

Seven Statements from the Cross

PART 1

**Baxter T. Exum (#1258)
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This morning, I would like for us to go back to our series of lessons based on favorite scenes or sayings from the life of Christ. Over the past two weeks, we have looked at that passage in Luke 22 where the Lord pulled Peter aside and let him know that Satan had demanded permission to sift him like wheat. We learned that Satan is a real enemy, we learned that Jesus is pleading our case, and we learned that we are to use our struggles to go out and encourage others. And then last week we looked at the parable where Jesus told about a poor widow who harassed an evil judge into giving her protection under the law. The main lesson there was that we are to pray and not lose heart.

This morning, in response to several requests, I would like for us to continue in our series by doing just a brief overview of those seven statements that Jesus made while hanging on the cross. We studied all of these in detail back in March and April of 2010; however, that was four years ago. In some ways, that is not very long. In other ways, though, we are a different group than we were only four years ago. People come and go, our children grow up, and sometimes we need a reminder! So, I don't think we need to spend the next two months on this (as we did four years ago), but this morning, as we cover these requests that have come in, I would like for us to at least briefly look at each statement.

If you ever want to do a valuable study on your own, I would highly encourage you to get a "*Harmony of the Gospels*." The one I have was put together by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry and uses the New American Standard Bible. We have discussed this before, so some of you might have this book already (and I am sure there are many other versions out there), but a harmony of the gospels takes the four gospel accounts and puts them in four columns, side by side. I checked Amazon this past Friday afternoon, and you can get a brand new one for just over \$21, and you can get a used edition for right around \$10. But it is a valuable resource whenever we look at the life of Christ. As we have studied before, the four gospel accounts might be compared to looking at several different news sources all telling the story of one big event. We think of the recent earthquake out in the Los Angeles area. We might get the breaking news alert from Fox News. We might then go to CNN and NBC for some pictures. We might go to the website of the LA Times for some local coverage. We might go to FaceBook for some updates from our friends who live in that area. And then, months later, we might look at some kind of trade publication among geologists to get an entirely scientific discussion of what happened. In a similar way, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all very accurate, but they were written to different people for different reasons. As a whole, though, they give us the big picture.

And so as we compare the four accounts side by side, we find that after the Lord was arrested and marched from trial to trial and beaten several times from late on Thursday night into the early hours of the next day, he was nailed to the cross at 9 o'clock on Friday morning. We know that he died at 3 o'clock that afternoon, and during those six hours on the cross, the Lord made seven statements.

But to really understand the importance of the Lord's last words, we need to remember how he died. He did not die in a hospital, surrounded by his family and friends (as a majority of people die today). Instead, he died very publicly at the hands of Roman soldiers. His hands and his feet were nailed to a wooden cross. To help us understand just a small part of what that might have been like, I have put a diagram up here that was created by a medical doctor. We have looked at this a number of times, and we do have several copies of the article from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on the back table. I also have a nail up here this morning that is very roughly the size of a nail used in a Roman crucifixion. And just to clarify something: The nail was not placed through the palm of the hand. If they did that, it would rip right through. And so instead, they put the nail through the wrist – right through those bones – and right through (or next to) the major nerve. We know the feeling we get when we hit our “funny bone” – not funny at all! But it was that kind of pain, only constantly – the weight of the body would hang on that.

And then they did something similar with the feet – sometimes between the bones of the foot, from top to bottom (or front to back), but sometimes through the ankles (from the sides). In fact, we actually have some evidence of this from First Century times. Years ago, archaeologists in Israel discovered an ankle bone with a nail driven through it – concrete evidence of a Roman crucifixion from the mid to late First Century. And on this one, they found evidence of wood on both sides. In other words, in order to keep the nail from pulling through, the Romans would use another piece of wood almost as a washer. And so the nail would go through the wooden washer, through the ankle, completely through the cross, and then the nail would be bent down on the other side to keep it from pulling out. To get some idea of what all of this might have felt like, I want to get this nail started around the room – and I just want us to imagine what that might have been like, to have something like this hammered through our wrists and ankles, and then to have our weight hanging on that.

