

Rich Nathan
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The Cross

The Seven Last Words from the Cross

We just heard John talk about some of the activities that we will be doing this summer in an event that we call Summer Harvest. And for those of who weren't here last year, or who were here but weren't involved, or were here and didn't have a great experience with Summer Harvest, let me share a little bit about what we are aiming at.

One of the things that I feel deeply about regarding Summer Harvest is the need for us, as the church, to focus on people who don't know Jesus. I talked last week about a lack a focus and I want to continue along that theme because it is the simple fact that our busyness and our anxieties and our own circle of concerns, whether it is at work or in our family or with our finances or concerning our health or house or vacation, often crowd out from us what is most valuable in life. And one of the key priorities for God, as he speaks to us in the Bible, and for us here at Vineyard Church of Columbus, is seeing people enter a relationship with Jesus.

That is where Summer Harvest comes in. If part of our problem is a lack of focus, then we want to have an opportunity, at least once a year, to push aside other kinds of issues to the extent that we can, to push aside other programming in the church and our other pursuits and to make ourselves available to God.

You know, last summer's meetings that we had a guest speaker for were disappointing, at best, in terms of the results that we immediately saw at the meetings. There

were very, very few people who made decisions for Christ. But in the ensuing year, following those meetings, we have seen more people make decisions to enter a relationship with Jesus than we ever have in our history by a substantial margin. I really believe that something was sown in the church, something happened inside of us, that did break an introversion and a self-centeredness of the church. The short of it is that the church was available to God to be used in the community. And God will bless our availability whether at these meetings or in the aftermath of the meetings.

I have no idea how many people will come to know Jesus through the Summer Harvest. In part, it depends on you and your responses, your prayers, and God's timing. But I do know that if we pull together as a church, if we do rally, if we say: "Yes, I will use this time to focus on being available to God in the area of evangelism" we are going to see great things. Not only at the meetings, but in the aftermath of the meetings.

One thing that I do want to do today is to recruit several dozen people who will commit themselves to one of two things. One is to pray daily for the Summer Harvest, and specifically for people to come to know Jesus and for our church. People who will pray daily for Summer Harvest. The second is to commit themselves to pray during the meetings. While we have our meetings in here, you who sign up will be in another room praying for God's blessing and for open heavens and that God would come and touch people. We have sign up sheets and forms out in the lobby. If you feel like God is leading you to be a part of our intercessory prayer team for Summer Harvest to pray daily or to pray during the meetings, please, after the service sign up for that.

Last week I began a series on The Cross. And if you were here, you will remember that I said I was going to start with the widest angle lens that I could—the signs surrounding the cross. Then, this week I am going to talk about the words spoken by Jesus from the

cross. Next week we will talk about the blood that was shed at the cross. And finally as we focus in, we will talk about the person who died on the cross.

Jesus said seven things that we have recorded, seven statements as he hung on the cross for six hours one Friday. He said seven things. And we are going to look at Jesus' seven statements on the cross in a message that I have titled: **The Seven Last Words from the Cross**. Let's turn to the Lord in prayer.

The text that we are going to look at is found in Luke 23:34. I am going to pick up the flow beginning in verse 32 where it says:

"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.'"

The word of forgiveness: Father, forgive them. We need, of course, first of all to understand what was happening at that moment. Jesus was suffering an excruciating form of torture called crucifixion. Now we have gained some more understanding of crucifixion as a result of the findings of archeology. About 25 years ago some archeologists uncovered the only known skeleton of a man who had been crucified. It showed that his feet were nailed sideways to the cross. Whereas his body was facing forward, his feet were twisted at a 90-degree angle at the waist. This unnatural position, the victim's growing thirst, his exposure to the weather, his loss of blood and the victim's impaired breathing all worked together in bringing about the victim's death.

The tension on the victim's arms would cause him to lose normal breathing and his lungs would fill with fluid. The actual way that a crucified man would die was the accumulation of fluid in his lungs. He would literally drown to death.

In order to hasten death, the soldiers around a crucified person would break the person's legs so that they could no longer pull themselves up in order to get another gasp of air. Frequently, a crucified man would live as long as 36 hours in increasing agony. It is one of the most diabolical forms of torture ever invented.

