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Listening to Jesus Die

BY RICHARD JORDAN

While on the cross our Lord spoke only seven times. This fact alone makes these statements of eminent value. The "sayings" naturally classify themselves into three groups: three are found only in the book of Luke; three are recorded only by John; one is found only in Matthew and Mark.

Beyond these apparent groupings, there is a fascinating progression in their order of occurrence. The first three are oriented to *dispensational* issues surrounding the cross. The central statement reaches into the depths of the *suffering* of the cross. Then the last three illustrate the *sufficiency* of what Christ accomplished at Calvary.

Another thing to notice is that all seven statements were direct fulfillment of Scripture. As such, they demonstrate the place the word of God held in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Scripture that was on His mind as He "*endured the cross.*" He was thinking through the verses that applied to him, keeping His mind fixed on His Father's plan.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

This is what Paul is pointing to when he writes:

"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU, WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

By saying, "*Let this mind be in you,*" Paul was not referring to the Jewish program under which Christ was living. Rather, he was pointing to Christ's *mindset* toward that program. It was the mindset Christ had toward the word of God that led Him to be obedient unto the death of the cross.

This should encourage us! As believers our thinking process should follow the same kind of understanding that Christ had about where He stood in the program of God—He knew what the Father had given him to do and He had such confidence in God's word that it enabled Him to "*endured the cross, despising the shame*" (Heb. 12:2).

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

One more thing: the Lord Jesus is an illustration of one who is totally "*filled with the Spirit.*" Consider John 3:34,

"For he [Christ] whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."

Jesus Christ is the only person who ever walked this planet who was absolutely, unreservedly, without any measure, filled with the Spirit. If you want to see someone filled with the Spirit, look at Him (cf. Luke 4:18)!

Now, what does it mean to be "*filled with the Spirit*"? Let's compare two passages for a moment:

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. . ." (Col. 3:16).

After talking about being filled with the Spirit, the Ephesians passage goes on to describe the *results* of being Spirit filled (chapters 5 and 6). If you compare Colossians 3:16 and following, you will see that the *same results* come from the word of Christ dwelling in you richly.

We know that when *A* equals *B*, and *B* equals *C*, then *A* equals *C*. So, if being filled with the Spirit (*A*) produces certain results (*B*), and the word of Christ dwelling in you (*C*) produces the *same results* (*B*), then we know these are synonymous terms. They are two different ways to describe the same thing, thus explaining and amplifying each other.

So, being filled with the Spirit has to do with the word of God dwelling in you, controlling your thinking process, so that by faith you can stand on the truth of the identity that God has given you in Christ.

We see all this in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus each time He spoke from the cross it was based on fulfilling Scriptures.

A FURTHER REVELATION

Before briefly examining these seven sayings we should remember that even though these *events* were prophesied, and the Lord Jesus was consciously fulfilling Scripture in each one, yet there was a depth of *meaning* to these events that was not as yet revealed. In fact, it was not until *after* the resurrection that even the Twelve understood these events to be what Scripture had foretold (see Luke 24:44,45; cf. 18:31-34).

In this regard, we would do well to remember the declaration of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 2:7-8,

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

"Which none of the princes of this world knew: FOR HAD THEY KNOWN IT, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE CRUCIFIED THE LORD OF GLORY."

So, while the events themselves had long been prophesied, God had a very good reason to keep the full meaning of these events hidden, only to ultimately be revealed in *"the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made*

manifest"—and that through the revelation given to and through the Apostle Paul (Rom. 16:25, 26, Eph. 3:1-9, Col. 1:24-27).

WORDS OF SALVATION AND SECURITY

The first time Christ spoke from the cross is recorded in Luke 23:34,

"Then said Jesus, FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO...."

In Isaiah 53:12 we read that one of the things Messiah was to do in connection with His death was to *"make intercession for the transgressors."*

Notice the first word in verse 34 is *"then."* This pronouncement took place when they had done their worst by hanging Him on a cross.

Instead of stoning Him, as the Jewish manner would have been, they instigated Roman participation so He could be hanged on a tree because Scripture said, *"For he that is hanged is accursed of God"* (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). They didn't simply want Him dead, they wanted Him cut off and declared to be cursed by God. It was at that moment, in matchless love and grace, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them,"* just as Isaiah 53:12 promised.

And this intercession carries a remarkable *dispensational* significance in that it resulted in an extension of mercy to His wayward nation, allowing for a renewed opportunity of repentance to be offered to them in the early Acts period. In other words, this was a word of salvation for a rebellious nation!

The second saying comes in Luke 23:43,

"And Jesus said unto him, VERILY I SAY UNTO THEE, TO DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

The thief had made what can only be called a clear profession of faith: he dramatically separated himself from the revilers, he knew about the coming Kingdom and the opportunity to be resurrected into it—and that Christ was the "door." These words of salvation to a repentant believer from the lips of the Messiah must have been wonderful to hear! And here again, Christ is fulfilling Scripture, for Isaiah 53:12 declared that He would be *"numbered with the transgressors."*

And, again, there is a wider dispensational significance here, as the Lord's response makes it clear that the fundamental issue in becoming a part of His "little flock" was faith in Him as Israel's Messiah. This pronouncement contained words of the assurance of salvation for the believing remnant, His Little Flock (Luke 12:32).

