

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## The Cross

I understand that the Amazon River travels with such power that, when it reaches the ocean, its current continues to be felt for 2,000 miles. The love of God, which was displayed in all its fullness when Christ died on the cross of Calvary, has flowed undiminished for almost 2,000 years. This morning I want to look at the seven statements which the Lord Jesus made when he hung upon the cross. These statements give us a remarkable insight into what the death of Christ means and its impact upon the lives of Christians. I shall look at these statements in the order in which the Lord Jesus said them. I have given the statements the following titles:

Christ's forgiveness	Luke 23:34
Christ's salvation	Luke 23:42
Christ's responsibility	John 19:26-27
Christ's suffering	Matthew 27:46
Christ's humanity	John 19:28
Christ's victory	John 19:30
Christ's obedience	Luke 23:46

### CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS - Luke 23:34

The first three statements by the Lord from the cross address the needs of others. First, for those who crucified Him, the need for forgiveness. Then, to the dying thief, the need for salvation. Finally, to His own mother, the need of care.

The first words uttered by the Lord Jesus on the cross are, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Forgiveness is a remarkable thing. How many people would love to be forgiven for the things they have done. Things which have been said and done cannot be changed. We know what it is like as a child to do something which spoils our relationship with our parents. For the relationship to be enjoyed again, we need to say sorry and to be forgiven. As adults, we discover human forgiveness is fickle. In marriage for example, the husband or wife, may say or do something unfortunate, then apologise and the matter is put right. But, sometime later, when similar mistakes are made we discover how things we thought had been forgiven re-emerge. Why is that? Because the mistakes we make and wrongs we do cause deep and lasting hurt. It is hard to forgive and even harder to forget. It requires a love which can bear the cost of forgiveness. The forgiveness of God has been made possible not because He was prepared to overlook the sinful things we do, but because He was prepared to pay the price of forgiveness. At the very beginning of Christ's suffering upon the cross, His words establish what He had come to die for - our forgiveness. And He recognised the ignorance of sinful man in His crucifixion. The astounding thing about the love and forgiveness of God is that it is directed towards those who hated Him. Generally we are prepared to forgive those we love. It is almost impossible for human beings to love those who hate them. Christ died for the whole of mankind. The message to the Christian is that we should be as ready as our Saviour to forgive those who treat us unjustly.

In Luke 7:40-50, the Lord Jesus once told the story of a lord who had two servants. One owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty denarii. Neither of them could pay their debts so the lord decided to freely forgive them. This simple story teaches us about the character of God's forgiveness. It is at His cost. It is towards everyone, whether we have much or little to be forgiven. It is also a genuine forgiveness. The meaning of the word "freely" is that the two servants knew their debts were settled and they would never be brought into question again. This is the forgiveness the Christian has experienced and has the responsibility to preach and to practise with the love and generosity of the Saviour.

### CHRIST'S SALVATION - Luke 23:42

Luke is the only Gospel writer who records the story of the thief who trusted in Christ. Before the crucifixion, Pilate had offered to release to the people either Jesus, or Barabbas, who was a murderer and a robber. Pilate had hoped, in his cowardice that the people would choose to release Jesus. Pilate knew the Jewish priests wanted to destroy Jesus because they were envious of Him. Pilate also knew the Lord was innocent of the charges brought against Him. The crucifixion was a damning judgement of the hypocrisy of false religion and political injustice. At the same time, it shows us that the Lord Jesus was on the cross in the place of Barabbas. He was a substitute for Barabbas

and died instead of him. This is a marvellous picture of how the Lord had come to bear God's judgement against sin and to die in our place. Charles Dickens' book, "*A Tale of Two Cities*", ends with Sidney Carton taking the place of Citizen Everemond in a French prison and, as a consequence, going to the guillotine. Christ took Barabbas' place, although we do not know if Barabbas ever trusted Christ. Christ's sacrifice is great enough to save everyone but it only applies if we trust Him.

The two thieves who were crucified with the Lord were unable to save themselves and escape from the judgement they had come under. At the beginning of the crucifixion, the other writers of the Gospels tell us that both thieves criticised the Lord. Yet something took place in the heart of one of them. He accepted that his crimes deserved death. He warned his fellow criminal of their situation. And He recognised Christ as Lord and he appealed to Him for salvation. The response of the Lord Jesus was immediate and personal. He promised the man would be with Him in paradise. Salvation is immediate upon trusting in Christ. It also forms a personal relationship with Him which can never be broken. The thief was the first person to experience the wonder of Christ's salvation. He went into heaven only on the basis of that salvation. He had no time to live a life of thankfulness. We have.