And what I think we have here most amazingly in this first word is the revelation of the heart of God toward us. What an incredibly merciful God we serve, who would forgive someone for the brutal torture and murder of his own Son.

You know, there are numerous movies out about true-life stories of parents who have decided to take the law into their own hands by killing some psychopath who has kidnapped, tortured and then murdered one of their children. And the stories are so gripping because we can enter the emotion, in fact, the justice that is being executed by a mother or father who has to deal with a grinning rapist in court and endure the horrors of listening to testimony about the last hours and moments of their own child's life. Watch some person who we would consider a cockroach smirking, smiling, sitting there whistling at the defendant's table. And then to add to the trauma of it, to listen to some defense attorney weave together this ridiculous defense, all designed to protect a person like this.

And imagine the feeling of one of those parents after listening to that testimony of the last moments of their child on earth in hearing a verdict that would acquit the defendant for his crimes. Is there anyone here who can't sympathize with a parent taking the law into his own hands upon discovering that an enormous injustice had been done? That the torturer and murderer of their own child has gotten off the hook?

Consider the heart of God toward us. He didn't hear about the torture and murder second hand, but He watched his own Son brutally executed. Forgive them? Let them off

the hook? We would think Jesus would more aptly pray: Father, destroy them. Consume them in your wrath. Punish them according to their sins.

Think about who Jesus was praying for when he said: Father, forgive them. He was certainly including the soldiers that were surrounding the cross. And you know, lest you get the wrong idea, most of the soldiers surrounding the cross were not some noble military types who were simply obeying orders – men who were committed to follow the chain of command and had no choice in this instance but to sadly do their duty. The soldiers that Jesus was praying for took delight in crucifying him. They enjoyed kicking him, spitting at him and mocking him, knocking him to the ground and punching him in the face. They were like some of the people we saw several years ago during the riots in L.A., dancing around and laughing while they kicked people in the head. They were not grimly doing their duty. They were a bunch of thugs. Forgive them.

And what about the Sanhedrin, the court that convicted Jesus of blasphemy? Lest you misunderstand who they were, they were not sincerely devoted, religious men who because of their backgrounds and viewpoints reached certain erroneous conclusions. These were men who by their own law knew that they were involved in injustice. They knew they were listening to, and actually producing, fraudulent, trumped up charges. They knew that the whole trial was a sham, that they were suborning perjury. That they were manipulating the process so that it had a veneer of legality without any of the substance of doing justice. The Jewish leaders were included in the “Father, forgive them.”

And Pilate. He was not a man who had to make a tough call, who after looking at the facts was deceived and made the wrong decision. He was the lowest form of political animal, Pilate. He represents the politician who absolutely has no convictions and no scruples whatever. Just an empty box. He is the consummate politician who is good at one

thing: political survival, staying in power, making compromises with every power group, saying what needs to be said.

You know, we are upset with the current crop of politicians that we have to deal with in the next election. We see them as reeds blowing in the wind, constantly looking at the polls. This guy, Pontius Pilate, is beyond any of them by a magnitude of a thousand. He has no convictions, no scruples.

It is for people like this, the soldiers, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders, Pontius Pilot, that Jesus prayed: Father, forgive them—the men who were torturing his Son and murdering him.

And I believe the Father heard his prayer and answered. He held back judgment on Jerusalem for 40 years. He could have immediately allowed the Romans to destroy the city. But for 40 years he gave the Jewish people in Jerusalem who had prayed, “Let his blood be on us,” for 40 years he gave the people in that city the opportunity to respond to the message of Christ. Many people say, “Well, you know, if Jesus were really the truth, how come the Jews who heard his message didn’t respond? How come Jews didn’t accept Jesus?”

The fact is thousands of Jewish people in the next 40 years were converted. James the apostle tells Paul in Acts 21:20, “Many tens of thousands, many tens of thousands of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the law.” If you look at what James says in the original, there is a minimum of 50,000 Messianic Jews, Jews who believed, and who were apparently included in this prayer: Father, forgive them. Ten percent minimum of all the Jews who lived in Palestine accepted Jesus as Messiah. Don’t let anyone ever tell you: Why don’t Jews believe? Tens of thousands Jews believed and accepted Jesus as Messiah.

And tens of thousands of Jews today around the world have accepted Jesus as their Jewish Messiah.

