

into your hands
commit my spirit.

I thirst.

them, for they
they do

Truly, I sa
you will be

Spoken

7 Sayings from the Cross

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It is finished.

My God,
you forsaken me?

Woman, be
Son, behold

...into your mind
commit my spirit.

I thirst.

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...or they

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It is finished.

why have you forsaken me?

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

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et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

I thirst.

or they

PREFACE

Last words are memorable. When someone knows they have limited time, there are typically specific things they want to express to those who are closest to them.

Jesus knew He only had hours and even minutes to live. He used the time caring for others. The Bible records seven sayings Jesus spoke from the cross:

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

“Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

“Woman, behold your son.” “Behold your mother.”

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

“I thirst!”

“Into Your hands, I commit My spirit.”

“It is finished!”

Spoken consists of seven study guides for personal or group discussion and forty-two devotions to help you realize God’s love for you. *Spoken* will show you who Jesus is, what He did, why He did it, and how you can know you are going to Heaven. It is a book about life and death, even eternal life and eternal death.

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson One

Forgive

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

Ryan Story
Location Pastor - Burton

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34

There are several interesting aspects of being a parent. Eating dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets for lunch becomes socially acceptable. The moment I no longer hear my children playing is the moment I know they are up to no good. Bodily fluids do not seem to be as gross as I once thought. My favorite part of parenting is the amount of advice that parents give to other parents. There seems to be a mantra to make sure you give a heads up to someone who is about to enter a phase you just survived. I never wanted to be the type of person who gives unsolicited advice to someone about how they should take care of their kids, but the best advice I have ever gotten was to purchase a NoseFrida. Parents of small children should heed this advice. That is the greatest invention since indoor plumbing in my mind. If you by chance, know what it is, you know I am right.

Before I entered the parent game, there was some information, facts, and methods on which I did have a good grasp. There was so much that I knew I did not know as a parent, and there have been other things that I did not even know was on the radar as a parent. I am even going to find out more on the journey of parenthood.

If you could travel back in time and give yourself one piece of advice what would it be?

How often do you think you are right? How often do you admit you are wrong?

All this month we will be looking at the seven sayings spoken by Jesus as He was hanging on a cross. These seven sayings that Jesus uttered on the cross should be read, memorized, and applied to our lives. The fact that Jesus was able to bear the physical torment of a crucifixion enough that He could utter coherent sentences shows amazing power and commitment to what He was doing.

The first statement that Jesus said on the cross was, ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”*** (Luke 23:34).

or they

In ten words, Jesus preaches an amazing sermon that is more than capable of leading someone to the redemptive love of God!

Who were the “them” that Jesus is asking the Father to forgive?

How often do you think of yourself roped in with the “them” crowd that Jesus is talking about?

Amazingly, while Jesus hung from the cross, beaten and bleeding, He thought about others. Jesus was still our advocate to God, the Righteous Judge in Heaven, and He cried out to His father, ***“Forgive them.”***

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

How would you react if someone tried to hurt your child? Do you think it was hard for God to watch the beating, mocking, disrespect, and torture of His son?

I saw an amazing quote on social media the other day (I will be honest it was on my wife's Pinterest). It read, "Jesus looks at the cross and then at you. 'You are worth it,' He says." I love that we have a God that loves us so much that He died the worst death imaginable. However, as I study this verse, I run into a major issue. The hardest part of the Luke 23:34 verse is the immediate context of who Jesus was talking about as **"them"** would have been the religious leaders. Those are the ones who would have claimed to "know God," "worship God," and "live for God." Yet, they were the ones who crucified Christ.

Why do you think the Pharisees wanted to crucify Jesus so badly?

How is it possible for someone to claim to know God, and yet reject God?

Isaiah 29:13 says, ***"And the Lord said: 'Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.'"***

What does it look like to honor God with your lips and have your heart far from Him?

How can that produce spiritual blindness?

or they

Recently, my oldest son has begun to want to do everything for himself. His independent phase is starting, and I love it. I love that he wants to learn how to do new things. Constantly I have to remind myself not to get frustrated with him because of his inability to do something. I tell Broly constantly, "I know you are a big boy, but ask for help if you need it."

One night I wanted to do something nice for my boys, so I stopped at a store and bought some chocolate milk. The next day, Broly wanted a cup, so he got a chair, pushed it to the cupboard where we keep his cups, and grabbed his favorite Spider-Man cup. He got down, opened the refrigerator, and pulled out the almost full gallon of milk. Every parent reading this knows where I am going with this story. While Broly was attempting to pour his cup, he lost control of holding the gallon of milk. While pouring it, the entire gallon fell to the ground. I heard the thud and went to check on my son. When my son made eye contact with me, he was terrified. He knew he was in trouble for making a big mess and wasting an entire gallon of milk. Was I frustrated? Yes. Did I give him a stern lecture for making a bad choice by not asking for help? Yes. However, I still looked at my son, despite making a mistake, with love.

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

When someone wrongs you, how do you treat that person?

Why is it so hard to forgive people?

Have you ever assumed the intent of a person? Why do we do that?

While Jesus hung on the cross, His dying request was not to have exact vengeance or to be let off the cross. His request was that His Father forgives those involved in His death.

How do you forgive people?

How can you show that kind of love to someone who has wronged you?

LESSON ONE FORGIVE

I thirst.

Somehow Jesus was able to still look at those beating Him and ask God the Father to forgive them. That kind of love comes only from Jesus. That kind of love should be seen in His followers and His Church.

How can we love like that?

or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON ONE FORGIVE

I thirst.

or they

NEED #1

FORGIVE, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | Growth Pastor

“And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And they cast lots to divide his garments.” Luke 23:34

Ravi Zacharias has said, “One of the most staggering truths of the Scriptures is to understand that we do not earn our way to heaven... works have a place - but as a demonstration of having received God’s forgiveness, not as a badge of merit of having earned it.”

Jesus lived and died with the goal of providing forgiveness for our sins. In Matthew 26:28, while Jesus was giving instructions on the institution of the Lord’s Supper, He said, **“For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** His death was all about the forgiveness of sins.

The topic of God’s forgiveness is so important that it is repeated often in Scripture.

“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.” 1 John 2:12

“Then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’” Hebrews 10:17

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” Isaiah 1:18

"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12

"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25

"For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you." Psalm 86:5

"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." Hebrews 8:12

or they

"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."
Micah 7:18-19

Billy Graham would regularly point out man's need for forgiveness. He said, "Man has two great spiritual needs. One is for forgiveness. The other is for goodness."

God offers us forgiveness. We do not earn or deserve it. It is all about Him, C.S. Lewis made a challenging point when he said, "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."

We are forgiven. We are changed. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."***

KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO

FORGIVE, DEVOTION 2

Shawna Johnson | *Communication Director*

Jesus was hanging on the cross. He was bloody, bruised, and beaten. They spat on and mocked Him. The crowd was chanting for His death, harassing Him incessantly.

It is humbling to take a moment and recognize this reality. This seems like as great a time as ever to give thanks to our Lord, the One who endured this pain for us; the One who took the weight of our sin.

Jesus, while still hanging on the cross, entering His final moments of life on Earth, chooses to forgive the very people shouting for His death. Despite the abuse, spitting, and harassment, Jesus' response to it all was, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"** (Luke 23:34).

This is forgiveness I cannot comprehend. As I sit and try to wrap my head around this concept, all I can think of is how difficult it is for me sometimes to forgive even the pettiest of things. Yet, Jesus forgives them for crucifying Him!

A story that has helped me walk the road of forgiveness is from the live action movie *"Cinderella."* If you do not know the story of Cinderella (first of all, come out from under your rock! Just kidding), it is about a girl whose father dies, and she is made to live with her evil stepmother and cruel stepsisters. As she is out, she meets a gentleman, and they share a brief introduction about their lives. When asked, "How do they treat you?" Cinderella's response was, "They treat me as well as they're able."

This quote has been incredibly powerful in my life. It brought me back to Jesus' response, "***They know not what they do.***" If we live a life of constant forgiveness, putting our ego and pride aside, praying for those who wrong us, and considering the point that they "treat us as well as they're able," our lives could look dramatically different.

Jesus would love nothing more than to have a relationship with each person in the crowd. He sees their sinfulness and yet still shows grace, mercy, and forgiveness toward them. Imagine if we lived that way. We need to choose to live that way. Who do you need to forgive?

Lord, help us love like You. Help us have grace and mercy like You. Help us live for You. Help us forgive like You. Because of Jesus, and in His name only. Amen.

CLUELESS

FORGIVE, DEVOTION 3

Jen Combs | Women's Ministry

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34

I remember a few years ago when I was dealing with forgiveness. I had someone in my life cause hurt in years past that I still harbored some angst against (Ever have that issue?). Reading this verse came alive to me for the very first time, ***“For they know not what they do, for they know not what they do, for they know not what they do.”*** I muttered that verse over and over. Could it be that this person did not even know that they hurt me? Gasp. Was that even possible? This was such a defining moment in my life; there was just no way it could be true. It is like the Lord was telling me, “When are you going to give this up? It is done; they do not even know what they did; it is time to forgive.”

Jesus was hanging on the cross dying the most awful death possible. He was taking on the sin of all mankind. Yet here He was asking His Father to forgive those that crucified Him, mocked Him, derided Him, beat Him, and spit on Him. He was saying they do not even understand what they are doing, but asked the Father to please forgive them. Wow. That is quite a challenge. There is nothing I have or will experience that is even comparable to what Jesus experienced. That does not minimize our pain, but it sure does give me comfort.

Now if I were Jesus, I could probably forgive and be done, but I am not. I am Jen Combs, and I am rather resentful (Things you just have to know about yourself). So, ***“Father forgive them for they know not what they do?”*** God exposed something I could not hide any

longer. I had been rug sweeping, burying, and angry about until I finally exploded (There was not a rug big enough to cover it up!). I decided I was going to go to the person. I talked about it through tears and anger. Sure enough, they had no idea the hurt they caused. The Lord was right after all. The Lord was right again!

Is there a person in your life that you need to forgive? Let me encourage you to do it sooner rather than later. I do not know what forgiveness looks like for you. I think it is different for us all. Sometimes it is daily forgiveness; sometimes you need to talk to the person face to face. Whatever it is, please forgive. If Jesus can forgive the mobs of people that crucified Him, surely we can forgive those that have caused pain in our lives.

or they

MIRACLE MAN

FORGIVE, DEVOTION 4

Gareth Volz | Senior 55+ Director

“And Jesus said, *‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’*” Luke 23:34

For the longest time, this was the hardest statement for me to understand of the seven statements Jesus made on the cross. My first impression was that Jesus was saying “Father forgive them for killing me.” And while I believe that is true, I believe it was so much more than that. As Jesus unjustly suffered hanging on that cross on Mount Calvary between two criminals who deserved this death sentence, I believe He was looking at a crowd of people who lacked an understanding of the God they claimed to love and serve.

As He looked over the crowd, I am sure He reflected back to the previous week when He entered Jerusalem with His disciples, and the crowd welcomed Him by shouting, ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest”*** (Matthew 21:9). Matthew 21:10-11 adds, ***“The whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.’”***

How had they missed it? They had seen or heard that He had:

- Turned water to wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)
- Healed an official's son in Galilee (John 4:43-54)
- Driven out an evil spirit from a man in Capernaum (Luke 4:31-36)
- Healed Peter's mother-in-law who had been sick with a fever (Luke 4:38-39)
- Healed many sick and oppressed one evening (Luke 4:40-41)
- Given His disciples a miraculous catch of fish one morning after

a fruitless night of fishing on Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1-11)

- Cleansed a man from leprosy (Luke 5:12-14)
- Healed a centurion's paralyzed servant in Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10)
- Healed a paralytic who had been let down from the roof by friends at the house where He was (Matthew 9:1-8)
- Healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6)
- Raised a widow's son from the dead in Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
- Calmed the storm on the sea (Luke 8:22-25)
- Cast out demons into a herd of pigs (Luke 8:26-39)
- Healed a woman in a crowd who had an issue of blood (Luke 8:42-48)
- Raised Jairus' daughter back to life (Matthew 9:18, 23-26)
- Given sight to two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31)
- Healed a man who was unable to speak (Matthew 9:32-34)
- Healed an invalid at Bethesda (John 5:1-15)
- Fed 5,000 men plus women and children with just five loaves of bread and two fish (John 6:1-15)
- Walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33)
- Healed many sick as they touched His garment at Gennesaret (Mark 6:53-56)
- Healed a gentile woman's demon-possessed daughter (Mark 7:24-30)
- Healed a deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:31-37)
- Fed 4,000 men plus women and children (Mark 8:1-13)
- Healed a blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)
- Given sight to a man born blind by putting mud on his eyes (John 9:1-12)
- Withdrawn the temple tax from a fish's mouth (Matthew 17:24-27)
- Healed a blind, mute demonic man (Matthew 12:22-23)
- Healed a woman who had been crippled for 18 years (Luke 13:10-17)
- Healed a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

- Cleansed ten lepers on His way to Jerusalem (Luke 17:11-19)
- Raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany (John 11:1-45)
- Restored sight to Bartimaeus in Jericho (Luke 18:35-43)
- Withered a fig tree on the road from Bethany (Mark 11:12-14)
- Healed a servant's ear while He was being arrested (Luke 22:50-51)
- Gave a second miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:4-11)

Jesus could only have done all these miracles if He was Who He claimed to be – the promised Messiah – the Son of God. Yet they had missed it. They were rejecting Him, and He was their only way to God. I believe that He was telling His Father, "I forgive their sins by my death on this Cross."

His death not only paid for their sins, but for your sins and my sins. Have you asked Jesus to forgive your sins and accept Him as your Savior? Rejecting Jesus means eternal separation from God. Do not wait!