Crucifixion in the First Century was designed to be as public and as painful and as horrific as possible. It normally took place along a main road, because the Romans were making a statement. They wanted people to know that you were not to mess with the Roman Empire. Sometimes an execution by crucifixion would go on for days. Cicero, the famous Roman historian, said that crucifixion “...is the most cruel and shameful of all punishments.” The Romans knew how to kill people, and when it came to execution, they did their research. They looked into hanging, and beheading, and boiling in oil – they experimented with all of these, but they landed on crucifixion because it was the most horrific way to die. Today, in fact, we have a word that goes back to crucifixion, the word “excruciating.” The word literally means “out of the cross.” And so if we say that we are in “excruciating” pain, that word goes back to the practice of crucifixion in ancient Rome.

This morning, then, I want us to look at the first three of those statements that Jesus made while hanging on the cross. This morning we will notice those three statements that were made between 9 and noon, and then next Sunday, if the Lord wills, I want us go ahead and look at the remaining four statements that were made much closer to the very end of the Lord's time on the cross. This morning, though, let us look at the first three.

- I. **With all of this as background, knowing at least something about what was involved in a crucifixion, I want us to look at the FIRST STATEMENT as it found in Luke 23 (p. 1649).**

Up to this point, the Lord has already been beaten to within an inch of his life, he has been cursed, he has had a crown of thorns pounded down on his head, he has had his beard yanked out, he has been spit upon, and he has carried his own cross to the site of the crucifixion. In my own mind, I can picture the angels in heaven all standing by with their swords drawn, ready to destroy the world if necessary, just waiting for the word, just waiting for permission to do so. And yet as he is nailed to the cross, writhing in anguish and pain, the Lord raises himself up to speak. What will he say first? Let us please look together at Luke 23:33-34, ***“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.”*** It is appropriate that the Lord’s first statement on the cross came in the form of a prayer. In fact, three of these seven statements are prayers. He prayed in this very public place, and he prayed this first prayer over and over again. Did you catch that? At the beginning of verse 34, Luke says, ***“But Jesus was saying....”*** In other words, this was not just a one-time statement, but this is something that Jesus prayed over and over again – during the scourging, as he carried the cross, as they beat him in the face, as they took off his clothing, as they held him down, as they hammered in the nails, as they dropped the cross in the hole – over and over again, ***“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”***

From history, we know that it was common for those who were crucified to cry out all kinds of curses – they would curse their parents, they would curse the soldiers, they could curse the judge. In fact, Cicero wrote that executioners would sometimes even cut out the tongues of the criminals so they wouldn’t have to deal with all of the hateful things that were said. The Lord, though, prayed. We remember what Peter would write many years later in 1 Peter 2:23, ***“...while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”***

It is interesting to me how the Lord emphasizes here that his tormentors ***“do not know what they are doing.”*** The Jewish leaders might have had some idea, Pilate might have had some idea, Judas probably had some idea, as the day wore on, even the soldiers probably started to get some idea of what was going on, and yet no one truly understood the eternal significance of what was happening that day. And so the Lord begs his Father to take this into consideration, ***“Father, forgive them....”*** Were these people forgiven? I would suggest that many of them probably were. Two months later, Peter stood up and accused a huge crowd of murdering the Son of God. The Bible tells us that they were ***“stabbed in the heart”*** and asked Peter what they needed to do. Peter responded by saying, ***“Change your hearts, and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven...”*** (Acts 2:38), and that day 3,000 people were immersed. So yes, many of those responsible for the death of Jesus were eventually forgiven, just as we can also be forgiven today.