How incredibly big is the heart of God. Apparently, he felt that many of the priests and leaders were acting in ignorance. God defines ignorance a lot differently than I would. Because Peter said that many of the priests and leaders were acting in ignorance in Acts 3:17. Maybe they were ignorant of the full implications of what they were doing. Or ignorant of exactly who the person was that they were crucifying, that he was the Incarnate One.

But I think if you survey the people Jesus was praying for, there is one message that comes through. The message is this: no matter what you have done, no matter how opposed you have been to God, you can come to Christ and be forgiven. You may have been involved in the occult. You may have committed adultery against your partner. You may have had an abortion and killed your own baby. You may have strayed into illegal drugs. You can come to God. The priests did. Many of the soldiers did.

It is an amazing thing to me when I stop and realize that God values a relationship with us so much that he sent his Son to die on a cross to remove the only thing that gets in the way of that relationship, our sin. *Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.*

And then there is the word of salvation from the cross. Luke 23:43, let me read it in context.

“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 we 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, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’”

The second word spoken from the cross, the word of salvation: *I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*

You know, there was a prophesy in Isaiah that says that Jesus will be numbered among the transgressors. He was crucified between two murderers. In verse 39 it says that one of the criminals who was by Jesus' side hurled insults at him. The Greek word is the word from which we get the word "blaspheme." This man refused to take Jesus seriously. Refused to take his power seriously. Refused to take his person seriously. But the other man relented. I think what we see in this story is not only is Jesus the Savior of men, but he is the divider of men. He is the wedge driven between all relationships. Here are two men who have an extraordinary commonality, similar backgrounds, similar in thoughts, similar in crimes, the only difference is that one relents at the last moment and surrenders himself to Jesus and the other one doesn't. And that makes the difference. It makes all the difference regarding where they are in eternity. It all turned on this one last minute decision to relent before Christ.

And Jesus comes today as the great wedge. One family member, one partner in a marriage, one child relents, surrenders their life to Christ, and another doesn't. It makes all the difference.

The first mocked him, that is what the other gospels say. But suddenly one of these murderers – who was also, by the way a thief; we would call them today, "muggers" – One of these muggers has a change of heart, is suddenly struck by the fear of God. He says in verse 40: Don't you fear God?

You say, "What is it that saves a person?"

I think we see in this person's words the minimum, the bare essence of what rescues a person and saves them for eternity. He says: Don't you fear God since we are under the same sentence? For we are getting what our deeds deserve.

I think the first thing that must be present in a person's life in order to be saved is that a person must see themselves clearly before God as deserving God's judgment. We are being punished justly. The first thing that a person must apprehend is their own wretchedness before Holy God. Christians call that the conviction of sin. While a person continues to blame others, to rationalize, to play the role of a victim, they will not surrender to Jesus because they are relying on something else, namely their excuses. It is this clear-sighted understanding of what we really look like before a holy God that is the first step in an individual getting saved.

I remember that moment plainly. I have told this story often in Newcomers classes here. But there was a situation that arose in Marlene's dorm room when I tried to make a pass at her. She rebuffed me and I turned the situation around and pretended that she had misunderstood what I was attempting to do. She was so naïve, so innocent, that she began to apologize. I pretended that I was hurt and left the room. But that evening for the first time in my life I had this strong sense that I was fundamentally at core a bad person. And not only did I try to make a pass, have sex with someone who had clearly told me that that was not what they were into, that that was going to violate their standards and their morals—not only did I try to push her to violate her own standards, but when I was caught, I lied my way out of it. And I saw, as I never saw before, that that is the way I always lived life, as a manipulator, as someone who was always pressing for the angle, always trying to turn things to my own advantage, cutting corners when necessary, lying when I had to, when

it was convenient, but making sure that things turned out well for me. I realized that I was a bad person. Not only that I did bad, but I was bad.

I don't know what brought this insight into the life of the thief, the mugger who made this confession. Maybe it was listening to Jesus pray for forgiveness for the people surrounding the cross. Maybe he was so struck by Jesus not yelling back at the crowd and cursing like everyone else who was crucified that day. Maybe he just saw Jesus' goodness and in comparison recognized his own badness. Sometimes when you are around a really good person, you can be struck by your own badness in comparison.