Who
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON ONE DEVOTION 4

I thirst.

or they

KNOWING NOT WHAT WE DO

FORGIVE, DEVOTION 5

Max Sinclair | *Young Adults & Guest Services Director*

My biggest pet peeve is “know-it-alls.” I know that is a shocker, from the guy who most people would say is one. I just hate the idea of someone always commenting after something someone else has said just to be the smartest person in the room. It becomes even more fun when you discover that the supposed know-it-all actually does not know anything about the subject at all. When stationed out in Whidbey Island Washington, there was this guy who was just that. He always had a point to prove and always wanted to play the “I am smarter than you because I use big words card.” While debating on a social issue I watched as this guy plummeted out of the sky into smoking wreckage of incoherent nonsense, I felt that I had won. Score one for me. However, did I really win at all?

I had no idea how my argument would shape out. I had no idea what damage I caused our relationship. I had no idea that what I was doing was not helping him to see Jesus.

That is a big problem. We do things and not realize how other people are affected by it. This is a product of our selfish desire. We see something, we want that, and we do not care about who else this will affect. A great biblical example of this is found in 2 Samuel chapter 11. Here we see that King David is now king of all of Israel. One day when he was at home he looked out and saw a woman bathing, not caring that she was married. He then slept with her. Being that is how children are made, it came as a surprise when he found out that she was pregnant. Through trickery and deception, he then had her husband killed so that he and others would not find out about David's sin.

Do you see the humor in this? We do this all the time: we cut people off, we take the last cookie in the office, we get mad that our wife wants a mini-van instead of the totally impractical SUV that we want, all because we are selfish. Now am I the least selfish person? By heaven sakes no, but I see just how truly depraved we are when Jesus shouts from the Cross, ***“Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing”*** (Luke 23:34 CSB). We have no idea what we are doing, but the whole time we pretend. We try to come up with systems, governments, programs, and procedures that give us control.

Once we submit ourselves to Christ, there is no more of us doing what we want. What we do is for Him and His Kingdom. Yes, we do not know what we are doing at that point either, but we have given it to Almighty God, and I think He knows what He is doing.

or they

POSSIBILITIES

FORGIVE, DEVOTION 6

John Hubbard | Worship Leader

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34

In a sermon preached in 1869, Charles Spurgeon spoke on this verse. This verse is incomprehensible in my mind. Jesus is experiencing brutal pain and suffering and is still thinking of those harming Him. In his sermon, “The First Cry from the Cross,” Spurgeon makes several points that hit me hard. First, even in His darkest hour, Jesus never stopped praying. When teaching the disciples to pray, Jesus referred to God as **“Our Father.”** That did not change when He was experiencing extreme hardship. He knew that even when He was facing the worst circumstances, God Almighty was still a loving Father and He addressed Him as so.

Next, when crying out in prayer, Jesus did not pray for Himself. He prayed for others. Not only did He pray for others, but He prayed for those who were brutally murdering Him. It is the most unselfish prayer. He did not pray, “Father, please take me off this cross! Father, take me out of these circumstances!” He prayed and begged God the Father to forgive these people. Jesus loved people. Jesus died for people. Jesus died for all people. He was **“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9 KJV), including those who were crucifying Him.

The Bible tells us to do hard things. One of those hard things the Bible tells us to do is to love our enemies. Jesus said, **“But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you,**

and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 KJV). Another hard thing the Bible tells us to do is to continue praying despite our circumstances, ***"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ, Jesus for you"*** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). I am grateful for our Savior who gave us beautiful examples of how to do some of the hard things the Bible tells us to do. We are only human, loving those who are hurting us and keeping an eternal perspective during hard times can feel impossible. Matthew 19:26 says, ***"But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"*** Next time we find ourselves in difficult circumstances dealing with difficult people, we should pray to our Father (who we know is a good, loving Father), pray for and love our enemies, and ask God to help us with these things that can feel impossible.

or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson Two

Paradise

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

Jayson Combs
Family Pastor

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“Today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43

There is a cartoon movie that came out a few years ago called *“Wreck-it Ralph.”* It is a story about Ralph, a video game character who was a “bad guy,” but who no longer wanted to be a “bad guy.” The show starts with a bunch of famous video game “bad guys” sitting around a circle in a Bad Guy Anonymous Program. I loved this scene because it took me back to my childhood playing the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System for the novice). The meeting ends with all the “bad guys” standing up and saying, “I am bad, and that’s good. I will never be good, and that’s not bad. There is no one I’d rather be than me.”

Do you have a favorite “Good guy, Bad guy” duo from your childhood? Explain.

Luke 23:32-43 says, ***“Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are***

Wor
Son

Father,
know n

under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’”

What does this passage say about the men next to Jesus on the cross?

Who are the bad guys and who are the good guys in this story?

or they

Who did Jesus say would be with Him in paradise? When did He say he would join Him in Paradise?

When you think of paradise, what comes to mind?

Several verses speak of eternal life.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Revelation 21:4-5

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

"I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." Philippians 1:23

"But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.'" 1 Corinthians 2:9

"Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:8

What do each of these verses say about the paradise of eternal life?

Paul adds more insight in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, ***"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And***

the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, why is it that we as followers of Jesus ***"do not grieve like others do who have no hope?"***

or they

Matthew 27:38-44 adds more information about the crucifixion, ***"Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way."***

What other insight does this tell us about the men next to Jesus on the cross?

John MacArthur explains that that word "robbers" in Greek is "lestes," "Which denotes a brigand who plunders as he steals. These men were not petty thieves or even common robbers, but cruel bandits

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

who took pleasure in tormenting, abusing and often killing their victims.”

Who else was mocking Jesus? What did they say?

Many times we put people into “Good Guy, Bad Guy” groups. We can look at the robbers next to Jesus and do the same thing. However, when we study the Bible, we find that both were bad guys. Both were cruel people who ridiculed Jesus. One though, through the amazing grace of Jesus, came to an understanding of who Jesus was, and because of that, he will spend eternity in paradise.

It was not just “criminals” who needed Jesus and who became followers of Jesus. Acts 6:7 says, ***“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”***

What rings so wonderfully true in Acts 6:7? What is happening to some of the priests?

Hebrews 12:28 adds, ***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”***

What does it look like in your daily life to ***“offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe?”***

The cross brings us to a place of knowing that God is the only one who is good. Jesus is the only sacrifice that could pay the penalty required of sin. Today I challenge you to think about the praise that our Savior deserves. May you worship Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. May our lives be an act of worship in everything that we do.

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON TWO PARADISE

I thirst.

or they

It is finished.

GAIN

PARADISE, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | Growth Pastor

Luke chapter 23 records Jesus on the cross. While rulers **“scoffed”** (verse 35), soldiers **“mocked”** (verses 36-37), and a criminal on a cross **“railed at Him”** (verse 39), Jesus saw past the moment. He was not looking for an excuse to zap someone; instead, He was listening for a child to be born. The other criminal took a stand, **“But the other [criminal] rebuked him [the first criminal], saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’”** (Luke 23:40-42). A criminal on his death bed instantly became a child of God. The next verse shows grace, forgiveness, and mercy, **“And he [Jesus] said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’”** In his commentary, John Martin pointed out, “Even in death Jesus had power to make people right with God.” He could, and He did.

At his lowest point, one criminal chose to be bitter. He ignored his own natural consequences due to a life of selfishness and barked out at others. He tried to elevate himself by lowering others. The other criminal saw himself as he truly was and chose God’s saving grace through Jesus.

Fear can stir our emotions. We may strike out at others, hide from life, or face reality and push forward. As one criminal came to grips with his situation, Jesus promised **“paradise.”** It is an interesting word. Jesus did not have to explain that it described a place of beauty and delight.

Nothing else is said about that criminal turned child of God. It is well accepted that he continued to suffer, was disrespected, had his legs broken, and died grasping for another breath. Throughout this struggle, I believe the word ***“paradise”*** echoed in his mind. It became his happy place. It brought peace.

As our brothers and sisters in the Lord pass, we need to focus on ***“paradise.”*** Paul reminds us of the beauty in 2 Corinthians 5:8, ***“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”*** Death for the believer takes them to ***“paradise.”*** This is also felt by Paul in Philippians 1:21, ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”***

or they

CONFESS, BELIEVE, RECEIVE

PARADISE, DEVOTION 2

Isaiah Combs

There has been an argument among the church world through the years. The argument is what happens to someone who has lived a life of opposition to God, and on their death bed, they ask Jesus to be their Savior. Are they saved?

I believe Jesus answers this question pretty clearly on the cross. Jesus did not say much on the cross. He was only recorded saying seven statements during the six hours He was on the cross. The Bible does record a conversation between Jesus and another man, "a thief," on the cross. You could say the other man was on his death bed. He was hours away from dying just like Jesus.

Luke 23:39-43 records the conversation, ***"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'"***

The man proved that he believed in Jesus and confessed with his mouth and believed in his heart that Jesus was Lord. He confessed, believed, and received (Romans 10:9-10).

Jesus in verse 43, confirmed that the man had confessed, believed, and received. ***"Today you will be with me paradise."*** It was not because he lived a good life; it was not because he was baptized. It

was not because he spoke in tongues; it was not anything he did. It was what Jesus did.

This is why I believe whole heartily that someone can give it all to Jesus on their death bed. It is definitely not up to us to decide who gets saved and who does not. It is solely up to God and what goes on in their heart.

or they

THE GOLDEN TICKET

PARADISE, DEVOTION 3

James Clouse

I grew up in a church that practiced that you needed to be a good person to get to Heaven. Salvation was dependent on how many good things you did and how many prayers you said. Before I came to The River Church, I did not know about salvation. The first time I heard about salvation my aunt said she had gotten saved. When my aunt said she got saved, I thought somebody had literally pushed her away from a bus about to hit her. I had no idea what it meant to have a relationship with Christ. Growing up I never read my Bible, prayed much by myself, or did things to serve my Savior. I always thought that I was a good person and even wanted to grow up to be a priest. However, I knew something was not right. The summer before my 6th-grade year, I came to know Christ as my Savior.

Since this time, many people come to ask me what salvation actually means. Do you have to do something to be “saved?” Is there a certain prayer that you need to pray to be saved? The answer is that there is no magic prayer or a golden ticket to get to the paradise that Jesus tells us about.

Luke 23:39-43 says, ***“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him [Jesus], saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’”***

Here we see that a man, a thief on the cross, next to Jesus, understands what he has done. He understands that the man next to him was completely innocent. He also recognized that Jesus was who He said he was, that this man was the Son of God. If you notice carefully, the thief says ***“your kingdom”*** and that he recognizes Jesus as divine.

or they

To know Jesus, we have to recognize the need for Him in our lives. The thief recognized that he needed Jesus to forgive him for the sins that he had committed. He understood that he had done something wrong and recognized the sacrificial act that Jesus was making. If we want to see paradise, there is no magic prayer or golden ticket but rather recognizing that we need Jesus. We can not get into paradise without Him. We have to recognize the sacrificial gift that He offers us. We also need to recognize that we do deserve death, like the thief, but the only way to paradise is Jesus remembering us before His Father.

OUR FREE GIFT

PARADISE, DEVOTION 4

Larry Gabbara | *Financial Bookkeeper*

“And he said to him, *‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’*” Luke 23 :43

Jesus showed the world that all we need to do is ask and accept our free gift of salvation. Even the thief on the cross was given this wonderful gift. He was not saved until the last hours of his life. He did not have an opportunity to be baptized, receive the Lord’s Supper, attended church, or perform any good works. We assume that he did not live a righteous life. He was a criminal, sentenced to death.

Luke 23:42 says, **“And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’”**

Jesus loves us all no matter who we are, or what we have done. We just have to believe in our heart that Jesus is Lord and ask for our sins to be forgiven. Just ask for this free gift. The Lord has an abundance of mercy and grace for us. His love is limitless.

It is natural that while on Earth we all want comfort and assurance about life after death. It is so simple to have eternal life. We do not need to DO anything. We cannot earn it or work for it. Just ask for it. The Lord offers forgiveness to us all through His Son’s death. Jesus paid it all. Salvation is the free gift!

Many denominations teach and believe that our salvation, or the way to Heaven, is through works here on Earth. This is not true! Jesus offers us the free gift by just asking for it. The thief proves it; he realized he was a sinner in need of a Savior and asked Jesus to save him.

God sent His one and only Son to Earth to live a human life, like us. Jesus suffered and died for us. It was the greatest sacrifice of all time. The Father's love is so immense that He sent His Son as a sacrifice to show His love for all mankind.

Romans 6:23 adds, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Just like the thief on the cross, Jesus offers us freedom and the gift of grace just for the asking!

The thief's only responsibility and ours is to receive this amazing gift. We are saved by believing in Jesus and asking for our sins to be forgiven.

John 1:12 says, ***"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."***

Faith is what makes this free gift attainable, and that is what was offered to the thief and to us. It is so amazing; through faith we can be saved from our sins.

The gift of grace saves sinners like you and me. Because of grace, the thief who was on the cross next to Jesus will spend eternity in Heaven! God wants to spend eternity with each and every one of us. He is waiting for us to ask for the gift of salvation.

John 3:16 says, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

THE COMMA

PARADISE, DEVOTION 5

Sierra Combs | *Women's Ministry Director*

English was always one of my favorite subjects in school. I have always enjoyed writing, and while I have lightened up considerably over the years, there was a time when I was a bit of a grammar and punctuation snob. Commas, in particular, are something that I have always been extremely fond of, as they can enrich the structure of the sentence and give room for added color. They really are extremely important. There are a few internet memes that stress this importance. Take for example: "I like cooking, my family, and my pets." Now take out the commas: "I like cooking my family and my pets." This is problematic. Another example: "Let's eat, Grandma!" versus "Let's eat Grandma!" As the internet meme wisely points out, commas save lives!

