

Good Friday

In the midst of physical pain and emotional agony, Jesus speaks to us from the cross, that most dread form of death by torture.

Seven "words", seven messages are taken from the four Gospel accounts, and assembled into what was probably their chronological order according to a simple harmony of the various gospel accounts of the crucifixion.

Today, we reflect on these words, these messages spoken from the cross, and what it means to us today. These seven words are taken from different gospels, but assembled into what was probably their chronological order according to a simple harmony of the various gospel accounts of the crucifixion:

1. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Luke 23:34
2. "This day you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43
3. "Woman, behold your son." John 19:26-27
4. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark 15:34;
Matthew 27:46
5. "I thirst." John 19:28
6. "It is finished." John 19:30
7. "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Luke 23:46

1. Father, Forgive Them (Luke 23:34)

“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.” (Luke 23:32–34)

The scene around the cross is cold and crass, without emotion and feeling. The soldiers were part of an execution detail doing a job, no different from a hangman, or soldiers in a firing squad. This team would have conducted several crucifixions. Participating in a crucifixion for the first time, a soldier might have flinched, felt uneasy, squeamish, even vomited at the sheer brutality of it, but now they are “seasoned professional soldiers”, calloused and emotionless; its a job after all and it pays well!

First, the soldiers begin the cruel process of nailing the criminal to a cross, then hoisting him up, the cross swaying forward, then back until it is secured with wedges at the bottom to hold it upright in the hole in the ground. Then they sit around the base waiting for the criminal to die – sometimes for days. To pass the time they gamble, deciding by a casting lots who will be awarded the victim’s last possessions. That is the scene.

In the midst of it comes an astounding, powerful word from the “criminal” on the centre cross:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Let’s say it together and listen to ourselves say:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Listen! ...

In his last hour, Jesus is requesting Father God, but not for Himself! I would be terrified and overwhelmed, trying desperately to retain my composure. If I could utter anything through the pain, it would be **“God help me!”**

Jesus prays out of complete unselfishness. He is concerned for those whose souls are in much greater peril than his own, those responsible for putting Him on the cross. **“Father to forgive them...” This is REAL Love.** Through excruciating pain, without a thought for Himself, Jesus loves.

Was it only 12 hours prior, in the garden, Jesus spoke to His Father, not for Himself, but for His disciples and followers? How can He **do** this under these circumstances?

Jesus’ total trust, His absolute confidence, is in His **Father!** Jesus models the perfect relationship with the Father and invites us to emulate Him.

“FATHER”, not “God” (a generic term for deity); not “Lord”, one who exalted in rank; not “Almighty God”, a bit formal at the desperate hour of one’s crucifixion; not even “Creator God” with whom Jesus was present at the creation of the earth, nor Lord of the Universe!

“Father!” a relationship of endearment in a family, “Da-da!”, “Daddy.” In the Garden of Gethsemane the night before¹.

“Teach us to pray!” the Disciples had asked Jesus and He says, “Pray like this, “Our Father...”² **“FATHER!”** It is the natural cry of the Spirit of God within us, helping us reach out to God³.

Let’s say it together again:

¹ Mark 14:36

² Matthew 6:9

³ Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6

“Father, **forgive THEM**, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Who are “**them**” for whom Jesus prays?

The **Soldiers**. Roman soldiers routinely put men to death. They destroyed a human life, brutally, without compassion, by merely following orders. Only after the fact, did they realise with awe and terror what they had done: “**Surely he was the Son of God!**” said the centurion⁴. Jesus was forgiving **THEM**, the soldiers!

Pilate was a better candidate. Against all law, he had given the order for the crucifixion. He had found Jesus innocent of the crimes with which was charged. Yet, pressure from Jewish leaders, and his fear of a riot, “forced” him against his own better judgment. He signed the death warrant and then publicly washed his hands⁵ – the crass, double-faced act of a self-serving politician, desperate to hold onto power. Jesus was forgiving **HIM**, Governor Pilate for the weakness in his character!