He sees himself clearly. He acknowledges what he sees. And the second thing is that he recognizes who Jesus is and asks Jesus to save him. He recognizes Jesus' innocence, that he is not like us. We are suffering justly. But in contrast, he is innocent, he is sinless. And he recognizes that if anyone is going to save him, Jesus is going to save him. Jesus, remember me. I am entrusting myself to you today.

Finally, he realizes that Jesus is not only innocent and a Savior, he is a King. He is a Ruler. Remember me when you come into your kingdom. See, we not only need to see ourselves clearly as being bad and acknowledging that, but we need to see Jesus clearly for who he is. The innocent one. The Savior. The King.

And of course Jesus, to use the language of Ephesians, always gives us far more than we ask or can imagine. That is what he does for this murderer on the cross. This what he does for us. The man prays for blessing in the future. Remember me in a far off day when you come into your kingdom. Jesus says, "This day." He asked to be remembered. Jesus said, "I am going to do more than remember you. You are going to be with me. And you are going to be with me in paradise." If ever there was a case against purgatory and having to work off sins, here is a man who reaches out for Christ at the very last moment. He

should have been working off his sins for the next 10,000 years. No purgatory. Today you will be with me in paradise. The word of salvation.

And then there is the word of relationship. John 19, beginning in v. 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 [namely the apostle John] standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son.’ And to the disciple John, he said, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on the disciple took her into his home.”

If you compare the list of women who were near the cross, they were four women: Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, and one who was named as his mother’s sister, another gospel says that it was Salome. Another gospel says that she was the wife of the sons of Zebedee, in other words, the fourth woman who was there was Jesus’ aunt, the mother of James and John. John the apostle and James the apostle were first cousins of Jesus. The word of relationship. “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.”

I would simply say two things about this word. Here the salvation of the world is hanging in the balance. No one was involved in a greater task in the history of the world than Jesus was at that moment as he was dying to accomplish our forgiveness and our salvation. And yet despite the fact that here was a great man involved in a great activity, he still was able to concern himself with an individual—his mother. And her future provision and care.

You know, in showing this care, he is so different than other great men involved in great tasks. Isn’t it the mark of great men involved in great things that they really are not very good at caring for individual people, family members, parents, children, spouses? Look around at the great people who were involved in great things. The physicians who are

absorbed with their careers and spend 70-80 hours a week doing great things. And look at the faces of their wives and kids. There is no room, no energy for them left.

The researchers at The Ohio State University, I remember them. The guys who would be in their offices on Christmas day working on big problems, important tasks. People who are concerned about humanity with a capital H, but have no time for the individuals right in front of them.

Jesus is so different. He is one of the rare great men whom I have ever read about who consistently had time for individuals. And in entrusting his mother's care to the apostle John, he is showing the priority that he places on spiritual relationships above relationships of blood. Jesus was the first-born son. His father, Joseph, had died most likely. Under Jewish law he was obligated to make provision for his mom. He had other brothers and sisters and could have entrusted his mother to one of his other brothers or sisters. But the gospel tells us that until the resurrection, his brothers did not believe in him.

We have four women around the cross and one man. Just one. John. Jesus' first cousin. And so Jesus turns to John, the only one who could have made provision for his mother as a man in that society and the only one who had enough relationship with Jesus, to share Jesus' heart and value system.

Friends, Jesus is saying there is something more important than blood relationship in terms of what connects and binds us together. I share relationship with Jesus. Spiritual family here in the church does go before blood according to Christ. Marlene and I have talked about it regarding our own children and their care in the case of our possible deaths. We have said, "Who is better able to care for our kids? Family members who don't share our value system, don't share our beliefs, don't share our goals in life, or dear friends in the

church who are not blood relationships, but who share all of these?” Jesus puts a priority on spiritual relationships. The word of relationship.

And then the word of abandonment. Look at Matthew 27:45,

“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About 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?”

The first three words were spoken apparently between nine and twelve noon. And then there is complete silence for three hours while Jesus experiences this darkness that came over the land. I talked about the darkness last week and said that darkness in the Bible always suggests the absence of God and the judgment of God. And that at the very end of that darkness, Jesus makes this fourth statement from the cross: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

There is so much that could be said about this one statement. I will only raise this thought with you. This is the only time in Jesus’ life that we have recorded him saying “why” to God. Why God, why?

