

THE SEVEN LAST SAYINGS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS

In **2 Corinthians 10:5** the Apostle Paul writes the following about our calling and about our spiritual battle: “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

This is a tough calling that is asked of us to bring EVERY thought into the obedience of Christ. When we are in great physical or emotional pain, stressed out or emotionally we are all over the place it is very easy to simply react however we feel like it at the time and not be willing to discipline our reactions in a godly way. Our conscience may even prod us to react better but sometimes we just don't care and decide to do as we feel like at the time.

When our pain and stress levels are low it is much easier to live God's way. The real test comes when our pain and our stress levels are high. In times like these it is good to remember our ultimate example of how to react during such times of pain and stress.

Jesus Christ's example on the cross provides great inspiration to encourage all of us to control and think through our reactions to great emotional and physical pain. This wonderful example of Jesus Christ on the cross is being vividly portrayed in the controversial Mel Gibson film “The Passion of the Christ”.

Like most movies it has both its strengths and its weaknesses. I had mixed feelings after seeing the movie. The history buff inside of me was a bit disappointed that there were a number of mistakes in many of the minor details in the movie. Some mistakes and little added extras were clearly influenced by Mel Gibson's Catholic perspective.

On the other hand, the part of me that likes inspirational and dramatic stories was both impressed and very moved by the way that the story is told on film. The level of pain and brutality it shows Christ went through is WAY beyond any other movie version of the event.

It's certainly not for children and those with a weak stomach. However, the violence shown really is very close to what is actually described in the Bible and it is very moving to see what Christ must have went through on our behalf to personally pay for our sins. I know that my eyes were very welled up with tears as I watched the scourging and Him being nailed to the cross.

In our local Leadership Club Mr Reg Wright made a very interesting comment about the movie. He said, after seeing the full enormity of what Christ must have went through, his respect and admiration for Christ's discipline to react to all of that in such a godly way went through the roof. This is what I'd like to focus on in this article.

I'd like to now take us back in time to this dramatic day in history and look at the last few sayings of Christ on the cross. There are seven sayings of Christ on the cross that are recorded for us in the gospels. It's interesting to note that all seven of these have a different theme. They reveal Jesus' innermost feelings as He poured out His life for us and provide a powerful example of how we, too, should react in times of great physical and emotional pain.

1] [THEME – FORGIVENESS] "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus, shortly after He was nailed to the cross prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". Instead of being consumed with his own pain and misery, Jesus asked forgiveness for those responsible for the evil done to Him and by extension, all who ignorantly go the way of sin.

Now what did Christ mean when He said "for they do not know what they do"? These hardened Roman soldiers didn't crucify Christ accidentally so what did He mean that they didn't know what they were doing?

We have a clue over in **Hebrews 12:2** where it says "Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross". It says His mind was totally fixed on the joy that was set before Him. It was the burning vision of victory for mankind He was about to complete and His coming Kingdom that kept Him going at this time.

It is also this vision that helps us to understand what Christ meant when He said that they did not know what they were doing? He may well have projected His mind forward in time to when these soldiers will be resurrected and the full magnitude of what they had done to their Saviour will hit them. At that time they will probably deeply regret being involved in Christ's murder.

When we are deeply hurt by others it helps that we also have this kind of vision and project our mind forward to when those who hurt us will come to their senses and repent of their actions. It also helps to remember that everyone is a potential son or daughter of God.

2] [THEME – HOPE] "I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Both of the thieves who were crucified with Christ, had early on joined bystanders in mocking Jesus (**Mark 15:32**). Luke tells us in **Luke 24:39**, "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'" This man wanted only escape from his pain. This criminal had no desire to know his Saviour and repent of his sins but a miraculous change occurred in the other criminal. He came to believe. He, too, had mocked Jesus earlier, but now he rebuked the other criminal.

We are not told of any other conversation between this second criminal and Jesus. Perhaps only Jesus' example and prayer, which he overheard, moved him deeply. He said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (**Luke 23:42**). Jesus replied by offering him hope for the future: "I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise" (**Luke 23:43**).