All joking aside, you might be interested to learn that the scribes who recorded Scripture in its origin did not use punctuation, as is did not exist yet in the Hebrew and Greek that the Bible was originally written. It was not until many centuries later when translators would study the context and meaning of the passages and add punctuation as they saw fit. There are a few places in the Bible that have comma discrepancies. Usually, they really are not that big of a deal and do not theologically alter the meaning of the passage. However, in the book of Luke, we find one passage that has two differing opinions and they revolve around the comma placement. Luke 23:43 tells us the dialogue between Jesus and the thief next to Him as they both awaited their deaths on a cross. This thief believed that Jesus was the Messiah and boldly asked Him to remember him when Jesus entered into His kingdom. Jesus replied, ***"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*** This is likely how you have always

Wor
Son

Father,
know n

read this verse, as every major Bible translation inserts the comma before the word **“today,”** all agreeing that Jesus was telling the thief that he would be in paradise with Him on that very same day.

However, there are many theologians who argue that the comma is misplaced, which changes the entire meaning of the verse. They argue that the verse should read “Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise,” implying that while the thief would indeed one day see Jesus again in Heaven, it would not necessarily be that very day. Instead, he would go to the grave like everyone else, waiting to one day be resurrected upon Jesus’ return, and enter into His Kingdom at that point. It really is quite an interesting debate, one in which I will not get into here. In the end, only one thing matters. Over 2,000 years ago a sinner hung on a cross next to the Savior. Even though he was wretched, even though he was condemned, and even though he was sentenced to death for his sins, he recognized his desperate need for a Savior and realized that this Savior was Jesus.

or they

Here is the best part! Aside from recognizing his need and asking Jesus to remember him, this man did nothing to earn the response Jesus gave him. He did not have to do a bunch of good works, or pray a very specific prayer in a certain way, or have someone come and take him off the cross for a couple of minutes so that he could get baptized. No. All he had to do was recognize that he was a sinner in need of a savior, and call upon the name of Jesus.

Whichever side of the theological fence (or comma!) you land, remember that what really matters is this great promise of the Gospel - for those of us who have called upon Jesus to be our Savior, we will be with Him forever in Paradise!

FEW WORDS

PARADISE, DEVOTION 6

Wes McCullough | *Production Director*

“And he said to him, *‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’*” Luke 23:43

There is a simple and profound concept conveyed in this one verse; your salvation comes from faith in Jesus alone. Sadly, some are taught that one must be baptized and have a long record of good deeds to reach Heaven. Luke 23:43 shows us that even in our final minutes we can receive salvation and be headed for Paradise.

It is good to look at some context surrounding this verse. Jesus is on a cross between two criminals. In these two criminals, we see opposing ways humanity responds to judgment. Some respond with indignation and denial, lashing out with anger, mockery and blaming others. On the contrary, some recognize and admit their guilt and accept that they are rightfully due punishment.

It is interesting that the repentant thief recognized Jesus’ royalty and lack of sin through such minimal interaction. He witnessed the verbal onslaught against Jesus and saw how severely He had been beaten. Jesus responded, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”** (Luke 23:34). At that moment Jesus was focused not on His physical suffering but on fulfilling God’s plan. It was certainly a life-altering revelation for the thief to see the servant King in action.

As someone who is not much of a talker, I find it encouraging that the repentant criminal did not need a wordy and dramatic prayer to receive salvation. He spoke to Jesus the best way he knew how, **“Remember me when you come into your kingdom”** (Luke

23:42). God knew his heart, his repentance, and that he had turned to Jesus for salvation.

Years later, Paul would write to the church in Ephesus, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9). From the repentant thief, we learned that God’s salvation is instant. There is no payment of good deeds required, nor a lengthy life of obedience. Come as you are and be welcomed into the family of God.

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson Three

Son, Mother

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

Noble Baird
Community Center Director

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” John 19:26-27

Often times when I think of someone’s “final words,” I think back to some of my favorite movie quotes: “I’ll be back,” “Luke, I am your father,” “With great power comes great responsibility,” “May the force be with you,” and “I’m going to make him an offer he can’t refuse.” Now, I am sure many of you have heard these fun quotes, and you are thinking to yourself that I am a nerd for quoting Star Wars. That is okay because it is true. I love it!

What is one of your favorite movie, book, or song quotes?

As we continue in our study of Jesus’ final words from the cross, I want to take a deeper look into His discussion with His mother. John records Jesus’ discussion with His mother in John 19:26-27, **“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”** Often times, when I read over this passage of Christ’s crucifixion, I will simply glaze over this interaction. I find myself focusing on His final moment where He breathes His last breath or His interaction with the thieves crucified alongside Him. Yet, throughout His crucifixion, Jesus is continually showing where His priorities are and His concern and love for His people.

Who was the disciple beside Mary?

How does Jesus refer to His mother? Why?

or they

It has always interested me, how Jesus no longer refers to His mother Mary as "mom." Instead, He refers to her as "**woman.**" He is, in a sense, showing how she has completed her earthly duty as His mother and is now preparing her for when He is gone. In the second part of this passage, we see Jesus address John and giving Him one final instruction. He says in verse 27, "**Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.**" What an incredible honor! Jesus is literally in His final moments, and He looks to John for one final task, the care of His mother.

Is there someone who you would entrust your family?

How do you think John felt with the final task with which he was entrusted?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

For me, taking a step back and letting this passage sink in is pretty crazy. Jesus has just been beaten, whipped beyond anything we can fathom, mocked, forced to carry His own cross, nailed to that cross, pierced in His side, and mocked some more. Yet, before He takes His final breath, He makes sure that someone will take care of His mother. As followers of Christ, it is so easy to get caught up in the things of this world, and our focus can easily be turned to look after ourselves. Please know my heart, you are not alone, I am right there with you; guilty as charged. However, throughout His entire life and ministry, even to His final hour on the cross, Christ's focus is others and even us.

When was the last time you reached out and checked on a friend or coworker?

When was the last time that you went out of your way to bless someone?

By definition, "obedience" is being submissive to the command of authority. I honestly wish I could say that I have always understood and adhered to this definition. Yet, as many of my school teachers and especially parents can attest to, that has not always been the case. Still, John's obedience to Jesus is something for which I strive. At the end of verse 27, it reads, **"And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."** John did not hesitate for one second on this final task Jesus was entrusting to him. He truly did as the Master commanded and took Mary in as his mother. He accepted

the responsibility to take care, love, and protect her, just as Jesus had done.

What was a time in your life when you were not obedient to authority?

Is there a time where you have struggled being obedient to a task from the Master?

or they

Is there a task Christ has placed on your heart and you have been avoiding?

As we continue on in this series and continue to take in these final sayings Christ said before He took His final breath, we are left with a choice. You see, John had the option to choose to ignore Jesus' final request. However, He submitted to Jesus' authority in his life and understood the privilege and honor with which he was being entrusted. As followers of Christ, we cannot forget the honor and privilege it is to be His followers. Even in His final moments before His death, Jesus was looking out for and taking care of us. The very least we can do is strive for the same obedience that John had to the Master's request. So, as you continue on in this week and the weeks after this Easter season, will you be obedient to the Master's call on your life?

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON THREE SON, MOTHER

I thirst.

or they

WE ARE FAMILY

SON, MOTHER, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | *Growth Pastor*

I coached a number of varsity sports for the past two and a half decades. I remember when I was coaching girl's varsity soccer. Katie was a very good player but seemed so stressed. Both her brothers were first team all-state stars. They were excellent, and because of them, she put more pressure on herself. We had a good conversation. I reminded her that she was a good player in her own right, that I was not comparing her to her brothers, and that she needed to have fun. The season turned out great.

Following an older sibling can be difficult. You can be discredited or overly pressured because of their track record. Many of you might still fight the battle. Jesus was a firstborn (please remember the doctrine of the Virgin Birth). Scripture tells us that He had brothers and sisters. He must have been a tough act to follow. It is hard to improve on perfection.

The Bible speaks of Jesus having siblings. John 2:12 mentions Jesus' brothers being at the wedding feast where He performed the miracle of water to wine. Luke 8:19-21 (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35) records when His mother and brothers came to visit Him, and He says, ***"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."*** Mark 6:3 (Matthew 13:55) is even more specific by giving names and adding his sisters to the discussion, ***"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.***

Although Jesus had siblings and Mary had other children, John 19:26-27 says, ***"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he***

loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. Mary had other children, but it appears they were not at her side when she needed them most. Early writers convey that Jesus' siblings did not accept Jesus as the Messiah until after His resurrection. They were nowhere to be found as Mary wept at the feet of her eldest child. Therefore, Jesus called on a friend.

Have you heard the phrase, "Brother from another mother?" It means that although two guys are not related, it is as if they are because they have the same Heavenly Father. They have a love for each other and have each other's back. John was Jesus' brother from another mother.

or they

If you do not have family nearby or cannot count on them, remember that in the church you have a family. You have brothers and sisters that God has placed near you to encourage you. They are there for you when you are hurting, and you can be there for them when they have a need. It is the church family.

MARY DID YOU KNOW?

SON, MOTHER, DEVOTION 2

John Rigg | Assistant to the Reach Pastor

One of my favorite songs of all time was written by Buddy Greene and Mark Lowry. The lyrics of this song are centered around this question, "Could Mary, the mother of Jesus, really comprehend who it was that she would give birth?"

Here is the first verse of that song which is titled, "*Mary Did You Know?*"

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?

This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you.

I am not sure how Mary could have fully understood the impact that her little baby boy would have on the world, but His future was not completely hidden from her. Shortly after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary took their firstborn son to be circumcised and to present Him to the Lord. Simeon's prophecy is recorded in Luke 2:34-35, "***And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'***"

Simeon's words became a reality 33 years later when opposition against Jesus developed as He proclaimed that He was the Son

of God and that the only way to the Kingdom of God was by Him. Soon thereafter, Jesus was falsely accused, brought to trial yet found innocent. Nevertheless, He was beaten and scourged, then hung on a cross and left to die. John, the apostle whom Jesus loved, later wrote what he saw that day, ***“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home”*** (John 19:26-27).

or they

At first, the words of Jesus appear to be disrespectful when He calls His mother ***“Woman”*** as He makes provision for her future care through His friend John. No doubt this just added to her sorrow as she recalled Simeon's prophecy of the day when a sword would pierce through her own soul also. But by addressing Mary as “woman” instead of mother, Jesus was letting her know that the Son she once delivered was about to deliver her and become her Savior!

Like Mary, the death of Jesus should pierce through our own souls as we come to terms with the fact that He hung on the cross that day in our place.

Did Mary know that her baby boy came to make her new?

I am not sure.

However, I know He came to make it possible for you and me to be new.

WE NEED EACH OTHER

SON, MOTHER, DEVOTION 3

Kenny Hovis | *Prison Ministry Director*

I grew up being a middle child, and for most of my childhood, the only boy. I do have a brother that is 17 years younger than me. So, being surrounded by so many women (I have four sisters), I spent much of my time growing up on a farm doing things by myself. Between self-entertainment and chores, I became self-reliant in most aspects of my life. To this day it is difficult for me to ask for help. I know this is a fault.

I believe that many times in our Christian walk, we become jaded by people's lack of desire to help others personally, or help in serving in a ministry. Therefore, we just soldier on by ourselves, not asking for help, trying to make miracles happen. I have heard many times the statistic that 90% of serving in the church is done by 10% of the body. It is no wonder sometimes we are ineffective in ministry if this is true! It is like trying to do a job or accomplish a goal with only 10% of your body parts. It would be definitely more challenging.

We see a picture of this at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus is about to die for all of mankind's sin. He sees His mother and the Apostle John are struggling to understand the ramifications of all that is happening before their eyes. I believe He sees in order for them to go forward from this event, they were going to need each other. In John 19:26-27, we see Him address the issue, ***"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."*** Jesus did not expect his mother or one of His best friends to "soldier" on alone. He has given

or they

us one another. We are to support each other, serve one another, pray for one another, and give to one another. Romans 12:10-18 adds, ***“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”*** We are meant to be there for one another. In this passage, we see the words “one another,” “those,” and “all.” They are words that are inclusive of all the body of Christ. We are not meant to go it alone.

God has taught me many times over that when I do things by myself, without those He has placed in my life to be a blessing, I tend to lean towards self-pity and pride. I want neither of these attributes in my life. My prayer is that I learn to use people in my life, with their different giftings, to work together to achieve the task that God has set before us. We can reach the world with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To accomplish this, we will definitely “need each other!”

NOT ALONE

SON, MOTHER, DEVOTION 4

Donna Fox | Assistant to the Growth Pastor

Imagine if you will, Mary, the mother of Jesus, kneeling at the foot of the cross as Jesus is dying. She must have been heartbroken. She had friends nearby, but as she watched her son being crucified, and His painful, agonizing death, she must have wondered, "What will happen to me after He is gone?"

Joseph, Mary's husband, is presumed to be dead. We do not know for sure, but he is never mentioned throughout Jesus' three years of ministry, so likely he died before that time. Mary's other sons did not believe in Jesus (John 7:5) and were not there. So as Jesus hangs on the cross, He sees His mother. Nearby He sees John, **"One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved"** (John 13:23). Where were the other apostles? Scripture tells us they all **"left him and fled"** (Matthew 26:56 and Mark 14:50).

As Jesus hung there, some of His last words are recorded in John 19:26-27, **"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."** In the first statement, **"Woman, behold your son,"** He is speaking to His mother, Mary. He is telling Mary, this man (John) is now your son and will be responsible for you after my death. In the second, **"Behold, your mother,"** Jesus is speaking to John, telling him that now this woman is your mother, treat her accordingly.

There was a large crowd there that day, most in favor of the crucifixion of Jesus. The crowd was cheering Jesus' death. Only a handful were

followers of Jesus and were in disbelief of what was happening. Obviously, Mary and John were close enough to Jesus to hear Him speak, close enough for Jesus to look down and see them amongst the crowd. In Jesus' last moments, His mind was on His mother and her care after His death. It was such an unselfish act!

