

LESSON 5

The Statements from the Cross

Matthew 27; Mark 15;
Luke 23; John 19

“But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing’” (Luke 23:34a).

Nothing reveals God like the cross, and nothing exposes man like the cross. The cross is repulsive and grotesque; only God could glorify a death on a cross. Crucifixion was chaos, profanity, agony, pain, and venom.

We would not expect profound philosophy to be on the cross, yet some of the greatest statements in all of history were made from it. People who do not know much about the Bible have heard and remembered what Jesus said from the cross.

Jesus made **seven statements** while on the cross. The first three focused on others; the final four concerned Himself.

Forgiveness. Jesus first said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). This was a prayer, not a declaration. Jesus’ first and last statements were prayers to His Father. In our culture, forgiveness is “in,” but the popular idea that God will simply “get us out of trouble” does not come from the Bible.

Jesus desired mercy for His tormentors. However, to receive God’s forgiveness, those who crucified Jesus would have to submit to the biblical repentance that leads to reconciliation. Jesus looked down at those who had nailed Him to the cross and said, “I want you to know God’s forgiveness.” Prayer was rare on crosses. To pray for the executioners was unthinkable. However, this is what Jesus did. In dying on the cross, Jesus prayed from His own pure heart. He was praying for forgiveness for those who were committing the crime of killing God’s Son. Some scholars think Jesus repeated this statement throughout His first hours of suffering on the cross. Think about this! The cross is the greatest exhibition of forgiveness that the world has ever known.

Salvation. Jesus said to the thief beside Him, “. . . today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (**Luke 23:43**). The first statement was for the crowd in general, and the second was for the thief in particular. Jesus promised that the penitent thief would be with Him after he died!

Was this thief more lost than we are? It takes a bloodstained Savior to save sin-soaked sinners! Jesus had power on earth to forgive sin (**Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:23, 24**).

Isaiah said that Jesus would be numbered with the transgressors. He was crucified between two thieves. It seems that it is easier for God to convert the “unrighteous” than the “self-righteous.”

Responsibility. Jesus said, “Woman, behold your son!” (**John 19:26, 27**). The “woman” was Jesus’ mother, Mary. John was the “son.” Jesus had just called God “Father.” To call Mary “Mother” would be to pervert who she was. Tragically, some religions do that.

Can we remotely grasp what it was like to live in the house with Jesus? It is easier to grasp His deity than His humanity. A young Jewish girl was called by God to bear and rear His Son (**Luke 1:26–33**). Humanly speaking, we might think that Jesus would have been an “A” student, a star athlete, the young man voted “most likely to succeed.” Mary must have wondered, “What kind of person will this child turn out to be?” (see **Luke 1:66**). What an experience she must have had in rearing Him!

Of all people, who will be with you, no matter what? Your mother! Friends like Peter deny, and sheep will scatter; but mothers will always be there! Jesus could not abort His cross; Mary could not abandon her son. She did not fully understand what He was doing, but she was at the foot of the cross.

Only a mother can remotely know how Mary felt. Were the brothers of Jesus there? Were His

sisters? No one knows, but His mother was there. Simeon, the prophet, had tersely said, “A sword will pierce even your own soul” (**Luke 2:35**). Mary paid a price to rear Jesus. In no measure could she grasp the cross. Discipleship will cost us as well.

What is the lesson here? In spiritual matters, the family does not count. God is not partial (**Acts 10:34**). Mary, Jesus’ brothers, and His sisters had to obey the gospel as others did! They had to become followers of the Christ as all do; and they did. They were present in the prayer session before the gospel was first preached (**Acts 1:13, 14**). Joseph, the adopted father, was faithful in what he was asked to do. Mary was faithful to her son and, later, to the gospel. She disappears when we come to the Epistles. Two of her sons, James and Jude, wrote books of the Bible.

Jesus saw His mother. He forgot His own pain to care for His mother, saying, “John, take care of her.” This was not permanent. It was necessary for that day. Surely, James and Jude would take care of their mother later on!