### **CHRIST'S RESPONSIBILITY - John 19:26-27**

The Lord's third statement from the cross, and the last one directed towards the needs of others, demonstrates His love and responsibility for His mother. This statement is rarely commented on and yet it is so important. These words are the last to be spoken before the three hours of darkness engulfed the cross. From the cross, the Lord puts everything, in relation to His earthly family, in order. It is believed that Joseph died some years earlier and, as the eldest son in the family, the Lord Jesus was responsible for the welfare of His mother and her children. The Lord is described as both "the carpenter's son" and, in Mark's gospel which views Christ as the God's servant, as "the carpenter". It is amazing to think that the Son of God was not only born into a poor family but learnt and practised the trade of a carpenter to help support them. In the past, English monarchs were taught a trade, such as a cobbler or tailor, so that if hard times came, they could support themselves. The King of kings knew what it was to earn a living and meet family commitments. Today, the family is so much under threat and relationships are vulnerable to breakdown and all the heartache which that brings. Christ's example upon the cross is very powerful. He did not abandon those who were His personal responsibility and remained entirely true to the family He had entered. His mother would be cared for by John, one of His most faithful disciples. That the Lord should emphasise this from the cross teaches how important it is for the Christian to understand the importance of the family. It also teaches us the obligation we have to fulfil the responsibilities relationships bring and so be a witness in a world where these relationships are so much under attack.

### **CHRIST'S SUFFERING - Matthew 27:46**

There is an increasing nearness of relationship to Christ in the first three statements from the cross. First, His enemies who crucified Him. Next, the thief who was crucified next to Him and acknowledged his need of the Saviour. Finally, His own mother. He did not abandon them but sought to meet their needs. The central statement of the cross is not about nearness but distance. What man, energised by Satan, did to the Son of God at the cross was horrific. But the time came when it was not man, or even Satan, who brought darkness over Calvary but God Himself. In those three hours of darkness, hidden from man's view, God's judgement against sin fell upon His only Son. Jesus, who never abandoned anyone, was Himself abandoned by God. At the end of that three hour period, He cries, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was a just question. Jesus was the only man who could righteously ask this question because there was nothing in Him which deserved the forsaking of God. But He was forsaken because He took our place and bore our sin. In Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:21, God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us". God brought all His righteous judgement of sin upon Christ. Jesus paid the price so that we would not have to. These central words bring home to our hearts a sense of the Lord's enormous suffering for us. As the hymn writer expressed it,

*"But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed,  
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through  
Ere He found the sheep that was lost."*

Although we can never fully understand the cost of our salvation, we should never forget His sacrifice. He has asked us to remember Him in a very simple way by breaking bread, as a picture of His body given for us. And by drinking wine, as a picture of His blood shed for us. We do this not simply as individuals remembering "the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me", but also as the Church because "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it".

### **CHRIST'S HUMANITY - John 19:28**

The shortest of the Lord's statements from the cross is, "I thirst". The Lord's words are said to fulfil the scripture. This is thought to be a reference to Psalm 22:15. The psalm prophetically describes the sufferings of the Saviour and verse 15 His thirst. The statement also conveys to us the humanity of the Lord Jesus. In fulfilling the work of the cross, the Lord knew enormous suffering. He was forsaken by God and the words, "I thirst", express the place of deepest need and weakness into which His love had taken Him. To those who looked on, His thirst was associated with a dying man with no power. To the worshipping heart it shows, in such a simple and yet profound way, the depths to which the Lord of glory went in order to secure our eternal salvation.

In Mark 4:36, the Lord Jesus, at the end of a long day, is literally carried by His disciples into a boat. He falls asleep. It is from this picture of the Lord's true humanity and exhaustion that He awakes to give a remarkable demonstration of His power in four outstanding ways (Mark 4:36 to Mark 5:43). He stills the storm - His power over disaster. He sets the demon possessed man free - His power over the devil. He cures the woman - His power over disease. He gives life to Jairus' daughter - His power over death. From utter weakness He shows incredible power. It was the same at the cross. When the Lord said, "I thirst", He expressed His true humanity and the place into which His suffering love had taken Him. But from that low position, He acts in great power as the final two statements from the cross demonstrate.