These words would comfort Mary by letting her know she would not be alone. John would take her in as his own mother, and he would honor and respect her until her death.

These words would be a blessing to John. For Jesus to hand over the care of His mother to John would have been a great honor. John gladly obliged and cared for her as we see in Acts 1:14, ***"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus."***

or they

I could not even imagine what it must have been like for Mary to watch her son be crucified, but to know that John would be there for her and treat her as his mother must have eased the pain somewhat on that day. Jesus was gone, but she knew she would see Him again when she died! She was always by His side and believed in Him. A mother's love is never-ending!

THE FACE OF CHRIST

SON, MOTHER, DEVOTION 5

Holly Boston | Women's Ministry Director

On a number of occasions, I have been faced with the question, "What if you are the only face of Christ they ever see?" This is a sobering question. It should provoke us to examine how well we are representing Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 we read that if you know Christ as your personal Savior, you are called to be His ambassador or representative. It further states that through us, God makes an appeal to the lost. It can sound very scary! In a nutshell, we are to draw others to Christ by the way we live.

Jesus made seven statements from the cross just before He died. There is one statement that I believe reflects the core of Christ's heart and the key to representing Him well.

John 19: 26-27 says, ***"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."***

Jesus, the Son of God, had been tried and found guilty of blasphemy. Even though He was an innocent man, He was abandoned by all, beaten, publicly humiliated, and sentenced to death. Not only was He physically and emotionally suffering to the point of death, but He was spiritually broken. With the weight of the sin of the world upon Him, He experienced separation from His Heavenly Father for the first time. With all that He was going through, He looked down at Mary and said, ***"Woman behold your son!"*** Incredible! Jesus is moments from death, and He saw His mother's need. Think back to the most

painful time in your life. What was your response? I am ashamed to say that I have responded to much less with paralyzing anxiety. I have been known to doubt God's goodness, His perfect plan, and His love. Suffice it to say, other people's needs were not even on my radar. Regardless of the circumstances, Jesus was focused on His mission: to serve (Matthew 20:28) and to save (1 Timothy 1:15).

or they

Do you see the needs of those around you? Are you too concerned with the busyness or struggles of this world to notice? Christian, if this is you, you need an eternal perspective. Colossians 3:2 says, **"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."** Jesus was selfless, and people were His priority. God's Word outlines the practice of freeing us from our struggles, **"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"** (Philippians 4:6-7). In summary, change your focus, see the need.

The second part of Jesus' statement is to John: **"Behold, your mother."** Jesus saw the need, and He met the need. We not only should see the need of others but we should help meet their need. Have you ever listened to someone share a need or a problem and carelessly responded with; "I'll pray for you" with little or no intentions of doing so? Pray on the spot! While you are lifting up their situation in prayer, ask God to show you how you can help. Praying is the most powerful thing we can do for someone, but maybe you are intended to be the answer to the prayer. God will equip you for the work He calls you to (Ephesians 4:12). Romans 12:1 urges us to **"present your bodies as a living sacrifice."** In essence, give each day to God. Ask Him to use you for His glory. He will give you eyes to see and the heart to help. If the struggles of this life have consumed

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

your attention, give it to God. When the going gets tough, the tough get serving! Tremendous joy and peace come from selfless living.

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON THREE DEVOTION 5

I thirst.

or they

HE PROVIDES

SON, MOTHER, DEVOTION 6

Jill Osmon | Assistant to the Elder Team

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” John 19:26-27

Imagine Mary’s grief during this time. I am sure it was all consuming, nothing else mattered at that moment. It was probably her lowest point, unable to think about anything else. She was not thinking about what Jesus’ death would practically mean for her. We assume Joseph had passed away, and in that culture, her son was responsible for her care when the husband was gone. It is interesting that during His death, Jesus remembered her, loved her, and took care of her. He had the weight of the world’s sin on His shoulders, and yet, He took time to care for the woman who carried Him, raised Him, and loved Him.

I could definitely use this time to talk about taking care of your mother (which you should!), but I want to look at what this reveals about the character of God. In *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, he says, “Sometimes, when God removes one comfort from us, he raises up another for us, perhaps where we looked not for it.”

The Lord provided for Mary. His care for her on Earth was being taken away, but He was providing her a son that would take care of her. God provides, even if it looks different than we thought and even with unique timing. He shows us throughout the Bible that He provides. Philippians 4:19 says, **“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”**

Psalm 84:11 adds, ***“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.”*** Please remember that while God may take things away, He always provides in other ways. We need to be ready for it, trust that it will come, and accept it when we see it.

or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson Four

Forsaken

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

James Mann
Children's Director

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Matthew 27:46

Growing up, I have spent my fair share of time in the garden. I have been involved with responsibilities from cleaning up, to planting, and everything in between. Something that did not make sense to me when I was young was the idea of fertilizer. As you may know, you use fertilizer to help the plants grow faster, but once the flowers grow, you rip them out of the ground and throw them either to the side or into a garbage bag. This would always make me mad because we spent so much time making this area so beautiful, and then we throw away the product of our work. The issue that I did not realize at this age was the flowers that we were throwing away was every child’s favorite weed, the dandelion.

What things did not make sense to you at a young age, but became clearer over time?

This idea of things seeming one way and not becoming clear until a later time is very prevalent in today’s verse. When reading this verse, there are two main ways that we can view what is happening. Today we are going to go down both of these avenues.

1. The Literal Context

When we first read through that verse, we see Jesus on the cross in pain. Anyone looking at this story that is unfolding would not question Jesus for His pain and frustration that He is portraying in this verse. It is easy to look at the times in our lives like this and focus on the hard times that go along with this pain and suffering.

What struggles have you had where you have felt helpless?

I cannot help but read this and feel a sense of abandonment going on in Jesus' heart. Throughout His ministry, He has had people by His side. We have all been in a point in life where we are sitting in a house all alone and just feel loneliness truly kick in and drain us. Here Jesus had left His throne in Heaven, came to Earth in the form of man, and was now abandoned and left to die.

However, we know, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you"*** (Hebrews 13:5b).

or they

What is the importance of this verse in your life?

We are so blessed to have a God, that even when we feel alone and abandoned, He is still there with us. He proves this in Matthew 27:51-53, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many."***

At what times in your life has God shown Himself to you?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

We should view this as a blessing, that we have a God who cares about us so much, that whenever we feel alone, we can take comfort in the thought that He is here.

2. The Prophetic View

The problem with the first view is that many people can view Jesus as questioning God. This is a trap where many of us fail. When I was seventeen, I broke my back and was supposed to be paralyzed. My immediate thoughts were to question God and even be angry at Him.

What times in your life have you questioned God?

The question that comes to many people's minds is, "If Jesus is truly one of the persons within the Godhead, why would He be questioning Him?" The first thing we must understand is that Jesus and God see a bigger picture than we do. Sometimes things are not clear to us at first, and then they become clearer as time passes.

Can you think of a time that you did not see God's plan in a situation until later?

Something interesting about Jesus in the Bible is that we see Him fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament in the New Testament. This is something that is very helpful in proving His status as the deity and the true Messiah.

Outside of the verses we are discussing today, can you think of any examples of this in the Bible?

In order to understand further what is going on here, let us take a look at the beginning of Psalm chapter 22.

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Psalm 22:1a

or they

On the cross, Jesus quoted this passage from the Old Testament. This is something that is very interesting that Jesus does throughout His time with mankind. Usually, there is some sign that He is trying to portray. The significance in this is what the rest of this Psalm contains. If we continue to read through this Psalm, we see correlations between what Jesus is going through here on the cross.

“For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet.” Psalm 22:16

Knowing that this Psalm was written before Jesus' birth, what stands out about this verse?

This Psalm is believed to be written 1000 years before the birth of Christ. The reason this fact is important is that crucifixion was not even invented by the Persians until 400 BC. We have David describing the crucifixion of Jesus before crucifixion was even being used.

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Read Psalm 22:18, ***“They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”*** What stands out to you about this verse?

What Jesus is doing here is showing the people that He has come to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. We are extremely fortunate to have a Messiah that has come and fulfilled not some, but all of the prophecies. It is situations like this, where Jesus solidifies Himself as the one and true Messiah. Based on the book of Matthew, these were the last words spoken by Jesus before His passing.

What do you think is the significance of this being Christ's last words?

Jesus knew the plan all along. While sometimes in our lives, we may feel deserted, we need to remember that God always has a plan for us.

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON FOUR FORSAKEN

I thirst.

or they

DO NOT GAMBLE

FORSAKEN, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | Growth Pastor

While Jesus was on the cross, He said one of the most misinterpreted phrases of all time. Matthew 27:46 records, ***“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”*** I have heard and read many faulty theories. Jesus was not confused. He was not questioning His choice to go to the cross. He intentionally carried the sin of the world knowing God would not be able to look upon Him. He left Heaven for this day. It was even prophesied.

Jesus was taking His present audience and even us back 1,000 years to a writing by David. To get the attention of a specific group, He chose to say the phrase in Aramaic. Luke interprets it for his readers. Jesus gives the opening words to a song every adult Hebrew male had memorized. He took them to Psalm chapter 22.

The song starts, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** As a seasoned Rabbi, he started the poetical section expecting his pupils to continue through the piece they had studied. The chapter goes on to mention that the Messiah was ***“despised by the people”*** (verse 6), they ***“mock”*** Him (verse 7), He is surrounded by enemies (verses 12-13, 16), His ***“bones are out of joint”*** (verse 14), He is thirsty (verse 15), they ***“pierced”*** His hands and feet (verse 16), and for His ***“clothing they cast lots”*** (verse 18). The crucifixion is clearly described and predicted in Psalm chapter 22.

Verse 18 makes me laugh as I picture the whole scene, ***“They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast***

lots." I imagine the Jews, both who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah and those who rejoiced in His abuse, humming out loud or in the mind all the lyrics recorded in this song. Jesus started it, and they caught His lead. I picture everyone who understands Aramaic looking at the guards as they are casting lots. I believe it is the first time Satan ever said, "Do not gamble." I picture him screaming for them to tear the clothing in half, burn it, steal it and run, or even for them to be kind and give the clothes to the needy. He could not change God's Word or plan. A millennium earlier, it was recorded, and no one could do a thing about it.

Jesus chose the cross. He knew what that meant and even took time to teach another lesson. He was the ultimate object lesson.

or they

Jesus loves you. He lived for you and died for you. His plan was not and could not be thwarted. He has a plan for your life. Listen to Him and step out in faith and confidence.

THE WEIGHT OF SIN

FORSAKEN, DEVOTION 2

Richie Henson | *Production Director*

Often times, when writing about or discussing the Bible, there are clear and obvious parallels that help us relate. For instance, in Romans chapter 7, when Paul discusses his struggle to do what he knows is right, we get exactly what he means. We have all lived this experience. It is truly shared by all believers who seek after Jesus. However, there are other passages of Scripture that feel substantial to the point of excluding themselves from our personal experience. I believe Matthew 27:46 to be such a one.

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

What an excruciating moment. How deeply painful to think of our Savior taking on the full weight and consequence of our sin. A weight was so heavy that Jesus, for the first time in all of eternity, feels the separation of intimacy with the Father that is the ultimate consequence of sin. What unbearable pain Jesus took on Himself that He might save wretched people like us.

I do not think I will ever understand how awful this was for Jesus. I do not think I will ever be able to express in words how horrible the death of Jesus was. That being said, I am forever grateful that Jesus would take my place. I am so full of joy that Jesus would sacrifice His own intimacy with the Father that I might have intimacy through His blood.

Reading this passage reminds me of how powerful the Gospel really is. Jesus gave up everything to save us. Jesus willingly laid

...into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON FOUR DEVOTION 2

I thirst.

down all He cared about to bring us out of death and into life. As we ponder this glorious truth, may we all express the joy of the Gospel to each other and everyone we know so that the name of Jesus will continually be exalted.

or they

ABANDONED

FORSAKEN, DEVOTION 3

Pat Rowland | *Locations & Development Pastor*

A person's final words in life are always remembered by those closest because they reveal a person's character, purpose, and values. As we look at the fourth saying of Jesus on the Cross, we come to Matthew 27:46, which reveals the agony Jesus suffered physically and spiritually.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

"Forsaken," or as translated in other versions of Scripture, ***"abandoned,"*** are far from the characteristics we would associate with God the Father. Yet, Jesus expresses the hopeless feeling of abandonment that comes with the bearing of all mankind's sin. Our sin divides, bringing separation between God who is without sin and us, the sinner. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23), and so we know what it means to be separated from God.

The significance of this moment is that Jesus was without sin, but He chose to take our sin. ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"*** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus knew that this was His purpose and this was intended from the beginning. There was only one possible solution for a man to be reconciled with God, and Jesus fully understood this moment would be forthcoming. Matthew records Jesus' prayer just prior to his arrest, ***"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will"*** (Matthew 26:39).

No one chooses a punishment for a crime in which they did not perform, but that is exactly what Jesus did. The physical agony of the crucifixion did not compare to the spiritual agony Jesus suffered when our sin separated Him from the Father. He cried out, **"MY GOD, MY GOD..."** It is a cry of desperation, loneliness, and hopelessness that is only remedied with His own death. Jesus experienced what we do not have to ever experience again because of the grace afforded us on the cross.

or they

PAY IT FORWARD

FORSAKEN, DEVOTION 4

Pat Bedell

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Matthew 27:46

We have all been there. Some more than others, but we have all felt the excruciating pain. I am not talking about physical pain, but emotional and spiritual pain. It could be losing a loved one by death or abandonment, or just spiraling into a state of constant, unrelenting temptation and sin. We have all been brought to our rock bottom and fallen before God screaming, “Why?” We have felt ashamed, guilty, scared, and all alone with no one or where to turn. Jesus had a plan in place long before we ever felt this way, and in the end, it works out in our favor.

