

Cross Talk

by Russell Roberts

The content of this brief booklet is taken from a 3-part sermon that I preached in March of 2016 at Calvary Baptist Church in Seymour. The message was titled "Cross Talk" and it focused on the 7 statements of Jesus from the cross which are recorded in the gospels.

Over the next few weeks, I am going to preach an extended message on the seven statements that Jesus spoke from the cross. This will be a single sermon divided into three parts, which will allow for more time to discuss each of the sayings in greater depth. We are going to call this lengthy sermon "Cross Talk". In part one of the message we will discuss Jesus' first two statements. In part two we will discuss His middle three statements. Then we will conclude the message with the Lord's final two statements.

Before we begin, let's take a quick overview of all seven statements made by Christ during the crucifixion as they are recorded in the gospels. Based upon the details given in each account, it is believed and widely accepted that they were spoken in the following order:

- "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." - Luke 23:34
- "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." - Luke 23:43
- "Woman, behold, your son!" and "Behold, your mother!" - John 19:26-27
- "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" - Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34
- "I am thirsty." - John 19:28
- "It is finished!" - John 19:30
- "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" - Luke 23:46

Notice that three of the statements were mentioned only by Luke, three others only by John, and the one remaining was mentioned by both Matthew and Mark. Of the four gospel writers, it is believed that only John was physically present at the crucifixion. However, this does not undermine the reliability of the other accounts as the authors most certainly spoke with eyewitnesses before composing their books. While some controversy and speculation persists relating to a few of these statements, most Christians are convinced that these seven statements are the actual quotations spoken by Jesus.

ON THE CROSS

Before we delve into the seven statements or "words" of Christ from the cross, let's take a few moments to set the scene and provide some details of Jesus' crucifixion. The Lord had been arrested around midnight and had been held in custody and tried by various courts throughout

the night and into the early morning. Each of the six trials was a travesty of justice in its own right, yet ultimately just a few hours after sun up Jesus was condemned by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death by crucifixion.

Throughout this ordeal Jesus was ridiculed mercilessly, beaten ruthlessly, and scourged with a Roman whip until He was almost unrecognizable. As if this was not enough, a crown of thorns was fashioned and pressed down upon His head causing blood to run from his weary brow down His tattered face. Finally, after enduring this harsh treatment all night long, Jesus was forced to carry His own heavy and splintered wooden cross to the location of His execution. There He was nailed to it and was crucified.

Scripture indicates that the crucifixion began around 9:00am that morning. The sun would have been fully risen, though the temperature would have still been cool. Around noon, when one would expect the sun to be bright and the temperature blazing, the sky suddenly grew dark and blackness fell over the land for about three hours. Around 3:00pm, Jesus made a final piercing cry then hung His head and died, having endured the shame of the cross for about six full hours. At that moment a violent earthquake struck, the temple shook, the veil was torn, and the graves of the saints were opened. While being crucified, the Bible records seven statements that Christ made... three in the morning hours and the other four in the afternoon.

I. "FATHER FORGIVE THEM; THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO" - Luke 23:33-34

Not long after their arrival at Golgotha early that morning, Jesus was nailed to an old rugged cross which was raised up so that onlookers and passersby could watch him suffer. As the soldiers gambled for His garments below, the crowd hurled insults at Jesus as He hung there slowly dying. Despite their bitter hatred and even while being unjustly executed, astonishingly Jesus prayed to the Father asking Him to forgive these sinful people. What depths of love does it take to ask God's forgiveness for those who have rejected you and who are gruesomely carrying out your murder?

Upon what basis do such vile and wretched sinners deserve forgiveness? Jesus pleaded with His Father stating that His executioners did not fully comprehend the implications of what they were doing. "If only they knew who I was", the Lord prayed, "they would not have acted in this manner. If they had truly grasped the dire consequences of their decisions, they would have behaved differently. They are acting out of ignorance Father, so please forgive them."

This prayer of forgiveness from the cross fulfills the prophecy found in Isaiah 53:12 which foretells that the Suffering Servant Messiah would "intercede for the transgressors" who were putting Him to death. This first statement of Christ from the cross encapsulates the very reason why He was there in the first place - to pay the necessary price in order to purchase forgiveness for all of humanity. Though you and I were not physically present at Calvary that day, as sinners and enemies of God we too are responsible for His death and are in need of the same forgiveness today that Jesus prayed for some 2,000 years ago.

Is it possible that, after receiving the great forgiveness that Christ offers, we too could extend this same type of forgiveness to our persecutors? In Acts 7 we read the story of Stephen's stoning. As he was being martyred for his faith by being pelted with rocks, and in keeping with the statement of Jesus spoken from the cross, Stephen prayed that his killers' sin would not be held against them. In the same way, we are to love our enemies and to pray for their well-being and forgiveness.