His next words address His mother and the "disciple whom Jesus loved."

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, WOMAN, BEHOLD THY SON!

"Then saith he to the disciple, BEHOLD THY MOTHER! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:26, 27).

Here we see the fulfillment of Isaiah 52:13's "*Behold, my servant shall deal prudently,*" as He deals wisely, prudently making plans regarding the details of life; dealing with them carefully while suffering in agony. But there is, again, an interesting dispensational thought here:

By addressing His mother as "*Woman,*" He focuses on her status as "*the seed of the woman*" and a representative of her nation. Placing her in the care of John foretells the role the Twelve were to play as caretakers of His nation. Thus, not only were there words of *salvation* from the Savior but also this word of *security*!

These first three sayings focus on the dispensational setting associated with the cross: first, there were words of salvation for His *unbelieving nation*, an extension of the opportunity of repentance; then there were words of salvation demonstrating how a *believing remnant* could take advantage of the offer of mercy and assuring them of their part in the coming Kingdom; lastly, there were words of security, placing His nation into the *watch care* of that very Little Flock where they were to look for safety.

WORDS OF SUFFERING

The central word from the cross took place amidst a "darkness that could be felt."

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI? that is to say MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matt. 27:45, 46, cf. Mark 15:34).

As Jesus Christ hung there in those hours of darkness, He loudly cried out so that there could be no question about what was taking place in that darkness: He directly quoted Psalm 22:1. The first half of this Psalm is a description of the events of the cross, and the answer to His question is given in the words of verse 3, "*Thou art holy.*"

It was in that darkness that "*God made Him to be sin for us*" (II Cor. 5:21). In those agonizing moments, God set forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sin (Rom. 3:25), to bear the eternal, everlasting and infinite consequences of our sin. He "*bare our sins in His own body on the tree*" (I Pet. 2:24) and "*put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*" (Heb. 9:26).

Isaiah 53 tells us "*the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all*" and "*he shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied*" (vs. 6, 11). It was in these dark moments that our Lord was literally experiencing the transformation in His soul that is "*the second death.*"

Amazingly, in those moments a meeting place being prepared between a holy God and sinful man, in the person and through the blood of His Son dying "*the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*" (I Pet. 3:18).

There is no other moment in human history like this one, save the empty tomb.

WORDS OF SUFFICIENCY

After the darkness lifted, there are three more words from the cross. These three demonstrate the *sufficiency* of what was being accomplished. The fifth saying comes in John 19:28,

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I THIRST."

This is a direct reference to Psalm 69:21, "*They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*"

When He said, "*I thirst,*" it was evidence of the depths of His physical suffering. Psalm 22 speaks of Him being "*dried up.*" All the moisture had gone out of His body because of the intense suffering. But there is more here.

Notice that little positive statement, "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled*, saith, I thirst." Not Scriptures, plural; not all that God ever said, but rather *the Scripture*—this *specific* one in Psalm 69:21 needed to be fulfilled.

He said, "*I thirst*," so that they would give Him vinegar to drink because Psalm 69:21 said they would! The Psalm doesn't say He would speak those words; it simply said they would provide him with vinegar to drink. He says this to cause them to do what the Scripture said they would do!

This is clear evidence that He was in complete control of His conscious faculties, so much so that in the midst of what He was experiencing He was thinking through all the verses of prophetic Scripture! He was not going to allow even one detail to be overlooked.

Then comes the grand pronouncement of John 19:30,

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, IT IS FINISHED: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

Thus He turns the tragedy of Calvary into triumph. The work is done, the suffering is over, the payment is made.

He was not saying that all prophecies were fulfilled. There were more to come, for in the very next verses of John 19 the warning about His bones not being broken was to be fulfilled. No, He is saying that there is an end to sin—He has "*put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*." The propitiation is completed; the work finished, so He bows His head and dismisses His spirit.

Do you realize the significance of that simple act of bowing his head? His head wasn't hanging down on His chest; it was erect. He was not swooning away. He was totally conscious of what was happening: His head was erect, His mind was alert and when the work was finished, He said so!

There is reference here again to Psalm 22. This time to its conclusion. The Psalmist set out details surrounding the cross and the resurrection (vs. 1-22), followed by the Kingdom to be established (vs. 23-31). The closing verse, in essence, declaring, "It is done. It is accomplished"—"*He hath done this*."

This gives rise to His final statement, where He simply quotes Psalm 31:5,

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46).

The fact is that no one would have been able to kill the Lord Jesus. They could have taken His rich red blood out of His body, and it would not have affected Him at all—for He *is* life! He voluntarily chose death; he was "*obedient unto death*;" He would "*lay down*" His life—it was His faith in His Father's plan that caused him to dismiss His spirit.

Don't fail to notice that the first word he uttered from the cross was "*Father*." Likewise, the last thing he said started with "*Father*." Thus was the intimacy they share: "*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself*."

These seven sayings from the cross reveal the "mind of Christ" that Paul encourages us to possess. Just as He consciously, by faith, chose to walk in the understanding of the doctrine that applied to each situation, even so we can say with Paul, "*I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*" (Gal. 2:20).

Remember: Jesus Christ gave His life *for* us at Calvary, so that He could give His life *to* us when we trust Him, so that He might live His life *through* us as we daily walk by faith in an intelligent understanding of His word to us.

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