You know, we say that to God all the time. Like many of you, I was so struck by the tragedy of the TWA jet that went down a few days ago. I literally began to cry as I watched and listened to the people talking from that small town in Pennsylvania about lost schoolmates and friends and children. As I watched their grief, like so many of you, my instinctive reaction is: why God? Why?

And as I was meditating on this verse, it occurred to me that Jesus never asked that question—why, except this one time. Why have you forsaken me? He never says: God, why did you allow my close friend, Judas, to betray me? Why are you permitting me to be kicked and spit at? He doesn’t even ask why the cross? All of that is totally acceptable. He

had so much confidence, so much assurance in the goodness of God, whether he understands it or not, he just continually yields himself to the will of God. The only thing that ever occurred in the life of Christ which he asked the question “why” was his experience of the loss of God. Up until that point, he always enjoyed sweet fellowship with God.

There is a moment in the gospel of John where during the last week of Jesus’ life, he says, “You will all leave me. But I am not alone.” And with supreme confidence he says, “I am not alone. My Father is with me.” And then when Jesus bears the judgment for our sins and the darkness comes over the land and God withdraws his presence, it was the only moment in his life when he turned and said, “Why?”

See, Jesus understood what was supremely valuable. God. And to lose God was to lose everything. We treat the loss of God so lightly as we get consumed by our own consumptions, as we build walls of sin and continue to live in ways displeasing to God and lose God as a result. Ah, big deal. Jesus knew that God was everything. That without God we have no hope. That without God we have no comfort. Without God we have no love, we have no future.

The closest to this moment that I have ever read about was in modern literature is found in Elie Wiesel, the Jewish Nobel Prize winner who wrote a book about his experiences during the Holocaust, a book called “Night.” He describes a moment in time when the Nazis forced he and his father, along with a group of other men, to march through the snow on their way to a concentration camp. They were all badly dressed and his father, in exhaustion, fell face down in the snow. Teenage Elie Wiesel was smacked by one of the Nazi guards and ordered to keep walking. He said that when he looked back and saw his father lying face down in the snow, the lights in the universe went out and he lost God. He called it “night”. He had been a very religious Jewish teenager who found great comfort in

his faith. He said that was night. And that is what Jesus is talking about when he says why? Why?

And then briefly in John 19 we have the word of distress. John 19:28,

“Later, knowing that all was completed, and so that the scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there and so they soaked a sponge in it and put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant and lifted it up to Jesus’ lips.”

I thirst. A little earlier, he refused wine mixed with myrrh that was used as a drug to dull the pain, but he accepts this apparent wine vinegar. It was cheap watered down wine that soldiers used to drink. Maybe a couple of the soldiers had it who were standing by the cross.

Why this word: I thirst? Jesus doesn’t say, “Oh, my back. My legs. My side.” There are any number of physical complaints that would have been very aptly said by Christ as he hung on the cross. Why this one: I thirst?

Part of the answer is given to us in John 19:28. “Knowing that all was completed, so that the scriptures would be fulfilled, he said, ‘I thirst.’” He was fulfilling two scriptures. See, Jesus was very conscious to see that everything that was happening would be according the plan of God written out hundreds of years before in the Old Testament down to the least detail. And so in Psalm 22, the Psalm about the righteous sufferer, Psalm 22:15 says,

“My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.”

Psalm 69:21 says, *“They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”*

Jesus was very self-consciously walking in the laid out tracks of Old Testament scripture. He clearly understood that what was happening to him was in biblical prophecy,

much of it beyond his control. And some of it he would voluntarily do and live out. Why “I thirst?” So that God’s word would be obeyed.

Do you have concern about God’s word, not just when it comes to the little details but to the big things? When you see something laid out in God’s word, the Bible, plainly, do you say, “This is the will of God for my life. This is a must. I am under constraint. I must necessarily do this thing.”

Even when he was being executed, suffering in agony, Jesus had concern for the word of God.

But this word of distress also tells us something about the sufferings of Christ and what he was going through in terms of his agony on the cross. One of the descriptions of hell is that people in hell will be tormented with a violent thirst. The rich man in the story of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, pleads for one drop of water to cool his tongue. He was in such agony from a raging thirst. Friends, I want to tell you that we would have suffered an agonizing thirst had not Christ endured for us the flames of hell. We would have been in that position of having to suffer an unendurable thirst. But he took it for us. He voluntarily allowed all hell to break loose against him so that it wouldn’t break against us.

