

Savior, Teach Us

† **to forgive (Luke 23:34)**

† **to believe (Luke 23:43)**

† **to love (John 19:26f)**

† **to reconcile (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)**

† **to plan (John 19:28)**

† **to finish (John 19:30)**

† **to die (Luke 23:46)**

In the name of Jesus, our suffering Savior and Friend, dearly redeemed:

Even Jesus' enemies stood in awe of Him. They marveled throughout His ministry at the gracious words that came from His lips. But He saved the best for last. As we hear His *Seven Words* from the cross today, we can't help kneeling with the Roman centurion who saw how he died and exclaimed, "Surely, this man was the Son of God." Surely, indeed! Jesus the Master teacher never stopped teaching even in His death. But most important of all the lessons to be learned is this: Jesus is our Savior – from sin and its eternal consequences in hell and from its power in this life. **Savior Teach Us.**

† **to forgive (Luke 23:34)**

Was there ever forgiveness like this? His own Jewish people had turned from shouting, "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday, to "Crucify Him!" at His trial before Pontius Pilate early Good Friday morning. Yet Jesus speaks in such kindness as He struggles out to Calvary. He was too weak to carry His own cross, so a visitor to Jerusalem, Simon from Cyrene, was compelled by the Roman executioners to assist Jesus in this dreadful way of tears.

Many women wept for Jesus on the way, but He is so rich in forgiveness that He warns them of a far greater tragedy that would come on them and their children. The city of Jerusalem and its magnificent temple would be destroyed by the Romans not forty years later. Unspeakable suffering would come upon the Jews at that time. But it was only a foretaste of what all of us rebellious sinners deserve. For by our sins we nailed God's Son to the cross.

Stretched in agony between two criminals, what does Jesus say? No anger here for His tormentors. No wrath at us because of our sins. Only a simple prayer to His heavenly Father whose wrath Jesus suffered to appease. Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Savior, Teach Us – to forgive.

† **to believe (Luke 23:43)**

Convicted criminals tell me that one of the hardest things about life in prison is not the captivity, but the other captives. Some are so filled with anger at anyone and everyone, that the slightest offense, no matter how unintended, sets them in a rage that wants to kill you. Once they reach that conclusion, they never seem to forget that you did or said something they did not like, or failed to say what they thought you should. So forever after they will come after you and maybe enlist their partners in crime to make your life miserable. If you are looking for good in humanity, it's hard to find it behind bars.

Harder still to see it on a cross. At first both criminals were making Jesus suffering all the more intense by their mockery. They joined the crowds in heaping scorn on Jesus. But finally one of them,

realizing his error, turned around completely in his heart of hearts. He began instead to criticize the other criminal and confessed his sins at the same time: ***“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”*** And then in humble faith, and faith is the only explanation for a prayer like this to someone hanging on a cross: ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”***

That’s all Jesus ever wants from sinners. Just a humble heart that confesses sin and trusts that Jesus is God who rules even when He hides His glory and majesty under the shame of the cross. What Jesus said to that dying thief, He says to every sinner: ***“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** When our final moment comes, there will be no further purging in purgatory, nothing more necessary for our salvation. Faith receives God’s gift of everlasting life.

Savior, Teach Us – to believe.

† to love (John 19:26f)

What happens in our family is often blamed on poor communication. Or family members are frustrated that someone is always angry. Or they admit, “We argue too much.”

But long before any unkind words are spoken, another sin has been committed which we cannot see. It is a sin of omission, failing to do something good. We have failed again and again **to love**.

Some look on Jesus only as a good example. And in His **Third Word** spoken to His mother Mary and to John, ***the disciple whom he loved***, we surely see a wonderful example. But here hangs the one the prophets called ***“the LORD our righteousness.”*** This is the Son of God our Savior who kept all God’s commands perfectly. For Jesus’ sake God looks at us and sees no sin, not a single one, neither a sin of commission nor a sin of omission. In Christ God sees only His Son’s perfect love. And by His grace and forgiveness He empowers us to look at each other kindly, lovingly too.

“Love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8), on the cross and focused on our family.