- II. **The SECOND STATEMENT is also found in Luke 23, and the statement is made with reference to two thieves who were hanging on each side of the Lord.**

In just a moment, we will find that Luke uses a word that refers to those who use violence to rob openly. We look around us today, and there are thieves everywhere. We have had a series of burglaries over near our house lately. We have had a few home invasions here in Madison over the past few months. So, not much has changed in the past 2,000 years! In ancient Rome, though, thieves and robbers were crucified. They were

nailed to a piece of wood out near the main highway and left there several days until they died. These were the men on each side of the Lord. With that, we pick up with Luke 23:39-43,

One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Mark's account tells us that both men were insulting the Lord earlier in the day, but as the day wore on (as we see here in Luke), one thief had a change of heart. As death comes closer, he starts to fear God, and so he speaks up and defends the Lord. He knows that Jesus is innocent. He then addresses the Lord directly, and in response, the Lord makes his second statement from the cross, ***"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*** The word ***"paradise"*** is actually a Persian word and refers to an "enclosure," a private garden. We think about the Rose Garden at the White House, for example, and we know that it would be a great honor to be invited into that garden. That is what the Lord does here.

Some, of course, have used this passage to try to downplay the necessity of baptism. Some have said, "Look, the thief was never baptized, and he was promised salvation; therefore, baptism is not necessary." We have looked into this in great detail in the past, but I would answer very briefly with just a few questions. First of all, who says the thief was never baptized? Yes, he was not baptized while on the cross, but we know from Mark 1:4-5 that many, many people were baptized through the ministry of John the Baptist. So, it is possible that this man had been baptized with John's baptism – either before his life of crime, or perhaps even while he was in prison. But there is another question to consider, and that is: When Jesus spoke these words, what covenant was this man living under? I know one thing: He was not living under the Law of Christ. We know from a number of passages that the Law of Christ went into effect at the Lord's death (Hebrews 9:15-17). The New Testament is like my will: My will does not go into effect until I die. And so if I want to give somebody \$20 this afternoon, my heirs have no right to complain. While I am alive, I can do what I want, but my will goes into effect when I die. The same is true of the New Testament, the Last Will and Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, what Law was this man under? If this man was a Jew, then he was governed by the Law of Moses. If this man was a Gentile, then he was governed by the Law of the Heart. Only after his resurrection did the Lord tell his disciples to go into all the world to preach and baptize. And so when people try to appeal to the thief on the cross as an excuse not to be baptized, they are trying to put themselves back into a time when the Law of Christ was not yet in effect.

Instead of using the thief as an excuse, let us instead use the thief as a motivation, and let us follow his example of courageously speaking up for Jesus at just the right time! What a blessing that must have been!

III. As we move along to the THIRD STATEMENT, we move over to John 19.

And before we get to the passage, I just want to give a little reminder that the ***"tunic"*** (the inner garment) that John is about to refer to has a long tradition among the Jewish people. History tells us that Jewish mothers often handmade an inner garment as a personal gift to their sons when they were old enough to leave home. It has been described almost as a long t-shirt and would have been worn right next to the skin. And so as we look at John's account of the third statement Jesus made from the cross, I want us to notice that the third statement comes almost immediately after the soldiers cast lots for that seamless inner garment, a piece of

clothing that was most likely a personal and handmade gift from Mary to her Son. Notice, please, John 19:23-27,

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be;" this was to fulfill the Scripture: "They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

Did you notice the connection there? The soldiers are dividing up the Lord's outer garments, and as soon as they get to that inner tunic, Jesus looks over at his mother and says, ***"Woman, behold, your son!"*** and then to John, ***"Behold, your mother!"*** With those statements, Jesus was making arrangements for John to take care of Mary as if she were his own mother. He was telling his mom to lean on John for support. We notice that Joseph, Mary's husband, is not mentioned here. Since we are not told, there is a chance that they were separated for some reason. I would assume, though, that Joseph was dead at this point. Construction has always been rather dangerous, and we know that Joseph was a carpenter. Since the Bible specifically points out that Mary was a young woman at the time of the Lord's conception, we assume that Joseph was older. At this point, Jesus was 33, so that makes Mary somewhere around 45 at the youngest – maybe older – and that is getting up near the life expectancy back then. Joseph, then, was probably even older than that and had probably died. Jesus, then, without Joseph in the picture, made sure his mother was taken care of. As the Law of Moses said, ***"Honor your father and mother"*** (Exodus 20:12). By taking care of his mother, Jesus was setting the example for all of us today. As Paul would go on to write in 1 Timothy 5:8, ***"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."*** Jesus, then, provided for his mother.