Later in John 19:30, it says,

“When he had finished the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’”

The sixth word is a word of triumph. It is finished. There is just one word used in the Greek—Tetelestai. Tetelestai. It is written in the perfect tense. It literally means “It has been and forever will remain finished.” Tetelestai. Never has one word contained so much meaning that this one Greek word, Tetelestai.

Think about it. Here is a young man aged somewhere between 30-35. Traditionally, Jesus’ age has been pegged at 33. Let’s use that. He is 33 years old. He is young like many

who died in that airline crash this past week. Part of the pain of what we have been witnessing on the news these last few days is the tragedy of lives cut so short of so many young people. And it increases the painfulness to see a young person's life cut off when it is so full of promise, so full of potential, so full of many things not yet fulfilled. I think that exacerbated the pain around John Kennedy's assassination. The fact that he was so young. He was so vigorous. He was cut down in the full bloom of youth and health. It was all so very shattering. Jesus was 33, a young man.

Mohammed lived until age 60. Socrates lived until he was 70. Buddha and Plato lived past 80. This young man hanging on a cross at age 33 could look back over the course of his brief life and, in particular, the last six hours of his life and with this one Greek word say "It's finished."

Some people have totally misinterpreted this and have interpreted his words as a cry of despair. It's all over. All the dreams of Messianic change have been dashed. My life is now over. None of these thoughts could be further from the mind of Christ. These are not the words of despair or the words of disillusionment. This cry was a cry of triumph. It is finished. Every last word of prophecy that needed to be fulfilled in Jesus' life and supremely in his death is finished.

I have been sold, Father, for 30 pieces of silver as the Old Testament said I would.

I was betrayed by a friend.

I have been judged to be a blasphemer.

I have had my beard plucked out.

I have been mocked.

I have had my clothes taken from me.

I have been hung on a tree.

From the cross, I have made intercession for many, praying to you, Father, forgive them.

I have been thirsty.

I have been surrounded.

Not a bone of mine has been broken.

Every single Bible passage of prophecy that had to take place in the death of Messiah has been fulfilled. Finished. It is finished regarding the Old Testament sacrifices and the need for the continual killing of bulls, goats and rams that never had the power to remove sin, but only covered it up. No more sacrificial system. No more earthly priests. No more earthly temple. No more need for yearly pilgrimages. It is finished.

No more wrath of God toward the sin of repentant sinners. No more judgments toward the repentant. No more punishment or penalty toward anyone who comes to me in faith. That is all finished with. Now it is pardon. Now it is forgiveness. Now it is access to God. The whole plan of God has reached its terminal point. Finished. All the types, all the shadows, they have all found their substance in Christ.

Can you imagine this: At age 33 to be able to look up to God and to say I have thoroughly finished the work on earth that you gave me to do. That is what Jesus was saying. We could keep plumbing the depths of this. Never has one word, Tetelestai—it is finished and forever will remain finished—contained so much meaning as this one word. The cry of triumph.

And then last of all, the last thing that Jesus said, some say breathing his last or crying out, we have finally the word of reunion in Luke 23:46, the very last thing that Jesus said before he died:

“Jesus called out in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ And when he said this, he breathed his last.”

The word of reunion. Whereas his relationship with God was torn when he cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus has now received the assurance that his sacrifice for sin has been accepted. That the Father was pleased by the blood of his own Son. The wrath of God is now spent. The forces of hell have now been defeated. Jesus’ relationship with God is now restored. And so he speaks this word of reunion. I am coming home, Father. I am coming back to you. And he dies with scripture in his mouth.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Psalm 31:5

Never has a man lived who was more thoroughly soaked in the Bible than this man Jesus. So completely drenched that his very last words were the words of God in the Bible. Father, I know that you have accepted the price I paid for sin. I know that my offering is pleasing to you. In the words of Hebrews 10, “Sacrifice an offering that you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. With burnt offerings and sin offerings, you were not pleased. But then I said [and these are the words of Jesus], ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will, O God,’ and I have done it and now I have done it and, Dad, I am coming home.

Amen.