

The Heart of the Cross – Good Friday

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Luke 23:32-46
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Words are incredibly important. That's almost cliché. To ask someone to marry them, those are profound words, to give those vows on the wedding day. Final words to a dying loved one. Sometimes the heat of an argument and the words that come out. Precious words between a parent and a child. We use our words at school, job, home, in the market, among strangers. How important are words? Jesus gives a very clear indication in Matthew chapter 12. Jesus had some very choice words for the religious leaders of his day.

What he says might surprise you, but it helps us understand the power of words. He says this. "You brood of vipers," it's a great introduction, "how can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil." Did you catch that? "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." In other words, whatever your heart is filled with spills out of your lips to reveal what's inside. Your true self is revealed by what you say. So, if it's lies and deceit or if it's truth or goodness, we get a clear picture of what's going on, on the inside.

Now, let's step back for just a second. Jesus is the one that we celebrate this weekend, Friday and the coming days ahead, his death and resurrection. He is our Lord and our Savior and our treasure. He's truly God. He's truly man. He's the promised Messiah. He's the central figure of the Bible. For Christians, we celebrate because this is the most important event in human history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus single-handedly achieved our salvation. While on the cross, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, these are the four eyewitness testimonies that we call the gospels here in the Bible, in the New Testament, they start us off, and they record seven sayings of Jesus from the cross.

So, what you have is the most important person speaking at the most important moment in time. Going back to what I said earlier, if words reveal what is in our heart, then we better lean in and not miss what our Savior, our Lord, has to say during this most significant moment in human history. We're going to look at three of those sayings today. We might mention a couple of others, but we're going to focus in on three that come from the Gospel of Luke. What Jesus says here on the cross reveals the heart of the cross, and in fact, the very heart of Jesus comes through.

Our main point as we look at this passage today in Luke chapter 23 is this, that Jesus' words on the cross reveal the very heart of salvation for those who believe in him. This is the white-hot center of the gospel, the gospel meaning good news. It is the tip of the spear. It is the top of the peak. It's the very core of the good news of who Jesus is, and it's hope for sinners and

refreshment for the saints. This Bible is the word of God, and so each week as we preach it, as we read it, we have everyone stand in order to honor God's word.

So would you do that just now, as I read these three statements that Jesus makes according to the Gospel of Luke? Starting in chapter 23, and if you have one of the Bibles that we give out, that's page 979. Verse 33 of chapter 23 says this. "And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" Then in verse 42, one of the thieves looks to Jesus and says this. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Then the last thing that he said on the cross, verse 46, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' And having said this, he breathed his last." You may be seated, and may God bless his word to our hearts.

Those three statements reveal three realities of salvation to us, and these three sayings are like a three-level cascading fountain, the third one being the base of it, and it flows up to the other two tiers, cascading, showing us an amazing blessing of what the gospel is to us. It's a great picture of what these three sayings say to us. Now we find ourself here, Jesus speaking from the cross. What sets the scene for this? Well, it's a grim and somber time. He's been taken to the hill called The Skull, Golgotha. We refer to it often as Mount Calvary. On his way there, he was betrayed by one of his closest companions. He went through mock trial, a savage beating. He was put a crown of thorns on his head in mockery of him claiming to be the king of the Jews. He had to carry his own cross after all of that until he couldn't anymore, and as Pastor Jeremiah had mentioned, Simon of Cyrene had to help him. He was mocked. He was stripped. His garments were divided as spoils, and he was hung between two common thieves, which that scenario was prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53:12.

It says, he poured out his soul. The messiah poured out his soul to death and was murdered with the transgressors, the lawbreakers, the sinners, yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. That's the first word here. Jesus is making intercession as he is hanging on the cross. That's number one, our point #1) We learn this, ***Jesus Forgives Those Who Believe in Him***. To believe is to have trust, to have faith. It's not a casual belief, and so his first saying, he enters into prayer for those who are doing this to him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and them is the crowd there. He was making intercession for the transgressors, the crowd. What kind of crowd? We get a little character idea here, characteristic of who they are in these following verses, 35 and on. Says, "And the people stood by, watching. But the rulers, the religious leaders, scoffed at him and they said 'He saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one.'" The soldiers, the gentile Roman soldiers, mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself."