II. "TODAY YOU SHALL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE" - Luke 23:39-43

Have you ever been situated between two people who were talking with one another? Later that morning the two criminals who were being crucified along with Jesus - one on either side Him - became engaged in a heated conversation regarding the Lord. One of them mocked Jesus, just as the religious leaders had done earlier, taunting Him to save them from their misery. The other defended Jesus, asking that the Lord would remember him when He came into His kingdom. This was the repentant thief's way of placing his faith in Jesus as his Savior. Jesus' response was immediate and assuring. He promised the repentant thief that he would be with the Lord in Paradise that same day.

The traditional view held by many Baptists is that, following Jesus' death on the cross He descended into "Sheol" which in Hebrew means the grave. Sheol was/is divided into two separate parts that are separated by an impassible gulf. One of these sides is "Hades", which is the present Hell, where the condemned go when they die. The other side was "Paradise" [also called "Abraham's Bosom"] where the redeemed went prior to Jesus' resurrection to await His coming. Between the time of His death and resurrection Jesus went to Paradise and released those who were there, subsequently taking them with Him to Heaven. Today Hades is still occupied and growing in population as more unsaved people die, but Paradise is empty because the redeemed now go directly to Heaven when they die.

Jesus made this promise of salvation to a guilty man who was being justly punished for his wrongdoing and sin. The fact that Jesus was being crucified as criminal further fulfilled the prophecy written in Isaiah 53:12 which predicted that He would be numbered with the transgressors. Jesus not only died the death we deserved, but even substituted Himself as the guilty criminal that we truly are. Because of His atoning sacrifice, all people can receive the same promise of salvation that the thief did that fateful day and have the assurance of being with the Lord in Heaven when they die.

III. "WOMAN, BEHOLD YOUR SON" & "BEHOLD, YOUR MOTHER" - John 19:25-27

As the morning wore on and the noon hour approached, Jesus looked down from the cross to see His mother standing there along with a small gathering of other women and the apostle John. Knowing that His own physical death was imminent and again showing His compassion for others above Himself, Jesus arranged for the ongoing care of His earthly mother after His

departure. The fact that He did this indicates that Jesus' father Joseph was likely already dead, and that Mary was a widow. As the eldest son, Jesus was considered the head of the household and therefore bore the responsibility of making provision for His mother's continued care.

Scripture definitively states that Jesus had earthly half-brothers and half-sisters, the naturally born children of Joseph and Mary. Some have questioned why the Lord would entrust the care of His mother to someone other than His biological brother. After all, shouldn't that responsibility stay within the confines of the family? We can gain some perspective on this by reading of an episode that took place earlier in Jesus' ministry which is recorded in Matthew 12:46-50. This passage indicates that Jesus valued His spiritual brothers and sisters as highly as His earthly ones.

Jesus was more concerned about the spiritual care of His mother Mary than her material well-being. It is important to note that none of Jesus' biological siblings were present at the crucifixion, and that all of them were non-believers at the time of Jesus' death. It was only after the resurrection that some of His brothers finally accepted Jesus as the Messiah and became Christians - most notably James and Jude. Therefore, Jesus wisely chose His faithful follower John to take care of His mother, and John graciously did so.

Of the 12 apostles, only John died of old age; all of the rest were martyred for their faith. It is widely held that John lived well into his nineties. I personally believe John's long life can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that he took such good care of Jesus' mother Mary. The 5th Commandment says to "honor your father and mother, that your days may be prolonged upon the earth..." We see this demonstrated through John's acceptance of Mary as his own mother which contributed to his long life.

IV. "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" - Matthew 27:45-46

At noon, darkness fell over the land for 3 hours. God placed all of mankind's sin upon Jesus, who became our sacrificial substitute. During this time, the wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus as He bore the full weight of humanity's sin upon Himself. The extent of the spiritual agony that Christ experienced for these few hours is unimaginable. The Father unleashed His intense fury and bitter hatred of sin upon Jesus. The spiritual pain and separation from God that Christ felt while hanging on the cross completely dwarfed all of the physical pain that He was feeling. This punishment for sin continued throughout the afternoon leading Jesus to eventually cry out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

Sin always leads to separation from God. From the Garden of Eden, to the cross, and even today sin always severs the relationship between man and God. Though He never sinned, all of man's sin was imputed to Christ and He "became sin for us". As such, in His humanity Jesus felt for the first time this separation from the loving goodness of God. We must understand that Hell ultimately isn't awful because of the fire and brimstone, but because of the absence of God's

love, mercy, and grace. Apart from the goodness of God, there is nothing but misery and torment. On the cross Jesus personally experienced the extreme suffering that is the very essence of Hell - that is, being estranged from the loving presence of almighty God.