When I was a young boy, I remember exploring in the woods behind my house. I thought I knew our property well enough to navigate myself through all of the trails. Somehow or another, I found myself lost. I did not have a cell phone or a clue which way was home or which way to the closest trail. All I had was my voice when I could find a deep breath in between crying. I prayed to God quickly, and I asked if He was so powerful, why would He not let my parents find me? Why would He let me get lost?

I now know that God puts us in these situations and lets us experience raw emotions. It helps us learn lessons to become better Christians.

Obviously, Jesus had a little bit of a different situation. Jesus came to this Earth as part of the flesh and experienced first hand the struggles of our life. The temptations, ill thoughts, anger, and frustration were

among some of the provoking events. When Jesus was rebuked and beaten, He knew what He was doing. He was about to give the ultimate sacrifice for humankind and save our souls for eternity. He took all of our sins. It covered the past, present, and future for all mankind to secure their place in Heaven if they would believe He did so. At that very moment, when He took on the sin of the world, Jesus was forsaken by God, and Jesus gave us a gift we never deserved. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV), ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** Jesus became sin for us. He became sin. He took on our sin. He was cursed, abandoned, and forsaken, all to save us from our sin.

or they

As much as this story warms my heart, I know that Jesus did something that was unimaginably awful. To think of the sheer mass of the amount of sin that He had to bear. He did it for us and our salvation. However, with that sacrifice, He also made the commitment never to leave us in our struggles. Hebrews 13:5 (NIV) reminds us, ***"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."***

This is our victory in and through Christ. Jesus took our place. He was forsaken, so we do not have to be. He was separated from God, so we do not have to be. He took our sins away so we could have eternal life with Him. It is so important that you recognize that you are never alone in the battle. People take on their battles every day. Everyone has their vice and if we could all just rely on God to help us with these daily battles, I believe that the forsakenness we feel would fade and we would learn to know that God is in control and that when we recognize our inequities, we would learn that He taught us something in His name. Then we can turn around and help someone with the same struggles and tell them they are not alone. God is in control, and He will never forsake you in your desperate time of need.

SILENCE NOT ABSENCE

FORSAKEN, DEVOTION 5

Debbie Kerr | Office Administrator

Have you ever felt like God was distant or even silent? If you answered yes, you are not alone. There are certain seasons when I feel God is so near in my spirit and also in tangible ways through His children. There have also been times when I have felt forsaken or alone, but God seemed far away. My faith has been tested at those times, but I rely 100% on the promise, ***"I will never leave you or forsake you"*** (Hebrews 13:5).

The word forsaken means to renounce, entirely turn away, deserted, or abandoned. Some of the last words Jesus spoke while hanging on the cross for our sins are included in Matthew 27:46, ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** So we ask the question, did God forsake Jesus on the cross?

The Bible teaches that Jesus was 100% God and 100% man, while He was on the Earth. His cry to God was a human response to this kind of torture. He was not asking the question to know the answer or because He did not understand. He willingly went to the cross. John 10:17-18 says, ***"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."***

Did God answer Jesus' question? It was rhetorical; He knew the answer! Through the account in Scripture, He appeared to be silent. God is always near and always listening even when we do not seem to get an answer. In those difficult times, it is important to rely on His

Word, believing He will provide everything we need. Silence does not mean absence!

Psalm 34:18 says, ***“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”***

We need to trust God’s plan whether we understand it or not. Everything we go through has a purpose, for our good and His glory. Romans 8:28 says, ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”***

or they

Paul adds in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, ***“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”***

Jesus can relate to our pain and sufferings. Hebrews 4:15 says, ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”***

Hebrews 12:2 adds, ***“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

You have a God who understands and is concerned about you. You are not going through this life alone. Trust His plan and know His heart.

MY GOD

FORSAKEN, DEVOTION 6

Michael Fox | *Creative Director*

I do not know about you, but I often need to be reminded of what God has done for me. I lose sight sometimes; I need perspective. The best way to gain that perspective back is to read God's Word - and remember how great He is!

Sin separated me from God. I needed a savior. He loves me. Lamentations 3:22-23 says, ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*** These simple promises are a great reminder. Remember what Jesus did for us at the cross: He took our sins, died for us, and then conquered the grave!

I like studying things that I have heard many times and learning something new. It continually shows me how real God is. Looking at the cross, I learned something new this week. John Gill, in his *Exposition of the Bible*, talks about a point that I have never thought about before. Matthew 27:46 says, ***"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"***

Jesus cries out ***"My God, my God."*** We know that Jesus was both God and man, which is something that is very tough to wrap our minds around. Here though, John Gill is suggesting that Jesus is showing His "human side," calling to "His God."

He also cries out, ***"Why have you forsaken me?"*** I looked up the word forsaken, and it means to "leave behind" or "abandon." All sin was put on Jesus at that time. I believe this phrase helps show us the

Wor
Son

Father,
know n

realness of what was happening at that moment. He felt abandoned by His Father and God because of what He was going through. However, that is not the end. Jesus conquered the grave and fulfilled what God said He would do, and now provides us eternal life. That reminder is what I needed today!

or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson Five

Thirst

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

Chuck Lindsey
Reach Pastor

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” John 19:28-30 (NKJV)

Hanging there, on that cross, between Heaven and Earth, between God and man, the mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), the substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21), the sacrifice (1 John 2:2), and the Servant of God (Isiah 52:13-15) is nearing the end of His journey. He was nearing the end of His passion, His great trial, and the dredges of that cup (Matthew 26:39). Soon it would be finished (verse 30). Soon, He would have His victory over sin, death, and Hell (Philippians 2:9). Just a few moments from this point and our King will exchange that old rugged cross for the honored seat at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33).

What do the titles mediator, substitute, sacrifice, and Servant of God mean to you?

What other titles for Jesus come to your mind?

First, Jesus is in need. Let that sink in for a moment. The God who created all things, in whom all things hold together and consist, is in need. He has never been in need. He has never needed anything

until He descended so low until He came as one of us. Only then do we read of Him having need. We read of Him being weary, tired, or hungry. Here, in the final moments of His suffering, He has an urgent need. It is a very basic need. He is simply "thirsty." I do not know about you, but I have often felt so helpless when someone is going through suffering. I feel helpless for the brother or sister with cancer, the person who has just lost their father. I so desperately want to help, and so I find myself offering to do any practical thing I can to help lighten their load. I may ask, "If we can bring you a meal or if we can watch your kids, please let us know." Who among us, would not run at the chance to give to our Lord Jesus, the One whom we love, something to drink in this final moment? It would be an honor just to lift His burden in some slight way. I am thrilled just to think I could do anything to help Him who was helping us. I want to serve the One who is serving me.

or they

When was a time you felt helpless helping someone in their time of need?

What thoughts come to mind when you think of the concept that Jesus was "in need?"

While it is common for people near death to feel intense thirst, Jesus' words here are the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. In Psalm 69:21, written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, we read this of the suffering Messiah, "***And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink***" (NKJV). This is exactly what happened here. When you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

consider that, realize He had no control over what was brought up that hill that day. He had no control over what could be given to Him to drink. You realize that this is just another proof of the deity of our Lord Jesus and the reliability of the Word of God.

Can you think of any other prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus?

There are so many lessons we could learn from Jesus' last words, but I think that our Lord's thirst tells us something we cannot miss. How can He be thirsty when He is the One who satisfies the thirst of man? Was it not He Himself who said to the woman by the well, ***"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life"*** (John 4:13-14 NKJV)?

Yet, here He is thirsty. What does this say to us? It speaks powerfully of our Lord as our substitute. He is the One who took our place. I deserved to hang there. I deserved to suffer. I deserved to die. However, He took my place. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, ***"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*** This means that Jesus, though He had never sinned, became a sinner by taking my sin upon Himself. He who had never been condemned and did not deserve to be condemned, hung there, condemned by God for me. He was being judged in my place instead of me. So, as my substitute, He was thirsty, and all of Heaven gasped at the sight.

What would be your thoughts if you were at the cross and heard Jesus say this?

Can you see Him there? Has God given you a fresh view of our Lord hanging there, between Heaven and Earth, between God and man in great suffering and in thirst? It was for you. It was in your place. He suffered so that you do not have to. He was condemned so that you will not be.

When did you realize God did all of this for you?

or they

He was thirsty so that you could be forever satisfied in Him. Can you hear the words from His parched lips? It will change you to hear them. I pray even now, that as you do, that your heart is filling with thankfulness to Him who ***“loved me [us] and gave Himself for me [us]”*** (Galatians 2:20 NKJV).

What should we do today because of what Jesus did for us?

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“Love was compressed for all history
in that lonely figure on the cross,
who said that he could call down angels
at any moment on a rescue mission,
but chose not to – because of us.

At Calvary, God accepted his
own unbreakable terms of justice.”

Philip Yancey

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON FIVE THIRST

I thirst.

or they

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

THIRST, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | *Growth Pastor*

Fox Broadcasting Company showcased a new show in 2019, “*The Masked Singer*.” On the show, celebrities competed against one another by singing while wearing an elaborate costume. They were fully covered, and their voice was altered to hide their identity. At every performance, they revealed a secret about their identity. Four celebrity judges tried to guess the performer’s identity.

A man dressed as a peacock was one of the performers. He was wearing a cape and waved it across his body. It appeared to be solid black, but the underside was full of color. All four judges immediately focused on the rainbow and assumed the performer was part of the GLBTQ community. Their preconceived notions could only let them consider this option. I immediately said to my wife, “It is the coat of many colors. It is Donny Osmond.” About ten years ago, I took my wife to see Donny Osmond perform “*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*” in Detroit. They gave another clue about a wig he wore while in prison. Donny may not have been in an actual prison, but Joseph was. One judge was thinking it was Donny Osmond but dismissed her guess as he was not part of that community and not believed to have been in prison.

Sometimes we get so locked into our natural thinking that we miss the obvious. John 19:28 says, “***After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’***” There are two valuable points to gather from the phrase, “***I thirst.***”

The first one is prophecy. Psalm 69:21 informs, “***They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to***

drink.” One thousand years before Jesus, this moment on the cross was proclaimed. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy.

The second point is very basic. We can become so focused on Jesus’ loving sacrifice for us that we forget He was human. Jesus was 100% God, and He was 100% man. He could forgive sin and still be thirsty. Right when we are so focused that Jesus is God, we are reminded that He was also a man.

This month as we visualize Jesus as God on the cross, we also need to remember Hebrews 4:15, ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”***

or they

UNQUENCHABLE THIRST

THIRST, DEVOTION 2

Roger Allen | *Recovery Director*

I have been part of the Passion Play at The River Church for the last thirteen years. As a disciple, I am present at the scene depicting the crucifixion. I am one of the disciples who removes Jesus from the cross. With blood covering my hands and clothes, it is a stark and vivid portrayal of what happened to our Lord that day. From the flogging to the judgment of Pilate and the Sanhedrin, and finally at the cross, we see the broken body of our Savior. It is the purview of what He has done for you and me. His body was broken, and His blood was poured out for all. In the abuse He received, we see His sacrifice as the atonement for our sins. His humanity is on display for all to see. He was the perfect sacrifice.

In John 19:28, we read His fifth and shortest statement from the cross, Jesus states ***"I Thirst."*** He was showing that He was fully human. He was capable of feeling the pains of torture, death, sorrow, and sadness. This is one of the places where our Savior fulfills Scripture. Psalm 69:21 says, ***"They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."***

On the surface, we see the crucifixion as a physical substitutionary atonement for our sins. Yet, in the fury of God's wrath poured out over His son, we will find the full reason behind His thirst. It was an unquenchable thirst. It was one in which a mere drink would not suffice, no matter what the liquid was. His throat would remain parched and unsatisfied. Prior to taking on the sins of humanity, He had the perfect relationship with the Father, but because of that sin, His Father could no longer look on Him. Now abandoned and all alone, He thirsted to commune with God the Father. We need only to

look at the previous statement on the cross to see His true suffering. Matthew 27:46 says, ***“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”***

or they

Now, try and imagine the true depth of what Jesus did that day. He took our sins and cast them as far as the East is from the West. It is where our dry bones are brought to life because of His atonement. He died so we could have everlasting life. He did it so that we may not have to experience the thirst that the rich man did in Luke 16:19-31. It is where he asked in verse 24, ***“Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.”*** The weight of what Jesus did that day finds no true understanding in our finite minds. We are incapable of the magnitude of thought or depth that is required to understand. Yet, Jesus tells us in John 4:14, ***“But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”***

He has offered Himself as a drink offering to satisfy our thirst for a relationship with God. Knowing we could not manage the breach which was brought on by the fall, He took the penalty for our sin unto death.

His sympathetic thirst for humanity is beyond our understanding. The love He has for us shows through all He did on the cross. Whatever trials we may endure, we can be assured that He is with us until the end. As long as there is suffering in this world, our Lord will thirst. He thirsts for the lost, who suffer the pain of separation from the Father, and for those who suffer from emotional and physical pain. Others, through their own folly, who have brought pain to themselves and others, He brings forgiveness. We know from Scripture that Jesus

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

will thirst. He came here in order to fulfill the will of the Father and in doing so, brought us mercy.

Hebrews 2:17 adds, ***“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”***

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON FIVE DEVOTION 2

I thirst.

or they

It is finished.

GOD-MAN

THIRST, DEVOTION 3

Gareth Volz | Senior 55+ Director

In John 19:28 we read these words, ***“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’”***

The first two words of this verse indicate something that happened previously to Jesus saying this on the cross. What happened?