### **CHRIST'S VICTORY - John 19:30**

The penultimate cry from the cross, "It is finished", was not one of weakness. In the original Greek, this statement is actually one word. It was a cry of power and victory. It did not mean, "I am about to die and suffer no more" but "I have perfectly finished the work God gave Me to do." The book of Hebrews helps us to understand this. In Hebrews 10:7, we read about Christ coming into the world to do God's will. The critical part of that work was to die upon the cross to meet God's judgement against sin and to bring in salvation. In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is called the "Author and Finisher of faith". Finisher means completer. The Son of God as man completed perfectly the work of salvation. In Hebrews 10:12 we read, "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God". Christ's work of redemption is a perfect eternal work. It has been done once and it has been done forever. It cannot be repeated. All that is left is to see its value and trust in the Saviour.

In the Old Testament, there are four outstanding pictures of the Saviour. Abraham and Isaac, Joseph, the Passover Lamb, and David and Goliath. Abraham is a picture of God the Father giving His only Son and Isaac's is a picture of the Lord's perfect obedience. Joseph is a picture of the Lord being betrayed by His own people yet ultimately saving them. The Passover Lamb is a powerful picture of "The Lamb of God" sacrificed for the sins of the world. The first three pictures are passive. But when we come to David going down into the Valley of Elah to meet the giant Goliath the picture, changes to one who is not at all passive but active in the work of salvation. David ran to meet the giant. Outwardly he was a youth untrained for war. He did not have a sword but a shepherd's sling. But David had come to do God's work and in God's power the giant was defeated. There is an aspect to the cross which demonstrates the power of the Saviour. He says in John 10:18, "I have power to lay down my life and power to take it again." In the statement, "It is finished", we do not see a defeated Saviour but the powerful Saviour. His love could not be defeated by man's hatred, Satan's energy, or even God's judgement. His love was victorious. In the words of the Song of Solomon "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:7). Christ's love is victorious.

### **CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE - Luke 23:46**

The first words from the cross are recorded by Luke, "Father forgive, them, for they do not know what they are doing." The last words are also recorded by Luke, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." It has always impressed me that the seven statements from the cross are embraced, as it were, by the name of the Father. Everything the Lord did was in obedience to His Father. John 10:18 reads, "No one takes it (my life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from my Father." A commandment is necessarily linked to obedience. In His final statement from the cross, the Lord Jesus fulfils the first part of the commandment. He lays down His life. Although man's intention was to destroy the Son of God, Scripture clearly tells us He gave His life. He laid it down willingly, in obedience to His Father and in love for us. The cross was a place of hatred, mockery and violence. All man's hatred against God was fully displayed in the crucifixion of the Son of God. But in all the darkness of Calvary, Christ's love shone with power and dignity. Christ quietly, and in complete obedience to His Father, lays down His life. The commandment was the power to lay down His life and in resurrection to take it up again. The cross is the most powerful demonstration of God's love: God's love for mankind, Christ's love for us. How was that love demonstrated? By obedience. Christ's obedience to death was the basis of God's power to save. This leads us to worship the One who loved us so much. It also teaches us the importance of obedience to the Lord in our own lives, obedience which enables Him to work powerfully through us. We cannot have powerful lives unless we have obedient lives. The cross is the place where we learn the greatness of God's love to us. It is also the place where we are challenged as to the reality of our response to the One who gave Himself for us. The

words of the hymn, "When I survey the wondrous cross", ends with the words, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life my all."

When the Lord died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn from the top to the bottom. The veil divided the place called the Holiest of All, where God had dwelt amongst His people, from the rest of the temple. Only the High Priest could enter the Holiest of All, and only on very few occasions. It was into this place that the High Priest went on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to answer for the sins of the people. When Christ, the true sacrifice, died at Calvary, all God's righteousness judgement against sin was met. The torn veil is a picture of how God had removed all the distance which existed between Himself and man on account of sin. God now appealed to men on the basis of His love. That love has not changed.

There was a Christian who had a great interest in steam trains. One day, he met the general manager of a locomotive works who invited him to the factory where the locomotives were made. He also arranged for the chief engineer to give the Christian a guided tour. The chief engineer took him to the department where the locomotives were designed. Then he took him through the various stages of developing, constructing and testing the great machines. It was a fascinating day. At the end of the trip, the Christian thanked the chief engineer and shook him warmly by the hand. To his surprise, the man's hand was cold and limp. The chief engineer, seeing the surprise on the Christian's face, explained that when he was an apprentice he had accidentally driven a nail through his hand. Ever since then, he had not been able to close it. The Christian looked into the man's face and said, "I have a Saviour who had nails driven through His hands 2,000 years ago and ever since then He has never been able to close them to those who come to Him".

It is fitting to end with the words of the hymn writer,

*How great Thy grace! No mind of man can grasp  
The love told out in suffering on the tree;  
Love that has gathered now within its clasp  
Those once far off, but now brought home to Thee.*

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