I find it interesting that Jesus did not give this responsibility to one of his own younger brothers. We know from the Scriptures that Jesus had at least four younger brothers. We are given their names in Mark 6:3. We also know that the Lord had at least two sisters. We might wonder why Jesus did not give this responsibility to his younger siblings. The Bible does not give us the details on this, but I would point out, first of all, that as far as we know, the Lord's younger brothers and sisters were not at the crucifixion. We know from earlier in the life of Christ that his own family thought he had lost his mind and tried to have him forcibly committed. And I will admit: If my own sister started saying she was God, I would probably try to have her committed as well! The point is: At this point in time, the Lord's younger brothers and sisters are not believers. It was only after the Lord's resurrection from the dead that several of them were converted. So Jesus, then, when he needs somebody to care for his mother, he looks to his spiritual family.

As Christians, we know we have the great privilege of looking out for each other. We think of what Paul would write later in Galatians 6:10, ***"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."*** In other words, we want to help everybody in this world, but our primary obligation is to our Christian family. On this day, therefore, Mary (in a sense) lost a Son, but she also gained a son in the apostle John, and the apostle John gained a mother. We think of what happened earlier in the Lord's ministry, in Mark 3:31-35,

Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

The Lord was not cutting on his physical family, but he was emphasizing the importance of our spiritual family, those of us who share the Christian faith. I love my own physical family, but there are members of this congregation who are more precious to me than my own flesh and blood. That is what the Lord demonstrated on the cross. He made sure his mother was taken care of, and he looked to his spiritual family to do it.

Today, we also take care of our spiritual family. We check on each other. We share our leftovers with one another. We adopt the elderly as our own grandparents. We change light bulbs. We replace batteries in smoke detectors. We adopt the young as our own children and grandchildren. We weep with those who weep. We rejoice with those who rejoice. We open our hearts and lives to each other, because we are brothers and sisters, and that is what the Lord demonstrated here!

Conclusion:

This morning we have looked at the first three of the seven statements that Jesus made from the cross. What I didn't point out earlier is that the cause of death for most crucifixions was asphyxiation. As I understand it, with the way the body was positioned, a person could breathe in but could not breathe out. In order to breathe out, a person would need to lift up by shifting the weight to that nail through the feet. And eventually, after doing that for hours or even days, the body just cannot take it anymore. The point is: The Lord had to do that for every statement that he made. Every word, therefore, was incredibly important. Every word had to be worth it. Every word had to be very carefully calculated. This morning we have looked at the first three, and if the Lord wills, I hope you will join us next week as we look at the next four statements that were made from the cross.

The Lord Jesus did all of this for us. He took the punishment we deserved. Jesus took our place on the cross. We respond to that sacrifice in amazement, shocked that somebody would do that for us. But God did. And we respond to that sacrifice in faith. We read the written accounts of Jesus' life, and we believe that he is the Son of God. As we read, we start to discover that we have sinned. We see what sin means to God, and so we make the decision to turn away from it. Our sin caused this to happen. And so, in obedience to God's command, in all humility we submit to Christ in baptism – we allow ourselves to be briefly dipped (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of our sins. In baptism, we are buried with Christ, and we are then raised up out of the water to live a new life. All of this is the gospel, the good news, the good news that Jesus died on the cross, the good news that he was buried, the good news that he was raised up from the dead on the third day. We reenact this good news in our own lives through baptism. If you have any questions, we hope you will ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com