- Jesus had been betrayed by one of His disciples – Judas Iscariot.
- Jesus was taken by a band of the temple guard and officers of the Pharisees and brought before the High Priest for intense questioning.
- Jesus was then taken to Governor Pilate’s palace, where they demanded Jesus should be killed.
- Finding no fault in Jesus, but wanting to please the Jews, Pilate had Jesus beaten by Roman soldiers and then sought to release Him.
- The Jews demanded that Jesus be put to death, threatening to send word to Rome that Pilate was no friend of Caesar’s since Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews.
- Pilate then had the Roman soldiers beat Jesus again, put a thorn of crowns on His head, and had Jesus carry His cross through the streets and up to Mount Calvary, the place where He would be crucified.
- Jesus then hung on the cross (crucifixion was the most hideous and torturous form of execution) from 9am to 3pm.

Jesus was not only the Son of God, but He was also the Son of Man. John 1:1-4 says of Jesus ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”*** This clearly states that

Wor
Son

Father,
know n

Jesus was truly God. John goes on to say in verse 14, ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** This clearly states that Jesus was truly a man. Jesus was truly the God-Man, and as both, He suffered greatly and thirsted.

As the Son of Man, Jesus had completed a hard task, suffered greatly while doing it, and in need of refreshment. As the Son of God, taking on the sin of the world had caused the Father to turn away from Him until He completed His task, and He thirsted for that relationship to be renewed.

or they

There are a couple of great lessons for us as Jesus thirsted on the cross. Jesus never gave up on completing the assignment His Father had given Him of paying for the sins of the world so that man could have a renewed relationship with Him forever. We need to remember this when God gives us assignments in this world – do not give when things are difficult. If God called you to do something, He would equip you to do it. Do not give up; stay the course until you complete what God wants you to do.

Jesus also had a great thirst for the relationship He had with His Father. We need to have a great thirst for God. We need to long for His presence and desire to be with Him on a daily basis. We need daily to have conversations with Him. When we read His Word, He speaks to us. When we pray, we speak to Him.

The fact that Jesus thirsted is not a sign of weakness. He did what His Father wanted and now desired refreshment. He is the source of life, and He was pouring out His life on the cross for us. We need to do what God desires of us and seek refreshment from Him.

HE RELATES

THIRST, DEVOTION 4

Ben Kirkman | Associate Operations Pastor & Facilities Director

Try to visualize the scene: Jesus, the perfect, sinless Lamb of God, hung on a cross between two criminals. He had just been mocked, beaten, whipped, spat upon, had a crown of thorns smashed into His head, and nails were driven through His hands and feet. He hung on the cross struggling just to breathe - bloody, cursed, and rejected. The crowd around Him hated Him and wanted Him to die. You could hear the people still shouting and murmuring curses and accusations against Him. Nearing the end of His suffering, Jesus spoke. He said, ***"I thirst."*** It was a simple, seemingly unremarkable and very human request for relief. How did the soldiers respond to the Lord of all creation? They lifted up a sponge on a stick, and the sponge is soaked not in cool water to satisfy but in sour wine that must have stung His parched mouth and turned His stomach. It was cruel for sure, but more had happened than solving an unquenched thirst.

John 19:28 says, ***"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), I thirst."*** By saying ***"I thirst,"*** Jesus was bringing about the fulfillment of a prophecy, and it let us know just how thirsty He was. Psalm 22:15 adds, ***"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death."*** His mouth was so dry that His tongue was sticking to the side of his mouth. Have you ever been that thirsty? John 19:29 gives us the details of the soldiers' response, ***"A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth."*** This jeering action actually fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 69:21, ***"They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."***

I hope that from Jesus speaking those two simple words ***"I thirst,"*** you will be reminded that He was human as well as God. Jesus had emotions, felt pain, and even experienced thirst. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, ***"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*** We have a Savior that can sympathize with our troubles and pain. We have a God that knows how to help us with our hurt.

or they

I also hope from Jesus thirsting on the cross you will be reminded of the pain and suffering He physically endured to make the payment for your sins and how much God loves you. In 1 John 4:9-10, we read, ***"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."***

ONE IN A MILLION

THIRST, DEVOTION 5

Debbie Gabbara | Assistant to the Gathering Pastor

An article entitled “*Biblical Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus*” from CBN says “The Old Testament is the part of the Bible written before Jesus was born. Its writings were completed in 450 B.C. The Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth, contains over 300 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled through His life, death, and resurrection. Mathematically speaking, the odds of anyone fulfilling this amount of prophecy are staggering. Mathematicians put it this way:

- 1 person fulfilling 8 prophecies: 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000
- 1 person fulfilling 48 prophecies: 1 chance in 10 to the 157th power
- 1 person fulfilling 300+ prophecies: Only Jesus!”

“Only Jesus!” Only Jesus, God in the flesh, could have fulfilled every single prophecy that was given concerning the Messiah, the One that God would send to save the world from our sins. One of those prophecies was fulfilled when Jesus spoke the words we find in John chapter 19 (NIV), “*I am thirsty.*”

My mind can hardly stand to think about what Jesus had been through by the time He made that statement. Our Lord had been beaten, mocked, humiliated, stripped of his clothes and dignity, and nailed. He was nailed to a cross. The Bible tells us that Jesus hung on the cross for six hours. He went willingly for your sins and mine. John 19:28 (NIV) says, “*Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’*”

John tells us that Jesus spoke those words to fulfill Scripture. Psalm 63:1 (NIV) reads, ***"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water."*** Jesus left nothing undone that had been foretold. He fulfilled every single Scripture that had ever been written about the One that God would send to rescue us. His will was to do the will of His Father, no matter what the cost. Jesus completely fulfilled the mission that the Father had for Him here on Earth.

We live in a world that is parched. Are you thirsty for the will of God? Do you seek Him no matter what the cost? Do you long for Him? In John 4:14 (NIV), Jesus said, ***"But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."***

or they

Let Jesus lead you to spring waters of life. Anyone or anything else will always leave you thirsty.

LIVING WATER

THIRST, DEVOTION 6

Josh Lahring | *Production Director*

Think of a time you have been desperate for a drink of water. When I was around fourteen years old I was home, my parents were gone, and my grandma's house was two miles away. I wanted to go there and could not drive, so I went to find a bike to ride. The tires were a little flat, and I thought that was not a big deal. Have you ever ridden a bike with half-filled tires? Halfway there I was dying and so thirsty. All I could think of was keep going so I could get some water. By the time I made it there I was a little dizzy and felt sick. I drank so much water and just laid on the floor thinking I will never ride a bike again.

When Jesus was crucified on the cross, He said, ***"I thirst."*** John 19:28 records the event, ***"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'"*** At this point, the Father had looked away from Him for He had taken on the sins of the world. Jesus was physically thirsty, but more than that He was thirsting for His Father. Jesus, the one who was telling others to come drink from Him, the living water, had no water to give, it had been completely poured out. He Himself thirsted for that relationship with His Father.

When Jesus said from the cross that He was thirsty, He not only fulfilled prophecy, He also showed again that He was 100% man while being 100% God. However, my mind was reminded of Him as my living water. Looking back at John 7:37, we read, ***"On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.'"***

...into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON FIVE DEVOTION 6

I thirst.

Jesus is our living water, and He is all that can satisfy us. We are to thirst for Christ like our greatest times that we thirst for water.

...or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson Six

Commit My Spirit

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

Dr. Randy T. Johnson
Growth Pastor

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

World Wide Words records the history of a number of common phrases used today. It traced a phrase back to October 9, 1891. The phrase came from a popular joke. A girl found a parrot that was guaranteed to be a good talker. She persuaded her uncle to buy it for her. The joke continues,

“A gentleman was boasting that his parrot would repeat anything he told him. For example, he told him several times, before some friends, to say ‘Uncle,’ but the parrot would not repeat it. In anger, he seized the bird, and half-twisting his neck, said: ‘Say ‘uncle,’ you beggar!’ and threw him into the fowl pen, in which he had ten prize fowls. Shortly afterward, thinking he had killed the parrot, he went to the pen. To his surprise he found nine of the fowls dead on the floor with their necks wrung, and the parrot standing on the tenth twisting his neck and screaming: ‘Say ‘uncle,’ you beggar! say uncle.’”

My Uncle Bob taught me the concept the hard way. I would say, “Hi, Uncle Bob.” For some reason, that was not enough. He wanted to hear me say “Uncle” again as his massive hand was crushing my young paw or as he found certain pressure points. Saying, “Uncle” clearly meant, “I give up, I surrender.”

Do you remember someone who would make you scream “Uncle?”

Jesus never needed to say, “Uncle,” but He regularly gave up His will and surrendered His life to God the Father. Jesus was, is, and will always be God, yet He submitted to the Father’s plan.

1. Age Twelve

Even at an early age, Jesus focused on pleasing His Father.

Luke 2:41-51 records every parent's nightmare, ***"Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.' And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart."***

How long did it take Joseph and Mary to find Jesus?

What was Jesus doing?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

What word describes Jesus' attitude in Nazareth?

Jesus committed His Spirit to God at an early age. He then even submitted to the Father by being submissive to His earthly parents.

2. The Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-44 describes another time when Jesus chose God the Father's will, ***"Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here, while I go over there and pray.' And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.' And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.' And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, 'So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again."***

Luke 22:42 adds, ***"Saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.'"***

What did Jesus ask of the disciples? Why?

What was Jesus' battle? What did He choose?

3. The Cross

From childhood to death, Jesus committed His life to the Father. Luke 23:46 says, ***"Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last."***

or they

The word "commit" is also found in 1 Peter 2:22, ***"He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."***

When it comes to committing our life, there are two options. What are they?

The baptism and miracles could also be discussed on how Jesus constantly committed His life to God the Father.

Jesus committed to doing the right thing in every situation. He always went beyond managing to do good; He did what was best. He chose perfection because good would not be good enough.

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

The next important step is to examine our own lives. Several verses remind us to commit our lives to the Lord fully.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:1-2

Sacrifices implied death. What is meant by being a ***"living sacrifice?"*** How?

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." Proverbs 16:3

"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act." Psalm 37:5

Which verses speak most to you? Why?

...into your hands
I commit my spirit.

LESSON SIX COMMIT MY SPIRIT

I thirst.

In what area do you need to surrender to God right now?

***“Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me,
O Lord, faithful God.”***

Psalm 31:5

...or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON SIX COMMIT MY SPIRIT

I thirst.

or they

ONLY BELIEF

COMMIT, DEVOTION 1

Max & Jenny Sinclair | *Guest Services & Young Adults Director*

Professing faith in Jesus Christ is such a beautiful thing. It is all bold commitments and embracing promises. The presence of God is within you; how could you ever want? Therefore, you do all the things you believe God has called you to do. You play “Oceans” on repeat in your car, with the volume all the way up high. Maybe you decide to read your Bible every day. Possibly, you meet with a Pastor and go over all your big ideas about serving. Whatever it is, you have decided you are striving to be committed.

Then some time passed, you wanted to start serving, but your boss moved up the deadline on a project, and you needed to work late. That new worship song has a great beat, but you stop thinking about the meaning. Your baby has been up all night with an ear infection (or better yet, that Netflix original just came out and even though you said you were only going to watch one episode, you binge watch the whole first season), so you put off reading your Bible until the next day. Before you know it, you start telling yourself things like, “I still see God working in the small things,” as though you are too busy to see God working in the big things.

It seems no matter the commitment we make; we can never follow through with some action. No matter how many times we feel inspired, we still end up distracted. It appears not to matter what steps we take to do things differently. No matter what, we do not feel the way we did the first time we sang “Oceans” during worship. We seem like we cannot get back to how we felt when that sermon spoke directly to us.

Luke 23:46 says, ***“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.”***

When will we realize our promises will never save us? When will we admit that our inspiration is nothing but a deflated balloon, weeks after the party is over?

Jesus called out in a loud voice, not a whisper, and not a small thing. This was the biggest thing of all. Jesus made a sweeping promise to God with His last breath. It is the only commitment which could save souls, transform lives, and heal the broken.

or they

There is no promise from us which can compare. For every time we decide we are all in, there is an equal time in which we have doubted. In all our efforts to be better, to reach the next level, we know there will be a day we decide to go our own way. There is no plan on how we can fix it. There is only belief. It is the belief that the commitment of Christ is enough.

IN HAND

COMMIT, DEVOTION 2

John Rigg | *Assistant to the Reach Pastor*

As a young man, even before I was able to get my driver's license, cars excited me. There was something about them that I was drawn to and could not wait to own one of my own. While driving the back roads with my dad one day, I spotted a 1971 Camaro in the back of someone's yard, and I just had to have it. It was a little beat up and had seen better days, yet I could see the potential in that car. I proceeded to head to the front porch of the house and knocked on the door. The owner answered, and to my surprise, he was willing to sell the car. The price he was asking was fair, yet in order for me to own this car, it was going to take all the cash I had. Nevertheless, before he could change his mind, I went back home, hooked up a car trailer and sped back to gentleman's house and began to pull the car out from the weeds. We soon secured it on the trailer and was ready to drive away, but the car was still not mine. I still had to pay for it. So, I went to the front door once again and began placing \$100 bills, one by one into the gentleman's hand until I reached the asking price. I then shook his hand, turned around and walked towards the trailer and my newly loaded car. I was so excited! This car had cost me everything I had, but it was finally mine!

I am not sure if we will ever fully comprehend just how badly Jesus desires to have us and to call us His own. Much like the 1971 Camaro, sin has left us a little beaten up and looking as if we have seen better days. God had warned us that if we disobeyed Him, we would die, both physically and spiritually (Genesis 2:17). We sinned, and as a result, we look nothing like we should. Yet, even before that dreadful day when sin first entered into the world and separated us from Him, Jesus began His submission to the Father and God's plan to rescue us and get us back.

