

EVEN IN DEATH

Luke 23:26-56

In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, dying Duke of Lancaster tells the Duke of York: *"O, but they say the tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony: Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain, for they breathe their words in pain."*

What about Jesus' last words?

How did He spend His final moments? On what did He focus attention?

Even on His way to die, Jesus is more concerned

about the welfare of others than about His own suffering.

Jesus' rejection reaches climax with Christ's death on the cross.

Crucifixion was common method of carrying out death sentence in Roman Empire.

It was most cruel and painful method of death the Romans knew.

It was reserved for the worst criminals.

Secular descriptions of nature of death by crucifixion make clear

what a slow agonizing death this was.

Alister McGrath: "They call the preferred way of execution 'crucifixion.' The word, which sounds neat and clinical in its precision, refers to nothing other than legalized sadism. It is probably one of the most depraved forms of execution ever devised. It is nothing other than death by slow torture. It works. No one ever survived a crucifixion."

First the upright is planted firmly in the ground.

Then the victim is laid down with arms extended on the crossbar to which they're fastened by cords and afterwards by nails through the palms.

Then the crossbar is raised to its position on the upright and nailed

while the body is left to swing,

or its weight rests on an iron saddle peg driven into the upright.

Following this, the feet are nailed, either through the instep separately,

or both together with a single iron spike.

There the body is left to hang in agony sometimes two or three days,

until death from pain, starvation, or suffocation ensues.

The punishment was invented to make death as painful and lingering as the body can endure.

Christ cut the time short by dismissing His own Spirit.

JESUS TAKEN OUT TO DIE 23:26-56

[Even in death...]

JESUS CARES 23:26-43 about people around Him, more than about His own suffering or self-preservation.

His care is demonstrated in several incidents Luke records:

- (1) His concern for mourning women and their children 28
- (2) His appeal to God for their forgiveness 34
- (3) His refusal to yield to temptation to save Himself 35-37
- (4) His promise of salvation to criminal beside Him 43

This is opposite of way we usually respond.

When someone wrongs us, or when we suffer severe pain,
we exaggerate the wrong, and pity ourselves.

Jesus does the opposite, His heart goes out to others.

Assistance from Simon 26 *As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.*

When He's no longer able to bear the cross,
help is drafted.

Reference to Simon's sons in other accounts,
indicates they're known in the church.

His story may have brought them to faith in the Savior.

Lament of the women 27-31

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

In His trials Jesus said not a word in His own defense.

But now, in His death, He cries out to the Father
in defense of those crucifying Him?

He's concerned for the future of the children of the women of Jerusalem
who are mourning for Him.

His comment contradicts the normal Jewish view.

It's women with children who were blessed.

The day will come when *barren* women will be blessed
because their children won't suffer the coming horror.

It was in fact women and children who suffered most severely.

The Romans attempt to starve Jews into submission;

stubborn, hungry men, defending their city, take food from their suffering wives and
even kill and eat their children.

The nation was like a green tree when Jesus was on earth.

Jesus Himself may be the green tree and Israel the dry.

In any case, the green is here, and this is the result.

When the time of dryness arrives, it will be worse!

It's a time of blessing and opportunity; it should be time of fruitfulness.

But the nation becomes like a dry tree, fit only for the fire.

Jesus often would have gathered His people, but they're not willing.

Therefore, the time of blessing dries up.

If this is the result of the time of blessing,
what will the time of spiritual drought produce?

Schneider: "If God has not spared Jesus, then the divine judgment will fall in full and
undiminished severity on the Jewish people, if they persist in unbelief and disobedience."
And so it was.

Calvin: "Dry wood is generally thrown into the fire first; but if what is moist and green be
burned, much less shall the dry be ultimately spared."

Mockery of the crowd 32-39

"Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 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. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There

was a written notice above him, which read: *THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS*. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

While the crowds stand around mocking and jeering,

Jesus prays God will forgive them what they're doing.

While the activities surrounding the crucifixion are going on, Jesus is saying: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing!"

He doesn't mean they're innocent.

He doesn't mean they don't know that they're crucifying Jesus,
or even that they're crucifying an innocent man.

They don't realize Who He is, nor are they aware of the spiritual and eternal consequences of what's taking place here.

He's more concerned about their destiny,
than His suffering.

Faith of a criminal 40-43

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Isa. 53:12 prophesies that the Suffering Servant will be numbered with the transgressors;

two criminals are crucified with Jesus.

As he watches Jesus die beside him, one criminal asks Him to remember him when He enters His kingdom.

The two thieves demonstrate two contrasting attitudes towards Christ. Their acceptance before God isn't based on the gravity of their sin.

Both are condemned evil doers.

Our sin isn't what keeps us from God.

The difference isn't in their good life; it's in their trust in Jesus.

One realizes Jesus isn't on the cross because of a crime.

They deserve to be there; but He's innocent.

Something is different about Jesus.

Classic case of what salvation by faith is all about:

This man never has a chance to do one good deed
to earn his salvation.

He doesn't deserve it and he couldn't earn it.

His salvation is personal and secure, guaranteed by Jesus' Word.

All he can do is trust Jesus.

Some people abuse the purpose of this incident.

The thief isn't presented to give us an excuse to put off Christ all our life, and then at the last minute turn to Him.

"Therefore, live it up now! You can always come to Jesus later!"

That's a perversion of God's grace.

There may not be a "later" for you!