Pathos. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (**Matthew 27:46**). Jesus’ first three statements on the cross concerned others. The final four concerned Jesus and the Father.

My parents were married seventy-one years and died two weeks apart. Their lives were so intertwined that they could not live separated. God was merciful. That moment at the cross was the only time in all eternity that God and Jesus were separated. No wonder Jesus was sorrowful, even “unto death” (**Matthew 26:38, 39**). As a young preacher, I encouraged grieving mates by saying, “They are better off.” I do not say that with such great force now! The loss of a tenured mate is life’s greatest loss. When one dies, both die in certain ways.

God did not abandon Jesus; He abandoned sin! God forsakes sinners who have forsaken Him. Jesus called upon God twice from the cross. Here, He found that God would be God. To accept us forever, He had to reject His Son temporarily. That is part of the great mystery of the cross. Jesus’ statement is a quotation from **Psalm 22:1**.

As usual, man missed the point. The people thought Jesus was calling for Elijah! They were cruel, making sport of it all. Jesus did not fear nails or death, but He did shudder at the loneliness that came with being made sin. How horrifying that was to Him! Jesus was made everything that sin is to God, and He had to suffer through this awful agony *alone*! He never tried to save Himself. This is the depth of His vicarious death. If Jesus had saved Himself, He could not save us. If He was to save us, He could not save Himself. He could not do both.

Thirst. After six long hours, He said, “I thirst” (**John 19:28**; KJV). His words fulfilled another Scripture (**Psalm 69:21**). At this point, Jesus spoke four times in quick succession. It is arresting to me that not every statement made by Jesus on the cross was recorded in every Gospel Account. Basically, one writer revealed what the others did not.

Jesus kept His full senses and a clear mind while upon the cross. He first refused a drink that would dull His senses. Later, He requested a drink to keep His senses. He had kept His composure and alertness upon the cross.

Of all the pains and discomforts He experienced upon the cross, thirst is the only one He mentioned. These two words comprise the only physical need that Jesus mentioned from the cross. It was the only personal favor He requested. His little statement is power-packed with thought. A dying man’s final words haunt us. They should. Only when knowing He had fulfilled His task (**John 19:28**) did Jesus ask for water.

Victory. He said, “It is finished!” (**John 19:30**). It is one word in Greek—*tetelestai*. This is the greatest single word ever said. When we hear this word, we realize how little we know. Only Jesus, with one word, could sum up the entire plan of redemption!

It will take all eternity for us to grasp what our salvation means! Jesus is the only person who fully did what God wanted done! He said, “*Tetelestai!*” Jesus came to do God’s will. He did it! Man, lost in sin, now has a Savior. *Hallelujah!*

Faith. Jesus said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (**Luke 23:46**). He did not die in

doubt. He died in joyous faith!

Yes, man in a human sense killed Jesus, yet in another sense man did not. Jesus chose when He would die and when He would be resurrected. He said, “No one has taken it [My life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18). Jesus told Pilate that his power was only allowed by God (**John 19:10, 11**). The spirit of Jesus was not taken from Him; He voluntarily gave it to the Father.

Think of how Jesus lived! Think of how Jesus died! His final words also fulfilled a Scripture (**Psalm 31:5**). Jesus, the Word (**John 1:1**), respected “the Word.” We must have the same attitude toward it!

Jesus spoke in triumph! There is a time to conclude everything, to wrap up our mission. Let us pursue our work, like our Savior, until we have fulfilled it!

The Statements to the Cross

Matthew 27; Mark 15;
Luke 23; John 19

“He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him” (Matthew 27:42).

Who can forget what Jesus said *from* the cross, and who can appreciate what people said *to* the cross? When we listen to ourselves, we are embarrassed, disappointed, and exasperated by what we hear.

What was said to the cross?