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† to reconcile (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)

There can be no doubt that sin separates us from our fellow human beings. Look at all the lines on the map and consider how many wars have been fought over property rights and trade. “They have what we want.” says sinful human reason. “Survival of the fittest! Whoever has the biggest guns wins.”

But all this separation from sin began long before the first shot was fired. It crept into God’s Garden Paradise in the tempting voice of the serpent, in the doubt he sowed in Eve’s heart, in the rebellion of Adam who followed his wife instead of his God. Hiding from God and blaming each other were symptoms of sin that separates us from God and from each other.

We naturally would crumble up such a ruined creation like a kid with a picture he tried to make and did not like. But God had a far different solution. When He promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head, the LORD God had an awesome substitution in mind. He would take our place under the weight of all this sin and guilt that drives a wedge between us and God, between us and those we love. Jesus, God’s own Son, would suffer total abandonment by God, so that sin would never be able to separate us from God in hell.

Jesus knew the answer to His question: ***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*** The prophets and evangelists and apostles all explain the reason. God wanted to remove our sin so that He could reassure us, ***“Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. Be reconciled to God.”***

Savior, Teach Us – to reconcile.

† to plan (John 19:28)

Successful people love to plan. We even use wise expressions like, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” But how often do our plans exclude God and His Word? Isn’t it often “what I want,” more than what God says is good for me? Don’t we sometimes plan our families around our jobs instead of our jobs around our family? And don’t we often plan both to the exclusion of God’s Word? How often do Christians move to a different place with no thought of how they will care for their souls? Like the sheep in shepherd Philip Keller’s flock, we are content to drink from every mud puddle along the way, while our Good Shepherd keeps trying to lead us to clear, clean, living water in His Word. Then when flukes and nematodes attack our soul and make us sick at heart, we wonder why and may even blame God.

God has a better way and better plans. These He repeated through His prophets down through the centuries. Then to the very last detail, God fulfilled His plans. Even in His **Fifth Word** – **“I thirst.”** – Jesus is fulfilling God’s plan to save our souls from all our foolish, selfish plans. In Psalm 69, Jesus had spoken a thousand years before the first Good Friday: **“They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”** (Psalm 69:21 NIV84) Jesus suffered our thirst for good from God in order to save us from eternal thirst in that waterless pit of hell.

Savior, Teach Us – to plan.

† to finish (John 19:30)

How many times did your parents or grandparents have to tell you, “Finish what you start”?

No one had to tell Jesus. In fact, everyone was trying to keep Him from finishing His mission to save our souls. King Herod tried to kill Jesus before He was two years old. Mother Mary scolded Jesus for staying in the temple when He was twelve. Satan tempted Jesus to sin for forty days of running battles in the wilderness when He was thirty. And for three years of His ministry Jesus’ family thought He was crazy; His disciples insisted He should not suffer and die; His fellow Jews were sure He should die for blasphemy; and the Roman authorities just wanted to avoid mob riot. No one had a clue what Jesus should be doing, but all of them insisted that He do it their way.

But Jesus pressed on until He gave up His life for us all. He stayed firm in His purpose to shed His innocent blood that washed our sins away. He came to the goal where full payment for all our crimes against God and each other was fully made. Then and only then Christ Jesus alone could say: ***Tetelestai!*** – ***It is finished!*** Nothing remains of our guilt. Nothing is left for us to do. Jesus finished our salvation and now gives eternal life and forgiveness to all who believe.

Savior, Teach Us – to finish.

† to die (Luke 23:46)

More and more Americans are trying to sanitize death. They want to put a smiley face on this violent intrusion into God’s perfect creation. Instead of funerals to praise God’s grace they want eulogies to praise themselves. Some speak in such glowing terms of their departed loved ones, it’s sometimes hard to tell who they’re talking about, whether it was the same person you knew. And if they were so close in life, why was there so much strife between them? And why could they not keep their loved one with them? Why do they so quickly forget and move on?

Jesus shows us where our real concern should be. Instead of worrying about earthly things, He gave it all up for God and entrusted His soul to His heavenly Father. He was totally committed to saving us, right down to His final breath: **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”**

Savior, Teach Us – to die.

Amen.