There was also an inscription over him. "This is the king of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanging railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." This is who

Jesus is praying for. He's praying for these that are doing this. Now, wait a minute. Your statement says, "Jesus forgives those who believe in him." These aren't believers. These are perpetrators. These are the ones who've literally put Jesus on the cross and now mocking him. They're not believers, and yet Jesus prays for them. Now, there's some implications here. We need to step back just for a second again. The four gospels that we've been given are four testimonies given to us on the life of Jesus. They're not the exhaustive biography of Jesus, but exactly what God wants us to know about Jesus. Luke chapter 1:4, Luke tells us why he's writing this, so that you are certain about what you've been taught and if you're certain about it, then the implication is that you believe it, that you believe it, and you can stake your life on it.

Not only that, but John 20:31, as Pastor John reminds us of what John said at the end of his gospel, because it sets up an understanding of the whole Gospel of John, and really, it describes all four gospels, the Apostle John says this. "These were written that you believe Jesus is the Christ and have life in his name." So the implications are, everything in this book, everything in these gospels, and everything in Luke is to be believed. So these now are being prayed for that they would be forgiven, and yet they don't believe, yet. In Luke 23:47, after Jesus utters those last words, it says one of the centurions said something. It's also recorded in Mark 15:39, and he says this. Roman centurion says, "Surely this was the son of God," after he saw what took place on the cross. There he was the first answer to Jesus' prayer. Now look to Luke, excuse me, Acts chapter 2. Acts is the second book that Luke has written. Some call it a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. I hate to spoil things for you, but Jesus rises from the dead, and this is where we find the beginning of the book of Acts.

Jesus has risen from the dead. He appears to his disciples, and then he ascends to heaven, and then he pours out his Holy Spirit on his believers. Then we find Peter, and he preaches. He had just denied Christ 60 days earlier, about, and here he is. What happened? He was transformed by the gospel and listen to this. He starts preaching to the crowd on the patio of the temple to the Jews, and in that crowd were those who were in this crowd in Luke 23, were in that crowd, the very ones who put Jesus on the cross and mocked him. They're out there in the crowd. Listen to what Peter says. Verse 23 of Acts chapter 2 says, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," in other words, you guys weren't in control, "you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" and yet it was the plan of God, and yet they're responsible for what they did. Verse 36, he goes at it again. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Whoa. How do they respond? Verse 37. "Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the disciples, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And with many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, Save

yourselves from this crooked generation.' So those who received his word were baptized. They believed it. And there were added that day about 3,000 souls."

It was amazing. These perpetrators and mockers were turned into believers. Jesus prayed for them. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It says even some of the priests, in Acts 6:7, turn their life to Christ and place their faith in him. Now, let's think about this for a second. Let's think about these particular sinners that Jesus is praying for. Here's an important fact. They were, in fact, the worst sinners who've ever lived. This is the top sinners who've ever lived. Jesus said this about them. "They know not what they do." Oh, they knew what they were doing, but they didn't know the extent of it and yet their ignorance wasn't excused. You can't go, I didn't know. Sin is sin whether you know it or not. It's the truth. Listen to what Paul says about these people here. He says, "None of the rulers..." This is First Corinthians 2:8. He says, "None of the rulers of this age understood." These are the religious leaders. "They didn't understand this," and the this that he's referring to in that context is the mysterious plan of God to save man. If they had known this, "For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

These men that were there didn't know the extent of what they were doing. They put the Lord of glory on a cross. There is nothing worse than that. It was far-reaching when Jesus prayed for this, the scribes, the Pharisees, Pilate, Herod, the Jews, and the gentiles. Their self-righteousness, their power-mad pridefulness blinded them from what they should have known of all people in the world. They had the book. The book pointed to Jesus, and they didn't like it. Now, there's two potential wrong responses to this, both based on what you possibly don't know or don't understand, for some of you. One, on one side, someone maybe think, well, that's good. I didn't kill Jesus, so I'm not that bad. I would say this. You don't know, you don't understand, your need. The other extreme might be this over here. Oh, no. I know I'm a sinner, but Jesus can't help me. You don't know what I've done, pastor. I've done some bad things. Let me tell you this. You don't know or understand your savior. Here's what you need to know. None are sinless. In one sense, because Jesus died for those who had placed their faith in him, we understand that we were complicit. We were responsible as well even though we weren't there to put him on there.