The incident is given to assure the greatest sinner, that we can come to Christ whenever we hear the call, and God will receive us.

Our salvation isn't based on the kind of life we live.

It's based on Jesus' death for us.

Just for the unjust. Innocent for the sinner.

We just have to trust Him.

Whatever your age, stage of life, or life story, as the songwriter says: *"The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there may you, though vile as he, wash all YOUR sins away."*

Spurgeon wanted to make message of salvation, based on trusting Christ alone, clear to his audience.

He wanted them to understand that this is how God saves every person throughout all eternity.

"I conclude by again saying that this is not an exceptional case. I began with that and I want to finish with it, because so many of the demi-semi-gospellers are so terribly afraid of preaching free grace too fully.

I read somewhere, and I think it is true, that some ministers preach the gospel in the same way as donkeys eat thistles, namely, very very cautiously.

On the contrary, I will preach it boldly. I have not the slightest alarm about the matter. If any of you misuse free-grace teaching, I cannot help it. He that will be damned can as well ruin himself by perverting the gospel as by anything else. I cannot help what base hearts may invent; but mine it is to set forth the gospel in all its fullness of grace, and I will do it. . . .

The Savior had this wonder of grace reported in the daily news of the gospel, because He means to repeat the marvel every day. . . . He is able to save to the uttermost, for He saved the dying thief. . . . I pray you therefore, if any of you have not yet trusted in my Lord Jesus, come and trust in Him now. Trust Him wholly; trust Him only; trust Him at once. Then you will sing with me—*"The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there have I, though vile as he, washed all MY sins away."*

[Even in death . . .]

JESUS CONTROLS 23:44-56 events taking place around Him

Death of Jesus 44-46

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Evidence of fulfilled prophecy

—things over which He appears to have no control!

- **Gambling for His clothing** Ps. 22:18
- **Mocking Him** Ps. 22:6-8
- **Offering Him vinegar to drink** Ps. 69:21

Evidence of supernatural events:

God demonstrates to those interested in truth that Jesus' death is not that of an ordinary man.

These evidences make clear

Jesus isn't dying as a martyr for a lost cause!

Jesus isn't dying as a criminal for wrongs done

(testimony of one who is;

plus testimony of one who knows what that kind of person's death looks like because he witnessed many.)

1) Sign of divine displeasure:

Nature laments death as darkness covers the earth.

2)

Temple veil is torn in two, from top to bottom.

Veil exists to keep people away from the presence of God;
to keep them from seeing the full brightness of His glory.

It's 60' long X 30' across.

More significant, it's a palm's breadth thick.

Nevertheless, it's torn from top to bottom.

It's of tough fabric and so woven that no natural explanation can describe what happened.

It took 300 men to manipulate it. This is no human feat.

Now there's direct access to God. The veil is no longer needed.

That it's torn from top to bottom demonstrates God did it, not man.

3) Jesus authoritatively dismisses His own spirit.

Reactions of the witnesses 47-49

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

These evidences convince **the centurion** who's watching.

He has witnessed plenty of deaths, but never a death like this one!

Jesus is unique—even in His death

Declaration of His righteousness is a way on noting that this man isn't dying as a common criminal. His death is different.

Other witnesses also recognize uniqueness of Jesus' death.

They mourn His death.

Reason isn't clear, except it seems to be their response to watching Him die, and to the signs that surround that death.

You can supply expression of worry about what this might mean.

Religious leaders probably have to calm everybody back down.

"Don't worry! The fears are nonsense."

Burial of Jesus 50-56 *Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. 54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

Even after His death, the faithful who are waiting for the Kingdom continue to serve God's chosen One.

Joseph, devout member of council, who opposed decision, identifies with Jesus, asking permission to bury Him

While the council demanded His death, he disagreed.

Waiting for the Kingdom of God, He believes Jesus is Messiah.

He's a secret disciple.

Out of love he buries Jesus in his own tomb.

His act of going to Pilate is a bold one.

He's no longer afraid to be identified as a follower of Jesus, even in the moment of His death.

The women go home to prepare spices for His burial.

WHAT LESSONS DO WE LEARN FROM JESUS' FINAL MOMENTS?

Jesus cares for the lost around Him,

more than about Himself and His sufferings. *Do we?*

Swindoll tells about a seminary student in Chicago. Though he preferred to work in ministry, only job he could find was driving a bus on Chicago's south side. One day a gang of teens got on and refused to pay the fare. After a few days of this, the seminarian spotted a policeman, stopped the bus, and reported them. The officer made them pay, but then got off. When the bus rounded a corner, the gang robbed the seminarian and beat him severely. He pressed charges and the gang was rounded up. They were found guilty. As soon as the sentences were given, the young Christian saw their spiritual need and felt pity for them. He asked the judge if he could serve their sentences. The gang members and the judge were dumbfounded. "I forgive you," he explained. His request was denied, but he visited the young men in jail and led several of them in Christ.

Jesus controls the events surrounding Him, even as He hung there dying on that cross. We can trust Him.

He can control the events of life surrounding us as well!

Do we trust Him with the tragic events in our own lives?

[Finally, as we look at His death,]

The stark facts of the death of our Lord are presented with sober restraint.

We really can't imagine what it would be like for the holy God of the universe to be identified with the sins of the world.

For the eternal God to die.

Cecil Alexander penned the words of a hymn:

"We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains He had to bear;

But we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there."

Have you trusted Him?