Chief priests and scribes were the prime movers behind the crucifixion. When Jesus cleansed the temple of their greedy trade in animals and money changing at outrageous exchange rates, they were determined to kill him⁶. Behind the scenes they paid Judas handsomely for his insider betrayal⁷, sent temple soldiers in the darkest hour of the night, to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane⁸, tried to get people to testify falsely against Jesus before the Sanhedrin⁹, brought his case before Pilate¹⁰, and

⁴ Matthew 27:54

⁵ Matthew 27:24

⁶ Matthew 21:15, 23, 45-46; 26:3-4

⁷ Matthew 26:14-16

⁸ Matthew 26:47

⁹ Matthew 26:59

¹⁰ Matthew 27:1-2

stirred up the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified¹¹. Jesus was forgiving **THEM**, the chief priests and scribes!

Pharisees and Sadducees were his early enemies. Jesus' plain teaching about the Kingdom of God offended them. The Sadducees tried to discredit him¹². The Pharisees were the first to actively plot Jesus' death¹³. I guess, if Jesus came to our churches today, many of our leaders (Ministers, Deacons and Elders) would oppose him openly. Some might plot to destroy him, because the real Jesus is just too threatening to established religious power that resists change. Jesus was forgiving **THEM**, the Pharisees and Sadducees!

Could any of these in authority, have prevented Jesus' Crucifixion? "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."¹⁴

And then, there is, **You and I**. Think about it..., you and I are no different than the soldiers, the politicians and the religious authorities; we have our personal beliefs and preconceived ideas to protect! It is our weakness, our squabbles, our intolerance and our pettiness which Jesus forgives from the cross, even when we have yet to ask for it!

But this is a different kind of love being shown at the cross. Paul explains, **"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."**¹⁵

What do we learn from Jesus' first words from the cross?

¹¹ Matthew 27:20-23

¹² Matthew 22:23-34

¹³ Matthew 12:14

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:8; see Acts 3:17

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 1:13

Jesus' prayer on the cross tells me that God has found a way to forgive us, even when I do not know, the hurt I cause the Father with my words and my actions.

As Jesus begins the last phase of his life dying on a cross, and He calls His Father, without any shame at the intimacy of his love and the authenticity of his Sonship – **“Father, forgive them.”**

And so we pray the prayer ourselves: ...**Father, forgive us...**

Prayer: Yes, Father, forgive us, please. We really don't know the depths to which we have fallen, pulled down by the world around us. And we are just coming to realise the width, and depth, and height of Your Love for us – and have always had. As we have cancelled and forgiven and forgotten the hurt others have caused us, forgive and forget our debt of sin to you, we pray. Not because we deserve it, but out of your great mercy revealed by the cross. Do this please in the Name of Jesus who, in the midst of excruciating pain on that cross, cried out, “Father, forgive **THEM**, for they do not know what they are doing!”

AMEN!

2. “This Day You Will Be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)

“One of the criminals who hung there, hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’¹⁶

It was terrible to be unjustly condemned to death by crucifixion; adding insult-to-injury, to be crucified between two obvious criminals. But there’s a story here, and a lesson. This brief passage relates one of the most amazing prayers and promises in the entire Bible.

Before going further, it’s important to recognise, Jesus’ crucifixion with other criminals was no accident of history. It is a fulfilment of prophecy: the prophet Isaiah says, ***“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.... He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”***¹⁷

Hanging on crosses at Jesus’ right and left, are two ***criminals***, some describe them as ***“criminal, evil-doers”*** who commit gross misdeeds and serious crimes. Others describe them as ***“robbers, highwaymen, bandit”***¹⁸,

¹⁶ Luke 23:39-43

¹⁷ Isaiah 53:9, 12

¹⁸ Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27

the type whom Jesus described as having inflicted life threatening wounds to a traveller in the parable of the Good Samaritan.¹⁹

One of these criminals, dying just as painfully on a cross beside Jesus, now takes up the cat-calling started by the soldiers, **“You are the Christ, aren’t you? Then save yourself and us!”** It’s like the cruel teasing of inmates that goes on in prisons today. It is a jab at authority of any kind, a pulling of everyone down to your own level. The thief is making fun of Jesus’ inability to do anything despite the exalted title of “Messiah.” *Where is this talk of “Messiah” now?* he sneers. You’re dying just like us. Death is the great equaliser.

The thief’s taunt is disrespectful, demeaning, denigrating, that maligns, slanders, reviles and defames. Yes, the thief is wicked, but once again, Scripture is being fulfilled. Hear Isaiah say, **“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not”**²⁰ and the Psalmist pray, **“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ‘He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.’”**²¹

Just below Jesus’ feet the soldiers are casting lots to see who gets his clothing. His last effects aren’t given to his family, standing nearby. They go to the soldiers as the “spoils”. This too is in fulfilment of Scripture! The Psalmist laments: **“Dogs surround me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my**

¹⁹ Luke 10:25-37

²⁰ Isaiah 53:3

²¹ Psalm 22:6-8

bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”²²

It is the final insult!

While one criminal is blaspheming Jesus, the other rebuked him. ***‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’***²³ The second bandit may be condemned to death, but he has not lost his faith; he asks, ***“Don’t you fear God?”***

The second brigand refuses to desert his sense of right and wrong. ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”***²⁴, he pleads. This brigand understands, what the 12 disciples had not, ... yet! Jesus is not an impostor; He **WILL** receive the Kingdom that belongs to the Messiah. ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”***. ... An astounding revelation in the midst of hardship.

Was this a deathbed confession? Perhaps the thief had attended one of Jesus’ outdoor teachings and grappled with “some sort of faith”, but the tug of the familiar and comfortable life was stronger.

There is “some sort of faith” and ***“saving faith”***. The latter is the result of genuine repentance,, followed by the commitment to Christ that repentance demands.

Jesus who knows what is in every heart knows this brigand’s request, ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”***. His reply?

²² Psalm 22:18

²³ Luke 23:40-41

²⁴ Luke 23:42

'I solemnly commit myself to Truth: today you will be with me in paradise.'²⁵ Yes, you'll be with me there – today in paradise. We'll go together, you and I.

On one side is a committed blasphemer who **cannot** see salvation and persists in mimicking the negative language around him; on the other side is a committed believer who **can** see salvation.

Remember Joseph, the man with a “technicolour dream-coat”, pleading with a fellow prisoner, the cupbearer to the king, that he would be released from prison: ***“When all goes well with you my friend, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.”***²⁶

You see, ...this is the nature of God's blessing - it is for every one; no one can hoard it or keep it for themselves. First, Jesus forgives everyone who has put Him on the cross. Then the Father blesses His Son with this strange companion during his last hours, one who believes Jesus is the Messiah, a believer who can look past the raw wood and nails and blood, to the heavenly kingdom that Jesus will inherit. He believes and wants “in.”

As life earth wanes away, Jesus answers him, ***“Yes, you'll be with me there – today in paradise. We'll go together, you and I.”***

What faith! What a promise! What a privilege! What a glory!

Prayer: Father, you never leave yourself without a witness. Even Jesus' close disciples faltered in their faith. But then you raised up a thief who had great faith and received a great promise. Please strengthen my faith. I am often so upset and confused by the buffeting winds of my life. Let me

²⁵ Luke 23:43

²⁶ Genesis 40:14

see beyond them to Jesus. By your grace, may my faith bring some joy into your breaking heart as did the thief's faith in Jesus. In Jesus' holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.

3. Woman, Behold Your Son (John 19:26-27)

“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:25–27)

John is the only one who records Mary’s presence at the cross. It would be expected for Jesus’ mother be in Jerusalem at Passover. Luke tells us, **“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover”²⁷**. Probably after Joseph’s death (presumed to have happened before Jesus began his ministry), Mary would come up to Jerusalem for the Feast with friends and relatives. Now her son is in trouble – arrested, tried, condemned, and now dying. Surely, Mary’s place is close to her son. Simeon’s prophecy given at Jesus’ dedication comes to pass: **“And a sword will pierce your own soul too”²⁸**. She is near him now, but her heart is broken; friends console her.

And who are these friends? To start with, **“Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs”²⁹**. Three other women³⁰ seem likely present:

Mary Magdalene is mentioned consistently in all three gospels.

Mary (the wife) of Clopas seems to correspond easily to **“Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses (Joseph)”³¹**. She is probably “the other Mary” who was with Mary Magdalene at the tomb Friday night and on Sunday morning³².

²⁷ Luke 2:41

²⁸ Luke 2:35b

²⁹ Matthew 27:55; Luke 8:3

³⁰ verse 25

³¹ Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56

³² Matthew 27:61; 28:1

The third woman, Jesus' mother's sister, may well be Salome, who is the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

James and John are Jesus' cousins, part of His inner circle with Peter. It might explain why their mother presumed to ask that her sons sit on Jesus' right and left in his kingdom³³. She had been rebuked by Jesus on that occasion, but here she is at the foot of the cross consoling Mary, Jesus' mother, her sister.

The tender, emotional scene near the cross unfolds further. ***“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”***³⁴

“... the disciple whom He loved...” Clearly, John stands in awe of Jesus. He does not want his name, in any way, to overshadow that of Jesus, but he does confirm himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”³⁵

As Mary's firstborn, Jesus is legally responsible for her welfare, to ensure that she has a place to live and food to eat during her widowhood, and He takes it seriously. Jesus entrusts his mother to John's care instead and John takes this commission seriously: “From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”³⁶

As we reflect on Jesus' third comment from the Cross, we begin to see and experience more about Jesus' love. He is dying in agony, gasping for each breath. He sees his mother, the one who comforted him through all of

³³ Matthew 20:20-21

³⁴ John 19:26-27

³⁵ John 21:24

³⁶ John 19:27b

childhood's cuts and bruises, teases and taunts, wrapping Him in her protective, comforting mother-love. Now, as he sees her at the foot of the cross, heartbroken, weeping, inconsolable, his heart goes out to her. He is touched by her concern for Him. She is a widow – soon to be a widow who will be known as “*mother to that crucified criminal, Jesus*”. Life will not be easy for her. There was a time when the other children in the family don't believe in Jesus as she did³⁷. Would they care for a grieving, sorrow-filled widow as she deserved, or might she be better off in John's care?

From the cross, Jesus communicates a fundamental truth: care for one's parents is a fundamental part of life's responsibilities. Whether they understand or even approve of us, whether we can even trust them, we are told: “***Honour your father and your mother***”³⁸.

The Apostle Paul is adamant: “***If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.***”³⁹ There is power in this kind of Christ-centred love. It helps heal hurts, it helps overcome betrayal, it help build bridges where communication is broken.

As we reflect on Jesus' third words from the cross, we are confronted with the question, “***How do we reconcile our primary commitment to Jesus with responsibility for our families?***” Sometimes with great difficulty. But to put Christ first doesn't mean that we are free to neglect our other priorities, – it means only that we get our priorities in proper relation to each other. God will give us wisdom to work this out. Here at the end of his life, we see in Jesus the tender love of a son for his mother – a mother who had sometimes misunderstood him. As he dies he settles his earthly

³⁷ John 7:3-5

³⁸ Exodus 20:12

³⁹ 1 Timothy 5:8

obligations as best he can, we hear him say, “Dear woman, here is your son ... Here is your mother” (John 19:26–27).

Prayer: Father, we see Jesus’ example of love and responsibility. As wonderful and loving as family relationships can be, they are often complex and sometimes hurtful. We ask you to help us sort them out. Show us how to love you at the same time we love our family members. Give us the divine wisdom that we need so that we can love as Jesus loves. In His name, we pray. Amen.

4. "My God! O! My God! Why have You forsaken me?"

Mark 15:33-35; Matthew 27:45-47

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' – which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.'"

At the very centre of Jesus' Seven Last Words, the Fourth Word reflects both, Jesus' lowest point as well as a theological high point of the crucifixion.

The early crowds had dispersed a long time ago, and the indeterminate waiting for death was on. An eerie darkness descended upon the entire area, a crushing gloom.

The two criminals on either side are still alive; they might have lived for days on the cross. But Jesus is not so strong. His physical human body has endured a cruel scourging that would have killed lesser men. He has lost a lot of blood, even before climbing the hill to Golgotha where his hands and feet were nailed to the rough cross. Mark tells us, "***It was the third hour when they crucified him***"⁴⁰. Sometime after the crucifixion took place, Luke tells us: "***It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour***".⁴¹ Jesus lasts only six hours.

An African–American spiritual asks: "***Were you there when the sun refused to shine?***" An eclipse has taken place not so long ago on 24 November, 29 AD, but what takes place this day is no natural eclipse. A normal eclipse would have been physically impossible during the time of the full moon on which Passover falls. We are not told how it happens. We just don't know.

⁴⁰ Mark 15:25

⁴¹ Luke 23:44

Throughout Jerusalem – and especially in this killing ground – the darkness is felt, heavy, foreboding and palpable, reminiscent of the darkness over the land of Egypt in the Ninth Plague: ***“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt – darkness that can be felt.’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days.”***⁴² The similarity between the three days in Egypt and the three hours on Golgotha in Jerusalem is **NOT** accidental!

Does the darkness mean anything? Consider these:

1. This Darkness is a **symbol** of moral darkness. (Luke 22:53).

2. This Darkness is a **fulfilment** of prophecy:

The prophet Joel declares, ***“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”***⁴³

The prophet Amos says, ***“‘In that day,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.’”***⁴⁴

3. Darkness is a sign of the **death** of a king. Philo, a first century AD Jewish writer, saw supernatural eclipses as “indications either of the impending death of some king or the destruction of some city.”

⁴² Exodus 10:21-22

⁴³ Joel 2:31

⁴⁴ Amos 8:9-10

4. Darkness is how the Father's expresses His **anger** at how his only begotten Son is being treated: ***"The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless."***⁴⁵
5. Darkness is the weight of the world's **sin** Jesus takes upon Himself as he hangs on the cross.

In this fast descending darkness, ***"Jesus cries out in a loud voice"*** reflecting in prayer, the very real agony of the Cup drunk to its very dregs on the cross. Jesus prays from the Psalms, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning in agony and pain?"***⁴⁶

"This shout expresses not a loss of faith, but a (temporary) loss of contact"⁴⁷, a temporary break in the Father-Son relationship

God cannot be a part of sin; Paul explains what happens: ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***⁴⁸ Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes the weight of the sin of the world", and as a result, God's punishment for sin.⁴⁹

From now on, whoever believes Jesus' blood in death, stained the beam of the cross, is saved from the consequence of God's judgement on sin.

The horror and magnitude of this "cup" comes in full fury as the darkness of God's judgment grows heavy and he feels the Father's comforting presence sucked away. He who has been with the Father from all eternity

⁴⁵ Isaiah 13:10b-11

⁴⁶ Psalm 22:1

⁴⁷ R.T. France (Matthew, p. 1077).

⁴⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴⁹ John 1:29

is now utterly alone! The Father's focus at this hour is severe judgment upon the sins Jesus is bearing.

We sing these very words, and the importance of it slips us by:

And can it be that I should gain, An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be, That Thou, my God, should die for me?

This is the most significant of all verses:

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
AMAZING Love, How can it be?
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?"

5. "I thirst." John 19:28

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips."

Jesus has hung on the cross for six hours. He knows it is near the end of His human life. He can barely take a breath. Hung from his arms, he must pull himself up each time he wants to breathe. His shoulders ache, and He is exhausted from the pain. His mouth is parched dry, yet he does not want to die without a final word. He asks for something to drink to wet his lips for this final effort.

John says, ***"Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled..."***⁵⁰

Which Scripture was fulfilled? A Psalm of lamentation, written by David, seems to have been fulfilled literally in Jesus: ***"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."***⁵¹ Jesus asked for something to quench his thirst in order to fulfil Psalm 69:21!

But this was not the first time Jesus had been offered wine. Both Mark and Matthew note, he was offered bitter wine just prior to being crucified⁵², perhaps as an intoxicant for those about to suffer pain. A group of Jerusalem women, as an act of piety, provided for a condemned man a vessel of wine containing a grain of frankincense to numb him. Jesus refuses to drink this. He has committed himself to the Father to offer himself as a sacrifice. Any attempt to lessen the pain of this sacrifice would be seen as going back on this commitment.

⁵⁰ John 19:28a

⁵¹ Psalm 69:21

⁵² Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23

Hanging on the cross, was the second offering of wine vinegar:

“A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.”⁵³

Wine vinegar was a drink popular with soldiers of the Roman army, an inexpensive drink, considered more thirst quenching than water alone, prevented scurvy, killed harmful bacteria in the water, and the vinegary taste made bad smelling water more palatable. The soldiers would have had this whilst on crucifixion duty, not to get drunk, rather to quench their own thirst.

A condemned criminal might be able to drink wine prior to being crucified, but drinking from a cup while hanging on the cross wasn't practical. So when Jesus indicated his thirst, the soldiers used a sponge to slake his thirst.

But to reach Him, the soldiers ***“put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.”⁵⁴*** John makes a point of specifying the hyssop plant, because Hyssop was used to sprinkle blood on the doorposts and lintels on the first Passover!⁵⁵ It was associated with purification and sacrifices in the tabernacle.⁵⁶

Standing there not too far from the cross, listening to Jesus words from the cross, listening to what was being said, and watching what was going on, John was piecing together the history of God, each word and enactment, a revelation that took Him deeper into reverential awe! Now hyssop, just as the blood of the first lamb marked those to be saved! WOW!

⁵³ John 19:29

⁵⁴ John 19:29

⁵⁵ Exodus 12:22

⁵⁶ Leviticus 14:4, 6; Numbers 19:6, 18

Jesus drank just enough of vinegar wine to get ready to speak His final words.

What was it like to watch Jesus' slow death? It had an impact on the impulsive and impetuous Peter who says, ***“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”***⁵⁷

The soldier who offered did not know, his was an act of mercy to the One who was bringing God's mercy to all humankind.

Jesus was determined to complete the task set before Him. His request, ***“I thirst”*** was to strengthen himself and ease his throat so that he might cry out his final words from the cross ***“with a loud voice.”*** He was summoning Himself, His strength, His will, and His body, to make a significant declaration and bring it all to completion.

PRAYER: Father, extreme thirst, being parched, is something I can relate to. But adding to the physical torment and exhaustion was the crushing spiritual aloneness. That is beyond my experience. Thank you for your love that conquered all to save us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

⁵⁷ 1 Peter 2:22-23

6. "It is finished." John 19:30

'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."⁵⁸

Jesus' journey had begun in a simple stable in the City of David, thirty some years before. There were dangers and challenges then, and threats to His life by the megalomaniac Herod. The prophet Simeon had told His mother, the young Mary, ***"This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."***⁵⁹

Now it was finished. What exactly was finished? What was this mission that was now finished? Why did Jesus come?

This is how Jesus defined his mission, and later, how his apostles understood it. He was commissioned to "preach the Gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18, 43), "to bring life" (John 10:10b), "to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8b), "to bring fire upon the earth," (Luke 12:49), "to testify to the truth" (John 18:37).

But Jesus had a very clear view of what lay ahead of him. He used two metaphors: ***"To drink the cup,"*** to take part fully of an event, and ***"to be baptised,"*** to be immersed fully in the event. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?"⁶⁰

Can you take part without distraction and immerse yourself fully to the task God has given you, and declare at the end, ***I have finished and completed the task God set before me?***

⁵⁸ John 19:30

⁵⁹ Luke 2:34-35

⁶⁰ Mark 10:38

The word for “completed / finished / accomplished in verses 28 and 30 has a sense of finality, the same word used in mundane commercial documents, contracts and receipts use an abbreviated word indicating, the bill had been paid in full.

The obligation has been completed.

The debt has been paid off.

It is finished.

The price of redemption has been paid. No one should ever again fear death, that death is an eternal separation from God. Jesus has paid the price in full - It is finished; the debt has been paid. Now death is the doorway to eternal life!

Jesus invites us to live life with this purpose: to be fully involved in all that this life has to offer (**to drink the cup**) with all its challenges of health and relationships, and to be immersed fully (**to be baptised**) in the life of God in us and through us, that we might not only be recipients of God’s many blessings, but that God’s blessings would overflow to others around us.

The final triumph! How many dying people do we know who can declare to the world around them, **It is finished!** Would it be just great, if the last words from our lips would also be: **It is finished** - I have completely completed, all that God set out for me to do?

PRAYER: Father, I’ve wasted much of the momentum of my life because I’ve tried to go in so many directions. Please corral me so that I will focus on your purposes and your direction for me, that I might finish this life well. In Jesus’ Name, I pray. **AMEN.**

7. "Father! Into your hands I commit my spirit." Luke 23:46

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last."

The Romans had mastered the ordeal of crucifixion. It was intended to be a long, drawn out, tortuous death for anyone who dared resist or challenge the power of Rome. Criminals would often last for days before they finally succumbed, though on this day, the day before a Sabbath, any surviving criminals would be killed by breaking their legs⁶¹ and their bodies removed from the cross, through some kind of understanding brokered with the chief priests, so as not to offend Jewish sensibilities.

Three or so years prior, Jesus went to His cousin John who was baptising people who repented of their wrong way of thinking, their errors in attitude, the false and duplicitous standards by which they live their lives; but Jesus had none of these to repent of! Jesus insisted John baptise Him and as He came out of the water, The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God "descends" on Him. ***This is my Son***, spoke God from Heaven, ***in whom I am well pleased. Follow and obey Him, for He is about, doing My Will.***

At Creation, God breathed into us His Spirit. We are not God; He did not make us to be His equal, He did not give us life to live independent of Him. God breathed His Spirit in us, that we might be One with Him! As the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are ONE, a mystery we will one day understand, so too were we created to be ONE with them.

Jesus has declared His work of Redemption as ***finished***. God's Spirit which descended on Him at His baptism, He now returns, He surrenders to the Father.

⁶¹ John 19:31-33

What a lovely and beautiful image of death. It's not an idea or a concept, it's not a metaphor, analogy or figure of speech.

It is what God has designed for us. In spite of all the scientific and technological advances we continue to make, two things we cannot and never will control: the moment of our first breath, and the moment of our last breath.

Our spirit, the Spirit of God in us, is **"on loan"** to us by the Creator, Life-Giver and Life Sustainer, Father God Himself. When our work, of being God's representative on this earth is finished, we return to Him, we surrender back to Him, His Spirit, which belongs to Him!

It's like turning up at the factory, clocking in, being given a set of tools to work with, going about the work, the task for which we have been given the set of tools, completing the task, surrendering the tools and returning home! The assignment, the mission given to you is finished, and it's time to return home.

Just one more thing left....

Jesus had felt God's presence ebbing away - ***Why have you forsaken me? I feel abandoned; I feel being left 'high and dry', stranded on this cross!***

An eerie, foreboding darkness had descended across the world. Had God turned His back, unable to see His Son suffer on the cross?

Suddenly, a rumbling noise grew louder and an sustained echo of falling metal rang through the air. ***"...the curtain of the temple was torn in two."***⁶² The inner curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, where the God met the High Priest to hear and forgive the sins

⁶² Luke 23:44-45

of the people, consisted of two curtains that were 60 feet high and 30 feet wide, as thick as the palm of a man's hand, woven in 72 separate squares, and joined together. Think of the force required to tear this massive curtain! Mark refers to an earthquake at that time; was that which caused the fall of a lintel, which started the vertical rip that went from top to bottom?⁶³

The price Jesus paid with His life on the cross, opened the way for direct access to God. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, we are purified and have access into the presence of God! The work of the High Priest is no longer needed, nor do we need a Temple! Christ is our High Priest, interceding on our behalf before the Father, day and night!

The evening prayer from Psalm 31, used daily by devout Jews, is Jesus' final declaration from the cross, ***"Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth."***⁶⁴

And Jesus, the man who was one of us, having surrendered His Spirit to the One who sent Him on a special mission, breathed His last breath.

Jesus the man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a young Galilean girl, Mary, was no more!

But this is not the end of the story! Wait and see what happens on the third day! We shall meet at 5:45 am on the roof terrace of the building next door to celebrate the completion of Jesus' mission.

Hung out on the cross between two hardened criminals, one who mocked Him and the other who asked forgiveness and restitution, Jesus demonstrated three things:

⁶³ Mark 15:38

⁶⁴ Psalm 31:5

First, Jesus' relationship with His Father is intimate. He speaks with His Father as he has done throughout his ministry. For Jesus, death is no out-of-control enemy. No matter how bleak the moment, he knows his Father is present with him – now present to receive his spirit.

Second, Jesus knows He is secure in His Father's care. He might have felt abandoned at one time, but He knew, because of His intimate relationship with His Father, God would **NEVER** abandon Him

Finally, surrender is not a sign of weakness; surrender is a sign of belonging!

So we pray with Jesus, **“Father, into your hands I surrender my spirit”**.

That's where we belong - safe in our Father's arms!

We read these fitting words in Psalm 31:1-5

*In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.*

*Turn your ear to me,
come quickly to my rescue;*

*Be my rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me.*

*Since you are my rock and my fortress,
for the sake of your name lead and guide me.*

*Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,
for you are my refuge.*

***Into your hands I commit my spirit;
deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.***