The words that Jesus cried out that afternoon echo those penned by King David in Psalm 22:1. David had felt forsaken by God following his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and in his anguish wrote the psalm. The religiously educated Jews who were present at the crucifixion would have immediately recognized these words as a quotation of Scripture. When you read the entire Psalm, there are some amazing parallels between it and the events of the cross. Perhaps Jesus intentionally quoted the psalm of King David as a way of revealing Himself as the true Messiah, the long awaited King of the Jews.

V. "I THIRST" - John 19:28-29

Yes Jesus was fully God, but He was also fully human. He ate, drank, slept, got tired, and so on just like you and I. And so, after suffering on the cross for several hours, it stands to reason that the Lord would have been thirsty. Crucifixion often led to dehydration. As such, He expressed His natural human desire for a drink. But this brief, simple statement of physical need also held a much deeper meaning...

After hearing Jesus' request for a drink, the soldiers saturated a sponge with sour wine or vinegar and held it up to Jesus' mouth on a long hyssop branch. Their actions fulfilled yet another prophecy also foretold by King David in Psalm 69:21. Just as He had done with His previous statement, Jesus again made a connection between Himself and the Jew's most beloved king in order to further reveal His true identity as the "Son of David".

Finally, I believe the "thirst" that Jesus expressed went beyond the physical realm. The Lord taught us that "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." There is a spiritual thirst that we as Christians should all have - a desire to see God and to be like Him. By this point the end of Jesus' life on earth was very near, and these words speak of His longing to be reunited with His Father once again.

VI. "IT IS FINISHED". - John 19:30

You might recall that Jesus' fifth statement from the cross, the one immediately prior to this one, was "I thirst". We talked about it at length last week. In response to His request for a drink, the Roman guard offered Jesus a sponge saturated with sour wine or vinegar to drink. After receiving this, Jesus made His sixth statement as He shouted in a loud voice, "It is finished!".

Like His previous statements from the cross, Jesus' words are found prophesied in the Old Testament. In Psalm 22:30-31 King David spoke of a future generation that would declare the righteousness of the Lord. These people who were to be born would worship the Messiah for

what He had “performed” or “done”. We are among this generation about which David wrote, as we gather here each week to celebrate what Jesus achieved or finished on the cross.

Some translations use the word “complete” or “accomplished” rather than “finished” in this verse. These alternate endings shed light on the true meaning of Christ's words. Following several hours of torment, and having carried the full weight of humanity's sin upon Himself, Jesus victoriously conquered sin and the grave. The Lord endured the unmitigated wrath of God against sin, and paid the incredible price for it all. When the penalty had been completely executed against Him, and Jesus had accomplished the mission for which He had come, He proclaimed victory. Our Savior defeated the enemy and vanquished sin and death, making forgiveness and salvation available to all mankind!

Have you ever been to a basketball game or some other sporting event when one team completely demolished the other one? At the end of the first quarter the stronger team was already ahead by 20 points and there were still 3 quarters left to play! The outcome of the contest had already been decided, yet the game itself continued. This is what happened on the cross. Jesus won the victory by overcoming the curse of sin, but the game of life continues until the final buzzer sounds [1 Corinthians 15:24-25].

VII. “FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT”. - Luke 23:44-46

These are the final words of Jesus from the cross - His seventh and last statement. I believe they were spoken almost immediately after He proclaimed, “It is finished!” Having secured the victory over sin there would be no reason for continuing to endure the suffering and shame of the cross. Longing to see the Father and having no reason to stay on earth any longer, sometime around 3pm that afternoon Jesus allowed Himself to die. He did not die as the result of man's actions, but instead laid down His life on His own initiative [John 10:18].

Again Jesus quoted the words of David, which are penned in Psalm 31:5. Many scholars believe that this psalm was written during the years when David was being chased relentlessly by King Saul. Fearing for his safety and not knowing whether or not he'd survive another day, the young man David expressed his trust in God's care by committing himself into the LORD's hands. In similar fashion, Jesus gave up His life in the exact same way He lived it each day - in complete surrender to the will of His Father.

When the Lord died, there was a mighty earthquake which shook the entire city violently. The veil of the temple, which had for centuries separated the common people from the presence of God, was torn in two from top to bottom. The graves were opened and some of the saints resurrected. These natural signs marked the physical death of Jesus, and revealed that the barrier of sin between man and God had been permanently removed.

CONCLUSION

While on the cross that historic day Jesus...

Prayed for his enemies,
Promised salvation to a criminal,
Provided for the care of his mother,
Painfully experienced separation from the Father,
Purposefully fulfilled prophecy,
Proclaimed victory over sin and death, and
Peacefully gave up his own life.

His words should be a source of inspiration to all believers. May you be bountifully blessed as you reflect on the "Cross Talk" of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!