upper Room and John was reclining next to Jesus. Jesus shocked His followers with three predictions. First, He predicted one of the disciples would betray Him. They all asked each other, "Who could it be?" Second, Jesus predicted *all* of the disciples would run away from Him in His hour of need. At that, the loud-mouthed Peter boasted the other disciples might desert Him, but he sure wouldn't. He boasted, "Even if I have to die with you, I'll NEVER disown you!" Jesus looked at Him with sad eyes and made His third prediction, "Peter, before the rooster crows tomorrow, you will deny me three times!" (Mark 14:30-31) All three predictions came true. Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter denied knowing Jesus. But we often forget all of the other disciples, including John, ran away like rats leaving a sinking ship! We tend to focus on Peter's failure, but John failed Jesus as well.

John had gone from leaning on Jesus to leaving Jesus. John ran away from Jesus, but John didn't *stay* away from Jesus. As far as we know, John was the only disciple to stand at the cross. He came back to meet Jesus at the cross. Surely John didn't know what to expect. He might have expected accusation or even arrest from the Romans who might recognize him as a follower of Jesus. Or he might have been expecting a rebuke from Jesus. But instead John heard words of grace. As Jesus saw him standing there He said, "Here is your mother." To amplify this thought, Jesus was really saying, "Thanks for coming back, friend. I forgive you for running off and leaving me. To show you how much I trust you, I'm going to give you an important job. Take care of my mom, will you?" And the Bible literally says, "From that hour on, the disciple took her into his home." (John 19:27) The language "from that hour on" could indicate John escorted Mary away at that very moment to spare her the heartache of seeing Jesus suffer for the next six hours.

I believe some of you can relate to John. Like John, you have run away from Christ. Oh, you didn't physically forsake Him, you just wandered away in your commitment to Christ. The Bible has a word for that; it's called being backslidden. Proverbs 14:14 says, "The backslider in heart is filled with his own ways." (NASB)

As you examine your heart would you admit there was once a time when you were more committed to Christ than you are now? There was a time when you got up every day and met the

Lord for a quiet time of prayer and Bible Study, but like John, you have wandered away from Christ? There was a time when you actively served the Lord with gladness, but something happened: You got too busy; or you just drifted away into complacency.

### **Personal Application: Jesus can restore me if I'll meet Him at the Cross**

If you've wandered away in your walk with Jesus here's the personal application for you: Jesus can restore me if I'll meet Him at the Cross. That's what happened with John. He deserted the Lord, but He met Him back at the cross, and Jesus restored Him. Do you want to be restored? Like John, you have known the Lord for a long time, but something caused you to slip away from the side of Jesus. It's time for you to come back to His precious bleeding side. The Bible says, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." (James 4:8) The best place for you to be restored is at the cross. It's only at the cross that you witness the height, breadth, depth, and width of the love God has for you. And when you meet Him there, the first thing Jesus says to you is, "I'm glad you're back. I've missed you. I want to restore you to a place where you lean on me. Now, I have a job for you: Take care of my people. Serve me again. I have a cross for you. Take it up and follow me."

### **CONCLUSION**

As I said at the beginning of this message, never wander too far from the cross. The wonderful blind hymn writer, Fanny Crosby, had more spiritual vision than the rest of us. She wrote a beautiful prayer that might well express the desire of your heart today. Would you be willing to pray this prayer? "Jesus, keep me near the cross, There a precious fountain, Free to all, a healing stream, Flows from Calv'ry's mountain. In the cross, in the cross, Be my glory ever; Till my raptured soul shall find Rest beyond the river." The cross is the perfect place for every person to meet the Lord. If you aren't a Christian, you can meet Jesus at the cross as He dies for your sins and offers you grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

I recall reading about a little boy who got lost in the inner city. As he stood there crying, a kind policeman came up to try to help him. He asked the boy where he lived, but the child couldn't give him the address. However, the boy did remember he lived in an apartment building near a church that displayed a large illuminated cross. As they walked around the streets, the little boy saw the cross and his eyes lit up with recognition. He was so excited and he said to the policeman, "If you can just get me to the cross, I can get home from there." And my friend, you can surely get home to heaven when you come to the cross of Jesus.

## OUTLINE

### 1. JESUS DEFINED GRACE WHEN HE PRAYED FOR THOSE WHO CRUCIFIED HIM

*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*

Personal Application: Jesus forgives me for my part in His death

### 2. JESUS DISPLAYED GRACE WHEN HE TOOK CARE OF HIS MOTHER

*Dear woman, here is your son.*

Personal Application: Jesus cares during the most painful experiences of my life

### 3. JESUS DEMONSTRATED GRACE WHEN HE RESTORED JOHN AT THE CROSS

*Jesus said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."*

Personal Application: Jesus can restore me if I'll meet Him at the Cross



**DISCLAIMER:** These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes