

THE THREE LAST WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

**John 19:16-30
(Good Friday, Year B)
Nairobi
(30 March 2018)**

INTRODUCTION

a. There are two great Fridays in the history of man. The first great Friday is the sixth day of the week, the week when man was created. The second great Friday is also the sixth day of the week, the week when mankind was redeemed.

b. The day of the death of Jesus has various names in different languages:

- Jewish Christians call it the Great Day of Preparation, as it was the day when salvation was prepared for the entire world.
- In some countries, it is called Black Friday, as it was the day of the mankind's most terrible crime.
- In English the day of the death of Jesus is called Good Friday. [Although the name "Good", according to the Oxford Dictionary, comes from the old, original meaning of "holy or pious",] the modern meaning of the name "Good" is truly appropriate, as mankind received so much good on that day that no language can adequately express it.
- We Finns call it "Long" Friday since that day was painfully long for Jesus.

c. Various denominations emphasize various parts of Jesus' life:

- Rome stresses the Christmas events,
- The Orthodox Church places emphasis on Easter,
- The Pentecostals stress Pentecost,
- The Adventists put forward the message of Advent,
- Lutheranism has traditionally had its focus on the events of Good Friday.

All of these emphases are correct, as long as none of them excludes the other.

d. The text for today presents us with an abundance of items to look into. What should we concentrate on? Our long text is divided into four sections: 1. Jesus is crucified (vv. 16-22); 2. the garments of Jesus (vv. 23-24); 3. Jesus takes care of His mother (vv. 25-27); and 4. Jesus gives up His spirit (vv. 28-30).

e. We are at the foot of the cross for the entire text for today. This is where the preacher is supposed to lead his listeners as well.

On the basis of this text, I will bring to our attention two matters today:

- First, who all were standing at the foot of Jesus' cross on Good Friday 2,000 years ago?
- Secondly, Jesus' "three words from the cross".

1. WHO ALL WERE STANDING AT THE FOOT OF JESUS' CROSS ON GOOD FRIDAY 2,000 YEARS AGO?

1.1. When He was on the cross, Jesus was surrounded by His enemies. Only very few friends were

there, and they, too, were following the course of events from a distance. When the furious mob started to thin out, Jesus' mother, three other women, and the Apostle John very quietly walked up to the foot of the cross.

1.2. The various gospels give slightly different information concerning who all were at Jesus' cross. Modern theology places these stories, these accounts, into conflict with each other. And then it adds one more example to its claims that there are internal conflicts in the Bible. In reality, the various gospels do not conflict with each other here either, but rather complement one another, filling out the whole story.

1.3. Apart from the Apostle John, there were four women at Jesus' cross on Good Friday. In all likelihood they were: 1) Mary, the mother of Jesus, 2) Mary's sister, whose name according to Mark was Salome, and who according to Matthew was the mother of the sons of Zebedee, that is James and John, the Evangelist, 3) Mary, the wife of Cleophas, who according to Matthew and Mark was the mother of James the Less and Joseph, also known as Joses. The fourth woman was Mary Magdalene, as the various gospels testify.

Even though the faith of these four women was not yet in accordance with the New Testament in everything, however their *love* was exemplary. *Out of all the men, only one* dared to approach the cross before Jesus died, that is the Apostle John.

2. THE WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

John leaned against Jesus at the institution of the Lord's Supper on Thursday night. Now he leaned against the blood-stained cross of Jesus. That is why in his Gospel he can repeat the last words of Jesus, the words the other Evangelists could not hear.

According to the Gospels, Jesus spoke on *seven* different occasions while hanging on the cross. I assume it is no mere coincidence that He specifically spoke seven separate times from the cross. This number seven contains a great message to us, as in the number symbolism of the Bible this number seven means perfection. Calvary is a sermon about a task and its achievement. It is a sermon of God's perfect holiness and perfect love—perhaps also of God's perfect suffering. In addition, it is no mere coincidence that everything Jesus said on the cross was *a direct quote from the Old Testament*. What does this tell us of the authority of the Bible!?

These seven “words” of Jesus expressed from the cross were: 1) “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34); 2) “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43); 3) “Dear woman, here is your son” – “Here is your mother.” (John 19:26-27) ;4) “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34); 5) “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28); 6) “It is finished.” (John 19:30); 7) “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

In the following section I will examine the three “words” out of the seven spoken by Jesus on the cross, those words which are narrated only in the Gospel of John. I have titled them “the word of love”, “the word of suffering”, and “the word of victory”.

2.1. THE WORD OF LOVE

2.1.1. The first of these “words” can be called the word of love. With regard to John, Jesus said to His mother, “*Dear woman, here is your son.*” And then He said to John, “*Here is your mother.*” (John 19:26-27) And John avoided using his own name in the Gospel, so he continues: “From that

time on, this disciple took her into his home.”

2.1.2. It was the Jewish custom that the oldest son in the family took care of his widowed mother. So, after Mary *was widowed*, Jesus had been responsible for her upkeep. And now, in the midst all His pain and suffering Jesus fulfilled this obligation as well.

Naturally, we ask why Jesus did not entrust the responsibility for His mother into the hands of His younger “halfbrothers”, whom we know to be at least four plus their sisters (Matthew 13:55-56). Perhaps one of the reasons at that time was their unbelief (John 7:5), or perhaps their poverty. Evidently, Jesus’ brothers were not at that time in Jerusalem. Then too, the other disciples were also far away from the cross.

We can assume from the Bible that John was financially better off than the other disciples (he had his own fishing net, and two houses, one in Galilee, the other in Jerusalem).

Later on, John was the pastor of the congregation at Ephesus. Tradition tells us that Mary also lived in John’s house in *Ephesus*. Some secret may be hidden in the fact that John lived to be about 100 years old. He was also the only disciple who died a natural death; the others died as martyrs. In this way then, through John Mary was given the support and care she needed to the end of her life.

2.1.3. In Jesus’ care for His mother, what lesson is there for us who so often forget our aging mothers and fathers? And furthermore, by behaving rudely, many people darken their parents’ final moments.

Jesus was not a spiritual fanatic. He respected His Father’s creative work, a work He also had taken part in. Jesus was God Almighty. He had the power to turn stones into loaves of bread. He could have taken care of His disciples’ earthly upkeep, their food and shelter, in some supernatural manner. But He did not do that. Jesus and His disciples simply did what others did, that is, they used ordinary, legal money to get food. They even had a cashier to take care of their money, His name was Judas Iscariot.

In the same manner, Jesus did not arrange for Mary’s earthly future in some supernatural way, but rather He left her in the care of the Apostle John. Jesus respected God’s created order.

2.1.4. In different churches *Mary’s position* varies. Mary deserves our great respect as Mother of our Saviour. But Jesus’ example prohibits the worship of Mary, as exercised in certain churches. How do we know that Jesus forbids the worship of Mary?

During His public ministry Jesus did not address Mary with the word “mother” but *with the word “woman”*. After His baptism at the beginning of His public ministry, in other words at the wedding at Cana, Jesus addressed Mary with the word “woman”. He behaved in the same way while hanging on the cross and apparently during His public ministry.

In this manner, Jesus wanted to show Mary that *she was no longer to think of Him as simply her son but as her Saviour and Lord and God, Who also atoned for Mary’s sins*. No created person, not even a mother, can take part in that work. In the work of redemption, Mary was no longer Jesus’ mother with her motherly affections and feelings, but she was a sinner on the same standing with other women and all mankind. Mary too had to look to Jesus as her Saviour.

This message of love expressed by Jesus to His grieving mother and His faithful disciple John is altogether touching and wonderful.

2.2. THE WORD OF SUFFERING

2.2.1. After Jesus knew that everything was fulfilled, in order to fulfil the prophecy of the Old Testament, He said: “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28).

This is a word indicating great suffering: “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.” (Ps 22:15; 69:21) Even more burning was *the thirst of his soul*, as Jesus’ communion with His Father had been broken when the sins of the world and their curse rested upon Him. In this thirst, He cried out as was written: “My soul thirsts for God, the living God.” (Ps 42:2). Jesus did not forsake His Father, but His Father had forsaken Jesus.

2.2.2. But what was the most awful thing? The most terrible thing was the thirst He felt *as He descended into hell* after His death for our sakes and on our behalf. (Luke 16:24; Acts 2:31).

2.2.3. This is how Jesus suffered all our pain and sorrows, and He suffered the eternal punishment of our sins. In suffering this thirst, Jesus opened for us the spring of Living Water. And now He invites us: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.” (John 7:37) He satisfies the longing of our hearts.

2.3. THE WORD OF VICTORY

2.3.1. Finally, from the lips of the dying Jesus we hear these words: “It is fulfilled.” (John 19:30) He had fulfilled the task given Him by His Father (John 10:18; 14:31; 15:10). What does “It is fulfilled” mean? It is explained by Jesus’ own words: “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” (John 17:4) And John adds: “And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” Everything is fulfilled and conquered at that very moment when everything is completely lost—at least in the eyes of the world.

2.3.2. All of the prophecies and foreshadowings of the Old Covenant had now been fulfilled. This is *the Seed of the Woman* that crushed the serpent’s head; this is *the eternally acceptable sacrifice* as represented by the multitude of Old Covenant sacrifices; this is *the Red Sea* where our slaveowners drowned; this is *the bronze serpent* that caused the snakebites of sin to be healed by merely looking at it. This is *our High Priest*, Who by His own blood went into the Holy of Holies acquiring for us a perfect cleansing from our sins. The prophecies of the prophets had come true. God had fulfilled His promises.

2.3.3. Furthermore, *God’s law* was fulfilled to the very last detail. Both in His actions and in His suffering He was obedient unto His death on the cross. In everything He was our vicarious sacrifice, our substitute sacrifice. Now the Law had obtained all it called for. The righteousness demanded by the law was fulfilled, and the punishment required by the law for sins had been suffered completely. Now we are redeemed from the curse of the law. Now we have received the righteousness where the law finds no spot or blemish. Now Christ is the end of the law to all whose belief is counted as righteousness.

The Son of God came down from heaven to this world to fulfil the task given Him by His Father. This task was defined by John the Baptist when he saw Jesus coming to him: “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*” (John 1:29)

Everything needed for our salvation is fulfilled. Salvation is a gift of God. It neither can nor does it

need to be bought in any way whatsoever. Because of Jesus' redemptive work, all of salvation is free. As Christ has fulfilled everything, all we have to do is only to hold on to the perfect gift of salvation. So therefore, all our own works, all our own requirements, all our own demands, everything by which man tries to earn something and to contribute to his salvation, all these are cursed.

The atoning work of the dying Jesus ends in such a wonderful victory as this. We are given the assurance of salvation and the strength of victory, so that we too through Him can overcome the power of death and hell. "*It is fulfilled!*" These words already radiate the triumphant victory of Easter morning.

CONCLUSION

1. Good Friday is the completion and victory of Jesus' earthly calling. Easter is God the Father's seal to the cry of Jesus on Calvary: "*It is fulfilled!*" At Easter the Father justified Jesus, in other words, God the Father declared Jesus innocent by raising Him from the dead.
2. As we hear the final words of the Man of Calvary, we also join in with those who were present around the cross in confessing: "*Truly this was the Son of God.*" We confess this not out of fear as did most of those present at the cross, but out of love for the Lord Jesus, our Saviour.
3. The cross is the centre. This is why we always preach the cross of Calvary, and not only on Good Friday.

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