“Come down.” People said, “If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (**Matthew 27:39, 40**). Jesus’ tormentors no sooner had Him on the cross than they wanted Him to come down: They said, “. . . come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!” (**Mark 15:32**). Believing is not at all what they would have done. If Jesus had come down from the cross, they would have put Him back on it! People with demands cannot and will not believe. Stubborn sinners cannot believe. No one could deny that Lazarus had been resurrected (**John 11**). However, this resurrection precipitated Christ’s death. Enemies did not deny Peter’s miracle (**Acts 4:13–17**). When we do not want to believe, even miracles cannot help us!

We all find ourselves at the cross. What a motley group we see there: enemies, the curious, the ignorant, spectators, the scared disciples, and the loved ones! Jesus was the only one who was fully living out God’s will.

Change. A thief said, “Remember me” (**Luke 23:42**). One thief was impenitent. The cross either makes men better or worse. The selfish life of one thief ended in his selfish death. The other thief repented. The penitent thief was one man on earth who had a solid clue about what was happening. He realized that he had lived a wicked life, and he saw the need to change. The gospel must be “bad news” before it can be “good news.”

Magic. The people said, “Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” (**Luke 23:39**). “Amaze us with a trick,” they were saying. Jesus is not a magician. There is a sense in which no one is as unsensational as God! Men crave excitement. Even at the cross, they could not just sit beneath it and learn. They tried to do something. Everything they said and did failed. Tragically, people today promote excitement. They want “holy goose bumps.” They hear with their eyes and think with their feelings. The impenitent thief was guilty of many crimes, even blasphemy (**Luke 23:39**); but he called over to the Lord and asked Him to save him. It is hard for a dying man to be brazen. However, he pushed through the circumstances and focused upon Jesus, asking for mercy.

Man would rather die than think. He is his own worst enemy. What if Jesus had saved Himself? Then this man would have been doomed. Jesus stayed on the cross to save this man and us.

Gawkers. Others said, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him” (**Matthew 27:47–49**; see **Mark 15:36**). Gawkers are dangerous. After Jesus cried aloud to God, bystanders did what bystanders do—they mixed up everything! Hearing a cry from the depths of Jesus’ heart, superstitious man confused Elijah with God. Bystanders (thrill-seekers) see everything and observe nothing. They see all that happens and understand little. All that bystanders offered Jesus was vinegar! What a travesty!

Gamblers. The soldiers said of Jesus’ tunic, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it” (**John 19:24**). Jesus was dying for our sins, while men were gambling for His clothes. Only hardened man could gamble at the cross.

The tragedy in life is not just what men suffer, but also what men miss! All of us are selling our lives for something. A man can gain the whole world and lose his soul (**Matthew 16:24–26**). Men gambled while God was dying to save them! Men were more interested in the worth of a robe than the life of a man. Things were more important than people. Are we any different? Are we any better? We know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Jesus went back to heaven; the robe soon disappeared. Spiritual values last; temporal things pass away.

Too little, too late. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked boldly for Christ’s body (**John 19:38–40**; **Luke 23:50–53**). We do appreciate them, for they buried Jesus. However, Jesus never asked that of them.

Too many people think the way these two men did. Joseph and Nicodemus thought they were assets. God does not need assets; He only wants servants. Too many only want to serve God in an advisory capacity. Two men who could have done so much did so little! They only claimed the dead body of a man they had secretly believed in when He was alive. Jesus asks us for our lives; we are only willing to perfume His body! Their action did take nerve, but it takes true courage to confess Jesus, to make Jesus who He is—Lord.

Conclusion time. A centurion, observing what had happened, said, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (**Mark 15:39**). This was just another workday for this war-hardened centurion, but perhaps he took pride in his job and did it well. He watched every movement; he heard every word. Jesus was different; this cross was different. Unknowingly, this honest man immortalized himself. What the world, the crowds, and the enemies totally missed, this man saw! He drew the only conclusion that one can honestly draw. Either Jesus is the Son of God, or He is not! The centurion made his decision; we must make ours!

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*