Scriptures tell us in Romans 3:23 and 24, tells us that, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but are justified freely by placing our faith in Jesus Christ." Now, for those who think that you're beyond mercy, let me remind you of what John says in First John 1:9. He says, "If we confess our sins, he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness." All. Not part. Not some. He only cleanses the unrighteousness of good people, which wouldn't make sense. It's all sin, if you confess it, if you agree with him that it's wrong. This is amazing truth for us, amazing blessing for us in understanding this.

Why is he appealing to the father? Well, he was making peace by sacrificing himself as the once and for all payment for sin. He could appeal to the father's great mercy to forgive sin, even foolish, unknowing sin. We see the father in scripture. father says, "He is the just and justifier for those who have faith in Jesus." The father sent the son to save us, and here he was saving them. We see both his justice and mercy. God is a just God. He can't overlook sin and shrug and go,

Hmm. He wouldn't be a holy God if he didn't take care of sin and yet he's a loving, merciful father who has provided a way that sinners can be free from the penalty of their sin. In fact, it says in Hebrews 7:25, describing this, "Consequently, he, Jesus, is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." He's able to save to the uttermost, not just halfway, not partway, but all the way. That's who he is. That's what he does and so here's the point. If Jesus can forgive the worst of sinners, he can forgive you. If he can forgive the worst of sinners, he can forgive you.

If you think you are a good person, think again. You need a savior. If you think you're doing okay based on your own merit, you're not. If you think your sins are too great, think again. You have a savior, and his mercy is greater than your sin. Who is forgiven? Jesus washes clean the sinner who believes that Jesus forgives, because there he is on the cross doing just that, paying for that sin. Sadly, though, there are many who face death with uncertainty. We see this. Jesus forgives those who believe in him, and yet there are many where you're asking, are you going to heaven? Then they might say, well, I hope so, and they shrug. That's kind of a big deal. Life after this life, and the best you can do is shrug. I'm not saying that to mock anyone. What I'm saying is, that's how we kind of think of it. I've seen people say this, they've said it to my face, well, I hope so. It's got to be better than that, because it's huge, and here's the good news of this story here, and what we see in point #2) that he says is that ***Jesus Assures Salvation for Those Who Believe in Him***. We get this from the situation with one of the thieves.

Now, what's interesting here, and we have four gospel accounts. In Matthew's gospel, he says this in Matthew 27:44. When he's talking about the same instance, he says, "The robbers reviled him." That's plural. There's two of them and it says they both reviled him. Now, Luke picks up the story here and he says, "One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.'" Oh, see their contradictory? No? They're giving aspects of the same story. At one point, both robbers were on the same side. Look at this guy, we're thieves, we deserve this. Look at this guy, the king of the Jews, and yet something happens. What happens? Because then we see this, verse 40, "But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed, justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' He said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'" Something happened. What happened? Jesus just said these words. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He saw the sign, king of the Jews. As a Jew himself, he would understand this is messiah. Something's going on here.

This thief was dying on his own cross. This thief only had one place to go, and he turned to that one place and said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." What we get is Jesus' response, and it's the most beautiful, the most assured answer anyone has ever gotten in all of scripture. What does he say to him? "Truly. Count on it. I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise." That's amazing, right? He was simply asking. Hey, when your kingdom comes, he knew the story. He knew that the savior would come and would reign, and he's just asking for a

place. Can I have a place? Will you remember me, and Jesus says, no, I'll do better, I'll do better. "Today, you will be with me in paradise." Jesus was on the cross to pay for sins, and this thief was literally dying for his own crimes, the thief paying the debt to society that he owed, and here is Jesus right next to him, paying for this thief's debt for all eternity. Here's the point. Jesus actually saves. Jesus actually saves. The thief isn't just going to get a place. He gets something better. He gets Jesus. That's what Jesus promised him. "Today, you'll be with me in paradise." That's what makes heaven, heaven. He is heaven. Yes, streets of gold. Yes, we're going to see passed loved ones that we miss. Looking forward to that.

