

Introduction

In the last seven communion services, we covered each of the sayings of Jesus from the cross, one by one. In effect, what we have are seven overlays for an overhead projector that we have viewed one at a time. Now it is time that we put them all into view at the same time, but of course, we cannot see and comment on everything at once, we have to be selective. However, being selective is dangerous; we may distort the text if the wrong reference point guides it. For example, the words to the mother of Jesus become words *about* Mary (Mariology) or worse, they lead to worship *of* Mary (Mariolatry) when we look at Scripture through wrongly colored glasses.

Therefore, we need an important biblical reference point in order to understand the sayings of Jesus without fragmentation and distortion. We need to hear the words of Christ from the cross in light of His ministry on earth, especially in light of His high priestly prayer of John 17.1-2. **When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."** In the shadow of the cross, Jesus intercedes for those given to Him. The cross is His priestly sacrifice for the Father's elect people. This perspective will help us understand the seven sayings in a unified way that is without fragmentation.

Therefore, keeping the fact in mind that Jesus is our great high priest, we will do two things today in communion remembrance: we will overview the seven sayings and then we will summarize them.

1A. An overview of the seven sayings from the cross

To overview the dying words of our Lord, we can put them into a rough and ready chronological order. Per the handout I gave you, you can read along with me.

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments (Luke 23.34).

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left...And he [one of the crucified criminals] said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23.32-33, 42-43).

...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19.25-27).

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mat 27.46; Mark 15.33).

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst" (Jn 19.28).

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (Jn 19.30).

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last (Luke 23.46).

The Gospels tell us nothing more about what Jesus said in the hour of suffering. The record limits our perspective. The Gospel writers did not choose to report anything else that Jesus may have spoken. Moreover, it is interesting to consider what the Gospels do not accent. There is no accent on the subjective experience, the emotional state, or even the suffering of Christ. When you read the sayings as a unit, you can see that the death of Christ on the cross is not an emotionally packed drama designed to stir up our emotions. Instead, what we have is a message (it is theology; the narrative is theological narrative) regarding the historical fact of the death of Christ. It is an objective fact that the Gospel writers narrate in a way that accents the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. They show the fulfillment of His commitment as high priest.

2A. A Summary of the Seven Sayings of Jesus from the Cross

The seven words give us the gospel word. The words give us a message. They give us God's covenant word regarding the fulfillment of His commitment as high priest. Accordingly, Jesus said, **"This cup [of communion] is the new covenant in my blood."** When we remember the Lord Jesus in terms of the seven words, we hear His promise and thus we have a summary of the new covenant. (By fulfilling His covenantal commitment as high priest, He became resurrected Sabbath king. As resurrected Sabbath king, Jesus guarantees that His covenant people will come to possess all that He secured for them on the cross. Thus, by summarizing the seven sayings, we are giving a summary of new covenant in His blood.)

We can summarize in a single packed sentence, and then we can unpack it like unpacking a suitcase stuffed with treasures. We unpack one diamond after another, one gold bar after another, and so forth.

Here is the packed sentence: the seven sayings reveal the determination of the Lord Jesus Christ to save His sheep and to form the new covenant family by means of His death and resurrection. We can unpack this sentence in steps (if you want a fuller suitcase, you can look back at the seven previous communion sermons; I will assume some things that I developed already more fully).

1) His words reveal His determination to save sinners *by His death*

It is determination to save that underlies the first saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The crucifixion of Jesus is the greatest crime ever committed by human beings. Thus, we should expect an immediate outpouring of the wrath of God on everyone involved in hanging Him on the cross. In the trial, he told His opponents that they will see Him at the right hand of power as their judge (Mat 26.64) and on the way to the cross, He told the weeping women that judgment is about to fall on them and their children (Lk 23.28). The last thing we should expect is the prayer for forgiveness, but Jesus intercedes for all who crucified Him. He asks for their forgiveness, that God not immediately crush them to powder. Of course, the Father granted them forgiveness because He always hears the Son (Jn 11.42). God spared them from immediate final judgment. He did not give them eternal life; He gave them extended life on this earth.

Why does Jesus spare the Jews and Gentiles, the actors and the onlookers alike, who are all guilty of the greatest crime possible? He spares them because He presents Himself an offering for sin on the cross. If they were not forgiven then He would not die on the cross. In other words, He is saying, "Forgive them so that I may not be forgiven. Judgment must fall and it must fall at this time, but it must fall on me." These are marvelous words, "Forgive them because they do not know what they are doing. Do not forgive me, because I know what I am doing."

Just saying these words, "He will die," makes one cringe for it is the Son of God, God the Son, Jesus the Lord of glory that will die! He must endure the wrath of God in the place of sinners. He must go into the wasteland of God-forsakenness and cry out in lament "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He must come forth from the wasteland where there is famine and drought and fulfill the Scriptures by saying "I thirst." It is from the outer darkness of hell

that He raises up His eyes and says, “I thirst” with parched lips. He is determined to save by dying a thousand deaths in the darkness.

2) His words reveal His determination to save *His sheep* by His death

Why does He endure the wrath of God while those around Him afflict, taunt, and mock Him as they gamble over His clothes? He endures the wrath of God for those given to Him by the Father in the eternal covenant of redemption (Jn 17). The murderers of Christ had temporary forgiveness, and Jesus endured infinite punishment so that the covenant people, including you and me who trust in Him, may have eternal forgiveness.

This comes out in the symbol of the one on the right hand and the other on the left. We cannot escape the image of the one criminal as a sheep and the other as a goat. He came to lay down His life for His sheep and He must bring them home to the Father (Jn 10).

3) His words reveal His determination to *save* His sheep by His death and resurrection

The guarantee of Paradise to the one thief is a guarantee that Jesus will save every single person for whom He died.

His words reveal His determination in fact to build His church (cf. I will build my church, Mat. 16, the church He obtained by His blood, Acts 20).

Bringing the sheep home to the Father involves bringing them into His church, the new covenant family. When Jesus tells us that Mary is now the mother of John, He tells us that a new order of things will result from His death. All who trust in Him, and who do the will of the Father, are His mother, brother, and sister.

He says, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” as the true and ultimate Israelite who trusts God to deliver Him out of the net (Ps 31). He therefore finishes all that the Father required of Him and can proclaim with a loud voice, “It is finished.” By His resurrection deliverance, He secures our resurrection. In the dark hours, in the darkness of eternal judgment, Jesus secured His people’s release (redemption) and that forever. He purchased eternal redemptive-release with His own blood (Heb. 9.12). Therefore, finally and irresistibly, He made it certain that all those given to Him in the eternal covenant of redemption will be saved. None for whom Jesus died will perish. He will bring all for whom He died to saving faith. All who believe in Him will never die. This is a marvelous grounding of the gospel of the kingdom, repentance, and the forgiveness of sins by faith in the risen Lord Jesus.

His work is finished, accomplished, and certain. God answers His prayers. He is Jacob’s ladder. His death for sinners is efficacious.

Therefore, our savior sings. His uses of the Psalms from the cross are songs. It was His joy to endure the cross; we are His joy as He fulfilled the role of our great and determined high priest.

What then shall we say to these things?