

Last Words: Sayings from the Cross and from Beyond the Grave (The Word of Contentment) Luke 23:44-49

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ understood the importance of the cross.

Early in the Gospels we hear Christ declaring that He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem and the cross. His entire life was spent in the shadow of the cross. He was ever eager to go to the cross because apart from that He could not fulfill His divine mission. **He was always moving toward that cross as a Victor, not a victim.** He was always moving toward the ultimate final victory over sin and death.

We return to God's word tonight to examine the 7th and final saying from the cross. Within a 14-hour period Jesus goes from arrest to **execution**. He is sentenced to death in a matter of hours. It is obvious to anyone that Jesus is being railroaded. These things all happen so quickly that it is easy for us to miss the impact of each event.

Let's read about the last moments of Jesus' experience on the cross. Please turn in your Bible to **Luke 23:44-49**.

Let's take a closer look at this last saying. Please note with me the following...

I. The _____ preceding Jesus' death (23:44-45)

Luke's arrangement of the events at Calvary the day Christ died is topical, not chronological. We get the whole picture when we examine the death of Christ in all four of the Gospels. Each writer has selected events that helped him to explain the message of salvation.

The first thing **Luke** does is show us what happened in the natural realm. He gives us the broad picture.

A. Cataclysmic sign #1 – “The sun stopped shining”

Darkness in the Bible symbolizes at least 4 things:

- *Spiritual blindness (Isaiah 9:2)*
- *Sinful deeds (Ephesians 5:11)*
- *The powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12)*
- *Judgment (Revelation 16:10)*

Darkness is almost always connected with the judgment of God for sin. Darkness in the Scriptures is a symbol of judgment. God's salvation is always seen as light. God's judgment is always seen as darkness. And God was saying by the darkness that the cross was a place of judgment. God turned out the lights because this was a judgment on sin. And yet, the One receiving the judgment was sinless, a Lamb without blemish and without spot, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. **Listen carefully. It was midnight at midday because Jesus became legally guilty of our sin and was therefore judged accordingly.** It was during this time that Jesus became our sin payment.

B. Cataclysmic sign #2 – “The curtain of the Temple torn in two

Luke tells us that when Jesus died the curtain in the temple tore in two. **Matthew** tells us that the curtain tore in two from top to bottom . . . this means that no one individual tore the curtain.

The curtain mentioned in this passage most probably refers to the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple (also called the “**shielding curtain**” in **Exodus 39:34** because it was designed to keep people away). The Holy of Holies (containing the Ark of the Covenant as well as other items) was reserved for one man to enter once a year. This was the curtain that kept man from the presence of God. **It was a curtain that was designed to safeguard people from God's wrath.**

The circumstances preceding His death...please note

II. Jesus' prayer preceding His death: the word of contentment (23:46)

Luke is the only writer to record the last words of the Son of God. Next, Luke zooms his camera in on the Savior as He dies on the cross. Crucifixion was a tortuous death. It was designed to be slow and agonizing. The Romans saw this as a deterrent to crime. No simple execution here. If you crossed Rome, you would be punished! It was not uncommon for men to hang for days on the cross working to gain every last gasp of breath before they were too weak. This is why the legs were going to be broken of those on the cross...to hasten their death. This is itself was certainly a gruesome prospect. The legs were broken to make breathing more difficult and eventually lead to suffocation. **This was not the case with Christ. He surrendered His own Spirit.** As the Creator of the Universe, He had the right to surrender His earthly life when He chose to do so.

Every word of this verse is important.

A. Father.

The words come from **Psalm 31:5** but differ in a significant way. I want you to notice that He adds the word "**Father.**" He uses the term of endearment and relationship. This shows the bond of love that He has with the One who sent Him. Jesus begins His cries from the cross with a prayer to His Father as He pleads with Him to forgive the sins of those who have crucified Him. His final cry is likewise directed to the Father. Jesus doesn't include the phrase in the second half of **verse 5**: "**Redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.**" Jesus does not pray this part because as the Son He has no need of redemption from the Father. His relationship with the Father has existed from all eternity. Now that His work on earth is finishing, He can't wait to return home.

B. Into your hands.

Hands serve as a representative of our whole being. What we are and do is reflected in our hands. We use them to embrace or attack, to caress or choke, to hug or hurt. If you & I decided to put together a series of "hand" portraits depicting the life of Christ, we would see something like this... **(1)** The last days and hours are filled with references to hands. **Matthew 17:22:** "*When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.'*" **(2)** In another scene we would see the hand of Jesus holding up the cup at the last supper. In the same painting we would notice Judas reclining at the table, with his sweaty hand wrapped around some silver shekels. **Luke 22:20-21** paints it this way: "*In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.'*" **(3)** In the next portrait a pair of hands are furiously scrubbing themselves as Pilate tries to wash His hands of guilt for condemning Jesus to death. **Matthew 27:24:** "*When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'*" **(4)** The next picture would be a montage of soldiers' hands as they tear the clothes from the back of Jesus. Other hands are raised to bring a whip that slices into His tender flesh. More hands slap his face. Another pair of rough hands slams the crown of thorns onto his head. And thick hands grasp a hammer to drive the spikes through His wrists and feet. **(5)** The last scene would stand in contrast as it shows the hands of Jesus impaled on a rough cross. As we come to the final cry, we see that His dying hands are praying hands as He entrusts Himself into the holy hands of his Father.

C. I commit. The word, “commit” means “to place something with someone for protection.” It was used when someone made a deposit of valuables into a safe place. In **Acts 14:23**, after Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church, they “committed them to the Lord...” At the end of his life, the Apostle Paul used this word when he said in **2 Timothy 1:12**: “...I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day.”

When He commits Himself to the Father, Jesus is ministering at His own committal service. He is entrusting Himself into the Father’s hands, never again to be at the mercy of the hands of wicked men. He is fully yielding Himself, knowing that He is safe in the hands of God. The victorious Son commits His all to the Father. This is an act of the will and is done voluntarily.

D. My spirit. Now that His physical life is over, Jesus is committing His spirit to the Father for safekeeping.

The circumstances preceding His death, the prayer preceding His death...please note...

III. The _____ to Jesus’ death (23:47-49)

A. The centurion _____

B. The watching crowd left overcome with _____

C. His friends watched with _____

CONCLUSION

What can you and I take with us tonight? You may find all of this interesting, but you may still be asking, “*So what?*” What does this mean to me? I see three life lessons from this verse. **Don’t miss the secret to living as Christ modeled the art of dying:**

1. Jesus was _____ to the finish.
2. Jesus _____ and _____ Scripture.
3. Jesus _____ Himself to the safety of the Father.