But here's the whole, ultimate aspect of what makes heaven, heaven. It's Jesus, and that's what he offers this thief. It's incredible because this thief recognized his sin. He recognized Jesus' sinlessness. He recognized Jesus was the one promised, and he turned from his sin. There was nothing this thief could do to earn his salvation. Nothing. He was stuck on a cross, and there was nothing he could do after Jesus uttered these words to earn his salvation, to work, to do anything. This thief is the golden example of who receives salvation. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That's it, period and this is what's being offered here in this moment. What's taking place here? First Peter 3:18 tells us, "For Christ also suffered once for sins," once, not every Sunday, "the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." He's bringing this thief to God. He brings you and me to God when we die if we've placed our faith in him. Second Corinthians 5:21. "For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

That's an incredible statement and here's this thief. "Remember me. Remember me." Now, the point of this, here's another thing not to learn from this story, and this one in particular. Oh, this is awesome. Then I'll wait till I'm dying, and I'll do my sin, and then I'll come to him in the last minute. Boy, if you pick that up, you picked up the wrong message here. Do not presume on the Lord and his graciousness. What we see is his incredible graciousness for a man who could do no good except turn to Jesus. No. The question now is today. This is your opportunity. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn to Jesus while you can. That's the message that you're hearing. Remember me. That includes save me, forgive me, take all of me. I'm yours. Does that describe you? Here's the good news. You can't earn it. You can't un-earn it. All you can do is turn and trust Jesus. So many lack assurance because they base it on what they do, and that might give them a false assurance. Well, yeah, I'm pretty good. Or it might give them another false assurance. Oh, I can never be good enough, and the answer is, you're right. Jesus was. Jesus did all we need to save us, not us. We can't do it. He does. "In him, we have redemption through his blood," Ephesians 1:7, "the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." You see, there were two thieves. One rejected him. The other did not. The difference? One turned to him. One turned to him and found life. Does Jesus forgive? That was our first point. Jesus forgives. What's the proof? This thief right here. Right away, he saves this thief. He saves a man who seems unsavable, and he gave him the assurance that upon his pending death, "Today, you'll be with me in paradise. Truly."

Jesus is not a booster shot so that you can finish the job. That's what some religions teach. His grace is everything to your nothing. The only thing you contribute, you maybe have heard me say this before, is your sin that causes you to need a savior. That's your contribution in this. Turn to him. No purgatory or penance is going to help you. It's not about being better than most. God doesn't grade on the curve. It's not about some sort of legalistic exercise. You got to have your seven sacraments or go on your two-year mission or whatever that might be. You need Jesus and Jesus alone. He's saying this from the cross. He's offering this. Yes, your good works matter, but they are a result of a changed life, and we even get a hint of that in this man. He was reviling Jesus, and now he's rebuking the Jesus reviler. There was a change because he turned to Jesus. Now, how is all of this possible, this forgiveness and this assurance? Well, it comes because, point #3) ***Jesus Secures our Salvation. Jesus Secures Salvation for Those Who Believe.*** That's what we see here in these final words.

How is this possible? Because it says, "Then Jesus called out with a loud voice so all could hear, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' And having said this, he breathed his last." Why is that important? He was done. What was he done? Well, he came to do the father's will. He says that time and time again. "I've come to do my Father's will." We've been learning about that in John chapter 5. In fact, when he was 12 years old, remember, this is almost a comical scene. Joseph and Mary are visiting Jerusalem, and somehow their wires got crossed and they left Jesus in the temple. They get out of town, and they realize, you don't have him. I don't have him. Uh-oh. We better go back and get him, and what does he say to them as a 12-year-old? It wasn't sassy. It wasn't mean. He said, "Where do you think I'd be? I'm about my Father's business." It's no coincidence that that's in the Book of Luke, because he's about his Father's business. Well, what is that? What is this father's will? What is he there to do? Well, Jesus tells us. He told us, "I have come," which means this is why he came, "to seek and to save the lost." He told that to Zacchaeus.

He said, I've come to bring light to a dark world. I've come to be made like my people. I bear witness to the truth, to destroy the devil and his works, to give eternal life, to lose nothing, all that the father has given him, namely believers, to receive worship, to bring great joy, to demonstrate true humility, to preach good news, to bring judgment, to give his life as a ransom for many, to fulfill the law on prophets, to reveal God's love for sinners, to call sinners to repentance, to die, to serve, to bring peace, and to bring a sword. Now, how is that possible? He brings peace with God, and because of that, people won't like you, and so there's a sword. To bind up broken hearts, to give us the spirit of adoption, to be a merciful and faithful high priest and king, to be the second and greater Adam, to satisfy our deepest hunger and thirst, to be loved by God's children, and to reveal God's glory.