Luke 23:46 records Jesus on the cross, ***“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.”***

As Jesus entered into His last few moments of being nailed to a cross and paying the death penalty for the sins of the world, He cried out these words to His Father, ***“Into your hands I commit my spirit!”***

Jesus placed His sinless life into the hands of the Father as payment for the sins of all mankind. However, it was not until full payment had reached the hands of the Father that made the transaction complete. Just as I was willing to pay the price for my car before I could take it home, Jesus was willing to pay the price to get us home!

or they

DARKNESS, THE CURTAIN, AND THE TOMBS

COMMIT, DEVOTION 3

Larry Gabbara | *Financial Bookkeeper*

“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.” Luke 23:46

When Jesus was calling out to His Father, He was acknowledging that His time on Earth was over. His 33 years on Earth were done. He had accomplished what His Father had sent Him to do.

Have you ever finished a task that felt final and complete? I retired from 50 years of work in retail sales in March 2017. That last day I felt I completed my task; I had this feeling of completion. I left with my head held high. I had completed my time in the retail pharmacy business, yet I knew that my time for working had not ended. My work was not done; I felt I still had a lot to contribute somewhere.

These are four very remarkable and extraordinary events that happened at the time of Jesus’ death:

1. Darkness fell over the whole land. Luke 23:44 says, **“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.”** According to Bible references, Jesus was said to have been hung on the cross at about nine in the morning. While Jesus died, darkness fell across the whole land and lasted from noon to three o’clock. This could also represent the Father’s anger on how His Son was being treated. Darkness is frequently a sign of judgment.

2. The curtain was torn. Matthew 27:51 says, **“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And**

the earth shook, and the rocks were split." Some theologians point out that the curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Temple. One study note I read said, "Its tearing symbolized Christ's opening the way directly to God." Scripture tells us that the curtain would have been 60 feet long, and 30 feet wide!

3. The earth shook. Notice Matthew 27:51 again, **"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."** The earthquake according to Albert Barnes was a miraculous convulsion of the earth that was felt in many countries. Earthquakes in the Bible are usually accompanied by a divine revelation. Warren Wiersbe connects the earthquake at Jesus' death to signify that the demands of the law were fulfilled in Jesus.

or they 4. The tombs were opened. Matthew 27:52 says, **"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."** These resurrections show God's incredible power over death and the grave. Christ's resurrection is the basis of Christianity. This shows the enormous power of the Trinity!

Finally, Mark 15:37 adds, **"And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last."**

Jesus said with a loud voice, **"Father I commit my spirit."** He was telling the Father He had completed His task on Earth. He had indicated His willingness to submit Himself to the will of His Father.

Jesus offered Himself, and the Father received Jesus' spirit. This was His human soul. With this, He was a perfect man. This was a total offering of all the sins of our lost world.

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

He has completed the payment for our sins. He was the only sinless man ever to walk the earth; there was never one before Him or after Him. We owe our eternal salvation to this selfless act!

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON SIX DEVOTION 3

I thirst.

or they

It is finished.

YOU'VE NEVER FAILED ME YET

COMMIT, DEVOTION 4

Sierra Combs | Women's Ministry Director

Recently, the mother of a sweet friend of mine had a massive brain aneurysm and stroke, which led to her being unresponsive in the hospital for a month. This month was filled with prayer: prayers from her family and friends, from the girls in our Wednesday night Growth Community, and from pastors both here at the River and at other churches in the community. We prayed that God would miraculously heal her, knowing that He has complete power and authority to do so. We also prayed that He would bring comfort and peace to those who loved her and trusted in Him, knowing that He would be faithful to deliver on that promise. My friend spent much of the month at the hospital, and every Sunday she sat right next to her mom watching the live gatherings online, singing along to the worship. One Sunday she sent me a text during the message, and I told her that I would soon be closing with one of my favorite songs which include the lyrics:

*"I've seen you move the mountains,
and I believe I'll see you do it again.
You made a way when there was no way,
and I believe I'll see you do it again.
Your promise still stands,
great is Your faithfulness.
I'm still in Your hands,
this is my confidence-
You've never failed me yet."*

Since I could not be praying with her in person, I figured the next best thing I could do would be to dedicate that whole song in my

heart in prayer for her mom, and as she sang along with me from the hospital, it could be like we were praying together. Even though it can be difficult, placing our trust, lives, and the lives of those we love in the hands of God, it will always be for our benefit. He is so faithful, even when we cannot see it or understand His ways. Friend, I assure you that you can trust Him.

I was really hoping that God would choose to heal her, but after a month it was clear that the time had come for the family to let her go. Like many of those other Sundays, my friend spent the morning in the hospital next to her mom, watching the gathering live, and worshiping with us. This time I closed with another favorite song, singing over and over about how good God is and how He will never let us down. The whole family was in that room that morning, singing those words with me. As we sang, my friend's dad, the high school sweetheart to his beloved wife, sat and whispered those words in her ear as she passed on from this life and leapt straight into the hands of her Heavenly Father.

I am so thankful for what Jesus did on the cross. Without it, there would be only death. However, because of what He did, we have the opportunity to leap into the arms of the Father when it comes time for us to leave this Earth. Jesus acknowledges this as He drew His final breath on the cross, ***"Calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!'"*** (Luke 23:46). Surely there is no better place to be than in the arms of the Father. Whether committing our spirit to the Lord when we leave this Earth, or placing every single worry, fear, and situation right into His hands while we are still here, I can promise you this: He is good, He is faithful, and He will never ever let us down.

or they

THY HANDS

COMMIT, DEVOTION 5

Ryan Story | Location Pastor - Burton

There is a limitless amount a person can learn about Jesus' heart in the seven sayings He called out while hanging on the cross. Luke 23:46 says, ***"Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last."*** In Jesus' final words He gives us an amazing truth about hope and life.

Death is a hard aspect of life. We all know death is a natural aspect of life. Everything that lives will eventually cease to be alive. From the smallest ant to the largest star in the sky, everything has a life span. You and I are lumped into the same reality; however, there is something special about humans. While God did not give humans the ability to avoid this reality, God did bless us with the fact that death is not the end for those who believe in Jesus. They come to a place where death becomes only the beginning of their eternity in Heaven. Romans 10:9 says, ***"Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."***

Sadly, people, even Christians, fear death. This is where Jesus teaches us something amazing. When Jesus calls out, He is calling out to His father. Jesus is calling out to the creator, the Father, the One who is and is yet to come. Jesus is calling out to the One who is in complete control. Nothing that Jesus endured was outside of God's plan. Jesus was in complete trust in this plan. Therefore, when Jesus cried out, He knew who He needed. Then after one last "loud call" Jesus died, but He leaves us hope.

Jesus knew where His spirit was going to be. Jesus knew His spirit was going to be with His Father. While doing some research on this devotion, I found an amazing quote by John Piper explaining what happened when Jesus committed His spirit to God's hands, "Not: into the grave. Not: into the void. Not: into the dark unknown. But: into the hands of God." That is an amazing truth that I hope brings you hope.

or they

Death is hard to navigate. My hope for you is two-fold. The first is that you know Jesus as Lord and you have given your life to Him. Being in a saving relationship with Christ is the only way to navigate through death. The second hope is that you put your trust in knowing where it is you put your soul. We are not bodies with souls; we are souls with bodies. Our body will fade away, but our spirit is eternal. Our souls will spend eternity in either Heaven or Hell. I plead with you that if you do not know that your soul will be with our Heavenly Father for eternity that you make that right and re-read the Romans 10:9 verse again.

OBEDIENCE IN LOVE

COMMIT, DEVOTION 6

Richie Henson | *Production Director*

When considering the life and death of Jesus, I believe we can take the immeasurable significance of each moment for granted. In my own life, I know that to be true concerning the crucifixion. I think of the gruesome nature and purpose of the event, but I rarely consider the lessons that Jesus taught us even in His death. Jesus' final moments on the cross are recorded in Luke 23:46, ***"Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last."***

As I consider the purpose of Luke's recording of Jesus' final words, I am baffled that even unto the point of death, Jesus was willingly laying down His life. His final breath seems to come of His own volition, not coaxed from Him or ripped from Him, but given freely not unlike the rest of His life.

I think Jesus wants us to understand that free will means obedience is of our own will. God does not desire servants who grumble and complain. The Father does not want us to obey because we have to or are forced. Instead, God desires for us to obey out of love. However, many of us go through our lives complaining and frustrated by our sufferings and difficulties. We fail to see that God finds purpose through sacrifice. I think Peter was aware of this truth in 1 Peter 5:10, ***"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."***

Jesus suffered and died for us willingly. He was not compelled by duty or responsibility but truly loved us enough to suffer on our

...into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON SIX DEVOTION 6

I thirst.

behalf. As the Father calls on us to suffer for the Gospel, we must submit and obey in love maintaining, until the end, our desire to see God's will accomplished.

or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do

Wo
Son

Lesson Seven

Finished

I say to you, today
be with me in paradise.

Caleb Combs
Gathering Pastor

My God, My
why have you

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

“It is finished!” John 19:30

Have you ever started something and struggled to finish it? Finishing something you start is a skill. I am not talking about finishing your entire plate or that nap you planned; I am not talking about finishing something that takes time, effort, struggle and pain (Side note: As a child, I sat a lot of nights at the table by myself after the entire family had finished their dinner and I refused to finish my vegetables, and I can still hear my mom's voice, "You cannot get up from that table until you finish your dinner!" Man, did I hate having to finish those peas, carrots, and green beans. Wow, not sure how I got sidetracked, but I feel a lot better getting that off of my chest. I hated finishing my meal. Nowadays, I do not seem to have any problems finishing a meal). Okay, back to finishing difficult things, like building something or painting a room, our human nature is to quit when things get tough. I found a quote by Seth Godin that summarizes this human response, "It is human nature to quit when it hurts. But it's that reflex that creates scarcity." Or you can go with the classic quote, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" Quitting difficult things is in our nature.

What have you quit when things got difficult? How did you feel when you quit?

What have you finished through adversity? How did you feel when you finished?

There is just something about finishing that makes you feel accomplished. From finishing the lawn and looking back at the magnificent straight lines to painting a room, finishing through difficulties does create a good feeling in us. However, all of this pales in comparison to the finished mission that Jesus finished on the cross.

We can go all the way back to the beginning and talk about how sin entered into the world by Adam's sin and how the punishment for that sin is death. Every person is born dead in their sins. That is how the Bible describes us. That is when the mission began. God knew He would have to send His only Son to be our replacement and take the sin of the entire Earth on His shoulders.

or they

We can go to a little town just south of Jerusalem, called Bethlehem, where a couple was expecting the birth of their firstborn child. This child was not like any other child. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. His earthly father was a carpenter. That is where the mission went into effect. Jesus stepped out of the halls of Heaven and into a cave where animals live simply to begin His mission.

We can even go one a step closer to the finish of His mission and head to the city of Jerusalem. It is just a few days before He would finish His mission and we find Jesus riding on a donkey watching people lay their coats on the ground and wave palm branches declaring their Messiah had arrived. Jesus continued to fulfill prophecy and stayed on track to complete His mission.

We could even peak in the garden and see Jesus agonizing over His mission, yet finding Himself at a place of declaring, "Not my will, but Your will be done." The mission was hard and weighty, yet Jesus knew why He was here. He came to save the lost. He knew His mission and did not quit or get sidetracked.

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

What are some other times in Jesus' life that you recall Him staying focused on His mission when others may have gotten distracted or quit?

We can look at the entirety of the story of Jesus and see the mission, but it is all summarized with these last words on the cross. ***"It is finished!"***

John 19:30 says, ***"When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."***

What do these words mean to you?

Jesus finished His mission. Mark 10:45 tells us, ***"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many."*** His mission was simply to take our place, and He finished it. Through the agony, pain, and embarrassment, He declared with His last dying breath, ***"It is finished."***

Have you ever felt like quitting on God? Why and how did you feel?

Why do you think Jesus came to Earth?

Summarize His mission in as few words as possible.

or they

We can talk all we want about finishing and how great of a feeling it is, yet we as believers feel the urge to quit all of the time. We celebrate how Jesus finished on the cross, yet when things get hard, it's easy for us to bail. The Apostle Paul talks directly about this in 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Paul is talking to his prized pupil, Timothy, and as his race (life) is coming to a close, he talks about finishing and why he wants to finish, ***"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."***

What does keeping the faith mean?

What does Paul say he will receive for finishing the race?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Paul celebrates because he is going to receive a prize. Did you know there are other crowns for when you finish the race? This really sunk in a little deeper for me as I saw this list in Pastor David Jeremiah's blog.

1. The first crown can be found in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 and will be awarded for self-discipline.

Crown Name _____

2. The second crown can be found in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, and it will be given to those who have led others to Christ.

Crown Name _____

3. The third crown can be found in 2 Timothy 4:8 (Hint: the one Paul talks about) and it will be given to those who have a longing for the return of Jesus Christ.

Crown Name _____

4. The fourth crown can be found in James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10 and it will be awarded to those who triumph over the trial, temptation, persecution, or are martyred for the cause of Christ.

Crown Name _____

5. The last crown can be found in 1 Peter 5:4 and will be given to Christian leaders who faithfully lead God's people.

Crown Name _____

These are incredible prizes for finishing and God has specifically made them for us. He will be standing at the finish line ready to greet us with open arms and celebrate our finish. What will we do with these prizes?

Revelation 4:10-11 draws a beautiful picture of what we will do with our crowns, ***“The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.’”*** We will lay our crowns at the feet of Jesus because He is worthy. What a great picture, because He finished we can finish! When you feel like quitting because it is too hard or things just continually do not go your way, remember to keep pressing on for the prize. Paul even had to remind himself in Philippians 3:14 to continue to press to the finish for the prize. Our prize as Christians is to spend eternity in a real place called Heaven simply because Jesus finished His mission.

or they

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

Truly, I say to you, today

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON SEVEN FINISHED

I thirst.

or they

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

FINISHED, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson | *Growth Pastor*

I have a friend who is a college professor in mathematics. He has been working on an “unsolvable problem” since 1971. Whenever I saw something labeled “unsolvable,” I turned the page. He likes to point out that it is unsolvable for now. He took a yearlong sabbatical to study with someone in Sweden who also had the same goal. He has been working on a problem for about 40 years. Most of us remember math class. If we could not find the solution in five minutes, we flipped to the back of the book and hoped there was an answer key. Not only has he labored over those numbers and letters, but his actual goal is also not to necessarily solve the problem. He just wants to help the progression so someone can eventually solve it. It has been his lifelong goal.