How do you sum it up? Jesus came to save sinners and all that's entailed with that. In fact, Peter says it this way in Acts 4:12. He says, "There is no other name under heaven by which a man can be saved." So if you think you can save yourself, your name is not Jesus, so that's not the name. He's referring to the name of Jesus. That's the only name that can save. So those of you who

think, there is no savior for me. I'm so bad, wrong. His name is Jesus, and he's come to save, and that's good news and that's the news that he brings. So, did he come and do what the father had asked him to do? Just before he said these words, the sixth saying comes from John chapter 19, verse 30. Jesus said, "It is finished." What does that mean in its literal language? Paid in full. What's paid in full? The penalty for sin. Jesus paid for the penalty of sin. You see, this holy God can't let sin go. He's got to punish it.

So, what does he do? He gives his son to take on that punishment for us and offer us eternal life. There's another way to pay for that sin, in hell after life is over. It's hard to talk about. People don't like to hear it. A lot of churches don't ever mention it. But there is a hell. It's a real place, and it's for those who reject the saving work of Jesus. He offers free grace. He offers himself. Romans 5:8-11 says this. "But God shows his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." See, these final words reflect Jesus' completion, his sufficiency to save. It was time to return to the Father as victor, as the sufficient savior of man.

You see, he gave his life and he had finished all he had come to do, and now he committed his spirit to the Father, boldly declaring, "Done." What does that mean? It means that Jesus secured our salvation. He did it. He accomplished all he came to do. Jesus is able to forgive and why? Because he died for us, paid the penalty. Those who believe are released from the penalty, the power, and one day, the presence of sin in heaven. Jesus actually saved sinners and the thief is the golden example, having only been able to turn to Jesus in faith, receiving the glorious grace assured by Jesus himself. Jesus was the victor over sin, death, and the devil. He's the only name that can save. How do we know he fulfilled the father's will and was victorious? Three days later, he rose from the dead. Pastor John gets to tell that story tomorrow and Sunday. Be in prayer for him, and don't miss it.

So let's conclude this. We see and hear the heart of Jesus in just these three sayings from the cross. It's the best news ever. It's amazing to me oftentimes when a Christian maybe asked, can you explain the gospel to me, how hard it is. I think sometimes we think we move on from the gospel once we become a Christian, and yet we never should, and I think it's also because there's a spiritual warfare and Satan wants to continue to blind and keep the gospel quiet. But here's Jesus with his arms stretched out for those who would believe what he accomplished, and what did he accomplish? Jesus solved our greatest need. He forgives sins. That's your greatest need. Maybe you thought it was something else, but your greatest need, and many of you know this, but maybe you've forgotten it, that your greatest need is to be saved from your sins because it separates us from God. It separates us from God, and he has brought near. It's the root of all those other problems that come in a distant second. Jesus solved your greatest need.

Secondly, Jesus has provided our greatest hope, the assurance of salvation. He actually saves. If you have faith in Jesus Christ, you don't have to try to win God's favor. Jesus has done it for you. You don't have to fear the lightning bolt. You don't have to carry a heavy burden of legalism, but rather put on his yoke that brings you rest. Why? Because Jesus, number three, provides our greatest blessing. He secures salvation. He's the sufficient one to save. So what's the action point on this? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn from your sin and to the one who died to forgive, assure, and secure your salvation. It's by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, period. Christian, rejoice in your salvation. Be renewed in the joy of your salvation. Be refreshed in the hope of Good Friday, with a fresh understanding of forgiveness, assurance, and security to bolster your faith and to refuel your witness to a dying world that needs to hear the good news. This is the heart of the cross. This is the heart of Jesus. Jesus saves. Would you pray with me?

Jesus, we are so thankful that you save. You have blessed us with these words to remind us of the good news of why you came. You are our Savior. You are Lord. I pray for those who cannot say that. I pray that right now, they wouldn't wait, they wouldn't delay, but they would believe in you, they would turn to you and turn from their sin. I pray for those who are Christians who came in and maybe they've forgotten the joy of their salvation. They've forgotten what it means to walk in newness of life and the joy that you provide and the security that you provide as you transform us by your holy work to make us more like yourself. I pray that they would be refreshed anew and be reminded of the gospel every day. We thank you for your good news. We pray that we would be good witnesses to it as well, because our world needs it. We thank you. Amen.