For some, finishing a puzzle, book, or room renovation can be quite the accomplishment. However, few have lifelong projects.

Jesus came to Earth to die. He lived a perfect life, fulfilled hundreds of prophecies, and never got distracted. He left Heaven because mankind needed a Savior and He was and is the only one suitable for the task.

We sinned and earned death, Hell, and eternal separation from God. However, Jesus died in our place to offer us the “free gift” of eternal life (Romans 6:23) and life to the full (John 10:10). This mission took 33 years. It was literally a lifelong project.

John 19:30 says, ***“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his***

Wor
Son

Father,
know n

spirit.” Jesus woke up every morning with the same goal in mind. He chose to do the right thing in the right way every day. He lived for us; He died for us. Finally, while on the cross struggling and gasping for every breath, Jesus gave the ultimate mic drop and said, ***“It is finished.”***

Lifetime achievement awards are very honoring. It is interesting to see what someone finds so valuable that they spend days, weeks, months, years, decades, and their entire life and resources to accomplish. Jesus found you to be that valuable.

Jesus lived with you in mind; Jesus died with you in mind. He is not asking you to die for Him, but will you live for Him?

or they

ASLAN

FINISHED, DEVOTION 2

Isaiah Combs

John 19:30 records the last things Jesus said on the cross, ***“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”*** It was finished, and He died for our sins. It is the greatest and most selfless thing ever done, and that will ever be done.

I believe we have some mixed up views about Jesus and the cross. The cross is super important, and I believe the physical pain that Jesus endured was incredible, and I pray God never asks me to experience it.

However, I do not believe the physical pain of the cross is what Jesus was worried about in the Garden of Gethsemane where He was praying as sweat was dripping like blood from His face (Luke 22:44). Luke would have the authority to record this medical condition produced by great stress because he was a doctor (Luke would later become Paul's doctor).

Jesus was indeed stressed, but I do not believe it was because He was scared of the pain. He was ready and willing to lay His earthly body down. However, there was a spiritual reason for His agony, blood, and sweat.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** Jesus knew God His Father would abandon Him. Jesus took on the sins of the whole world, so God could not even look at Him (Mathew 27:46). The Lamb without blemish or

spot, the perfect sacrifice became the very thing that God hates, sin (1 Peter 1:18-19). Because of the cross and Jesus' willing sacrifice, we are free from that sin. We are bought and paid for with His blood.

There is a great book for kids written by C.S Lewis, *"The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."* The movie is good as well. In the story, a boy named Edmund (a picture of us) gets caught in a trap set by the White Witch (a picture of Satan). The only way to free him from this bond of Satan was for King Aslan (a picture of Jesus) to lay his life down willingly to free Edmund. This is our story. We were caught in sin, and Jesus willingly died to free us from the bonds of sin. I recommend the movie for you and your family. It is a good way to start the conversation with your kids about what Jesus has done for them.

or they

Because of the cross and Jesus' willing sacrifice, we are free from that sin. We are bought and paid for with His blood.

It truly was finished.

TORN CURTAIN

FINISHED, DEVOTION 3

Pat Rowland | *Location & Development Pastor*

I am very much a “Do It Yourself” kind of guy. I work on my own cars as much as I can and cannot seem to justify paying someone else to do something I know I can do myself. Needless to say, we always have projects going around the Rowland Farm (our little home and hobby farm). Whether it is knocking down a wall, installing new floors, replacing a roof, or fixing a fence, I enjoy these projects. However, it seems like the projects are never done because as soon as you think you are finished there is something else to do. Finished is never finished in homeownership. When Jesus said, **“It is finished,”** it was finished.

Jesus’ last saying on the cross is found in John 19:30, **“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”** As you probably already know, the New Testament scriptures like the book of John have been translated from Greek manuscripts. The Greek word used for **“finished”** in John 19:30 is “tetelestai” or more properly stated by Jesus, **“TETELESTAI!”**

This was not an utterance or a last gasp whisper. This was a statement, an announcement declaring the finality of Jesus’ earthly life and the introduction of His free gift of grace. TETELESTAI! Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of the final atonement for our sins which eliminated the barrier between the sinner and the creator.

In the Old Testament, the temple held the significance of being the place of worship and where God’s presence resided. Having been built to very specific instructions by God, the innermost area of the

temple was the sanctuary, and within the sanctuary separated by a curtain was the holy of holies. The holy of holies contained the Ark of the Covenant, which according to the Old Testament is where God's presence rested. It was also off limits except to the High Priest and only to him once a year, when he would enter on the Day of Atonement with the blood of a perfect lamb that was sacrificed for the sins of all Israelites.

or they

After Jesus' last words an amazing event is recorded in Matthew 27:51 (NIV), ***"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."*** Jesus said, "TETELESTAI!" and gave up His life. Immediately, the curtain separating us from God's presence is torn from top to bottom symbolizing the separation that had been eliminated. The sin debt that kept us from God's presence was atoned with the perfect lamb, Jesus Christ. Jesus paid our debt so that we can never be charged again. It is FINISHED!

BLOODY MESS

FINISHED, DEVOTION 4

Roger Allen | *Recovery Director*

Close your eyes and imagine if you will, the altar in Solomon's temple. It was made of bronze, twenty cubits by twenty cubits by ten cubits high. The altar was massive. It was a place where the priest could offer the sacrifice for the people. From the voluntary sacrifices (burnt, grain, and peace) to the mandatory sacrifices (sin and trespass), the priests were busy atoning for the sins of the people. On this day, they were dedicating the temple to the Lord. Imagine now the smells, sights, and sounds of the day as Solomon offers a sacrifice. We read in 2 Chronicles 7:5, ***"King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God."***

The sacrifice was so large that Solomon did not use the altar for the burnt, grain, or the fat of the peace offering, ***"And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord, for there he offered the burnt offering and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat"*** (2 Chronicles 7:7). If your imagination works like mine, you will soon realize the enormity of what is taking place. There were thousands of people and animals moving to their destination. As a friend of mine said about the size of the sacrifice, "It was a bloody mess."

The Mosaic Law had strict rules that had to be followed. It ranged from the type of animal, grain, or wine that was to be used, to what part of the animal that was retained and what was burnt. In fact, the Mosaic Law contained 613 mitzvahs (commandments) in which they found atonement, worship, the sinfulness of man, and the holiness

of God. Try as they may, the Hebrews could not overcome their condemnation through the law.

Fast forward almost a thousand years. As news of the Messiah reached the crowds in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin conspired against Jesus. It was the week of Passover. Riding in on a donkey as people put their cloaks and palm fronds at His feet, Jesus fulfilled the prophesy, ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”*** (Zechariah 9:9).

or they

As the next few days passed, the people who had praised Him would turn and despise Him. Cheerful hosannas quickly turned to shouts of “Crucify Him!” Utterly disillusioned, the crowd turned on their Messiah when they realized that He did not fit their idea of “The Savior.”

Isaiah 53:3 says, ***“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*** Destined to be crucified, Jesus shared His last meal with those who had been with Him these past three years. As He retired to the Garden of Gethsemane with them, He prayed to the Father, ***“And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’”*** (Matthew 26:39).

These are just a few of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Through Old Testament prophecy, to the New Testament fulfillment, we see that Jesus was the unblemished lamb of God. Realizing we cannot save ourselves, Christ’s full atonement for our sins allows us to have a relationship with the Father. That happened through His absolute obedience to the Father’s will; He presents us sinless. “Tetelestai” (It Is Finished).

“TETELESTAI”

FINISHED, DEVOTION 5

Kenny Hovis | *Prison Ministry Director*

A few years back, my wife got her first tattoo. It hurt so bad (on the top of her foot) that she said she would never get another. Well, now she has four and thinking of another. For a number of years, she has told me to get one. Although not against tattoos, I just could not think of something I wanted permanently put on my body that would not look ridiculous years from now. So I always told her I would think about it.

Late in the summer of 2014, I heard about the prison trips that our church was going on, and after praying about it, decided to go on one. It changed my life. I was taken out of my comfort zone socially and spiritually and launched into an environment that was raw and real. I had never witnessed broken people like that before. I had participated in jail ministry before, but this was completely different. There were men coming up to you asking if you would pray with them about their faith, family, health, safety, and their court case. I realized that the faith that had sustained me, and for the most part I had kept to myself, was exactly what these men were searching! So, I opened my mouth and trusted God.

I quickly realized that I am an addict; I was addicted to seeing people coming to be self-aware of their need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I saw my life and faith change, just like the men's lives with whom I was praying. They would transform right in front of my eyes. I brought those experiences home with me and could not shut up about it! The next year, I went on almost every prison trip. They could not keep me away. I did whatever the team needed so it was difficult for them to say I could not go.

Realizing that tattoos are a big deal in prison, I actually started thinking of something to have tattooed on my forearm so that an inmate would look at it and ask what it meant. Secondly, it would appease my wife. I came across a picture of the Greek word, "TETELESTAI." Greek is the language in which the New Testament was written, and "TETELESTAI" is written as the account of Jesus' last words before dying for every person's sins. John 19:30 says, **"When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."** **"It is finished"** is the most common translation, but more specifically translated "TETELESTAI" is an accounting term. When you had a debt that had been completely paid for, in Greek you would say "TETELESTAI," or "paid in full." I fell in love with the word.

or they

Dying on the cross the way He did, Jesus paid the debt for me that I could not pay on my own. He did not make a down payment, partial payment, or an installment. It was completed, done, finished, and "paid in full!" Someone has to pay for your sin and mine. Romans 6:23 says, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Without Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, we would have to pay the debt our sin creates with God. Jesus' proclamation just before He died, paid the debt for everyone that accepts that payment in their place. It is not a loan; it is a gift! His death makes our debt, paid in full.

I made sure of the spelling, picked out a font and style, went to the tattoo artist my wife went to and had three crosses with the word "TETELESTAI" next to them tattooed on my forearm. Now, when an inmate or anyone on the street sees it and asks what it means, I am able to say, "It is a daily reminder that there was an extravagant price paid for me to be able to have a relationship with God and a place in His family. Can I tell you about it?"

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

I hope I never tire of telling people why I have a funny looking word tattooed on my arm. That funny looking word means everything to me!

Wo
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

LESSON SEVEN DEVOTION 5

I thirst.

or they

It is finished.

THE END THAT WAS THE BEGINNING

FINISHED, DEVOTION 6

LaRae Wing | Secretary

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:30

In our world of calendars, schedules, and agendas, the word “finished” is often viewed as “over and done with.” It seems to implicate that something has been checked off a list and it is time to move on to the next thing: Get up, work out, make breakfast, balance checkbook, drop kids at school, go to work, finish project, meet with boss, pick up kids, take daughter to gymnastics, coach son’s softball team, pick up daughter, prepare dinner, clean garage, help kids with homework, put kids to bed, breathe for 5 minutes before trying to complete ten other things that need to be done before bed, write out tomorrow’s schedule, fall into bed for a few hours of exhausted sleep, get up and begin another day with another full schedule.

It seems strange to say it, but Jesus had a checklist too. In order to prove to people that He was truly the Son of God (the Messiah), He had to fulfill the prophecies that were made about His life and death that began as far back as the book of Genesis. Although there were still more prophecies to be fulfilled, Jesus’ list was getting shorter with every event He experienced. Jesus’ death was the perfect and final sacrifice necessary for forgiveness of sin, and even though Jesus spoke the words, **“It is finished,”** referring to His need to die, Jesus was not “finished.” In fact, He was just entering the next phase of His work on our behalf.

Jesus’ death on the cross was the determining factor in our ability to have our sins pardoned, yet His work continued. He is eternal;

therefore, His work is eternal. The resurrection of Jesus secured our hope of eternal life. That is why Jesus is our Living Savior. No other individual that people worship has been able to conquer death. Jesus Christ established His place as the One, True, and Living Son of God by conquering death and the grave.

The great news is that the perpetual work of Jesus is for us, His children. Hebrews 9:24 says, ***“For Christ has entered...into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”*** Also, in Romans 8:34 we read, ***“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”*** Jesus is taking care of us by talking to God about and for us. Just as He was so personally involved in His disciples’ lives while He lived here on earth, we continue to be on His “to do” list while in Heaven.

or they

The Savior’s task of personal involvement with His children is multifaceted. Not only is He interceding for us to the Father, but Jesus also has told us of His work in John 14:2-3, ***“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*** Jesus has a plan for us to be with Him eternally. Because of Jesus, “a forever home” is prepared for us when we leave this world behind.

Matthew 16:27 adds, ***“For the Son of Man [Jesus] is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”*** Jesus is also making preparation for His glorious return to this earth. Then, as Romans 14:11 says, ***“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”*** Not one person on this earth will be able to deny who Jesus is.

why have you forsaken me?

SPOKEN 7 SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS

Do you feel as if your list never ends? Are you stressed because you can never complete the tasks before you? Are you overwhelmed by the length or magnitude of that list? Take a moment and remember that when Jesus said, "It is finished," He died for you. He rose for you. However, He was not finished; His work for you did not end. Talk to Him; He is interceding! Praise Him; He is preparing! Hope in Him; He is coming!

Wor
Son

Father,
know no

et, into your hands
commit my spirit.

I thirst.

or they

It is finished.

why have you forsaken me?

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “we don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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Truly, I say to you, today