By paradise did Christ mean that this criminal would go straight to heaven? Now, we know that wasn't the case. What Jesus did know was that in the moment after this criminal's legs were broken and he died that he would come up in presumably the second resurrection which would seem like the same day to him. At that time the earth would have been transformed into a paradise and he will have his chance to receive salvation.

Again we see the incredible vision that He had on the cross. He just kept focusing ahead on the "joy that was set before Him" as it says in **Hebrews 12:2**. This kind of vision, this kind of thinking way ahead to the end result can help us to keep things in perspective and to encourage others when we, too, are suffering and it can help us to temper our responses in a godly way.

3] [THEME – CARE] “He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’” (John 19:26-27).

We read in **John 19:26-27**: "When Jesus saw his mother there, 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! From that time on, this disciple took her into his home’".

Now Jesus’ mother Mary had four other sons - James, Joses, Simon and Judas. One might naturally think that one of them would probably be physically caring for Mary. **John 7:5** says that during His ministry Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Him. Paul notes in **1 Corinthians 15:7** that He appeared to His brother James after His resurrection and this is probably when he and his brothers began to believe as they are with Mary and the apostles in **Acts 1:14** when a replacement is chosen for Judas. James became the leader of the Jerusalem church while Judas or Jude later wrote the epistle of Jude.

What need of Mary’s did Jesus perceive on the cross that wasn’t being met here by His brothers? That John took Mary into his home implies a physical need. Whether it was a physical or perhaps a spiritual need that wasn’t being met Jesus saw to it that His disciple John would take care of His mother.

Again, instead of being consumed with his own pain and misery, Jesus cared for those around Him. I remember when I was a teenager going for a visit to our elder, Jack Clune’s sister in the nursing home where Mr Clune is now. Even though she suffered terribly from emphysema I would be absolutely amazed by how she’d be constantly be thinking about others and how they were doing compared to the carnal teenager that I was at the time.

4] [THEME – LONELINESS] "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' - which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Jesus here then cried out, "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' - which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’" (**Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34**).

The Apostle Paul perhaps referred to this moment when he wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:21**: "For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." At this moment the Father placed on Him the sins of humanity to be paid as He was about to die. **Isaiah 59:2** states that our sins separate us from God.

During his entire adult life, Jesus had an intimate and vibrant relationship with God as His Father. Suddenly, while suffering the agony and fatigue of crucifixion, Jesus could no longer feel that wonderful heavenly Presence. At this moment He could empathize with all of us when we feel separated from God because of our sins and guilt.

5] [THEME - SUFFERING] “I am thirsty” (John 19:28).

The time of final sacrifice was close. Jesus had endured and overcome the heat, pain, rejection and loneliness. He could have suffered and died in silence. Instead, unexpectedly, he asked for help. "Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty’" (**John 19:28**).

Earlier He’d been offered the same drink but with added gall. He refused it as recorded in **Matthew 27:34**. Why refuse it earlier and now take a drink at the moment of death? "With the Word Bible Commentary" makes this comment about the vinegar mixed with gall: "The narcotic drink would have helped deaden the pain, but Jesus refused it. He drank the cup of suffering instead." Instead of reaching for a comforter He was prepared to take the difficult

but necessary path. When finally He had fully drank of the cup of suffering He then asked for a drink.

6] [THEME - TRIUMPH]“It is finished” (John 19:30).

The sixth saying of Christ on the cross is one of triumph. John 19:30 says: "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, He bowed His head and gave up his spirit".

Jesus' humility rings in his words. His was not a vain, I-showed-you attitude. He did not even say, "I did it" or "I did it My way" as Frank Sinatra used to sing. He claimed no credit. To the end, Jesus' mind was on the work He came to do. He triumphantly announced, for all to hear, "It is finished."

7] [THEME – REUNION] “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, He breathed his last". He looked forward to finally being fully reunited with His Father. At that dramatic moment Jesus died for you and me and became the true Passover sacrifice for each and every one of us.

The way that John records his gospel, at first, gives the impression that Jesus died first before the soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side which is how it is portrayed in “The Passion of the Christ”. In “The Passion” the soldiers suspect He is already dead and one of them thrusts him in the side to test that He is dead.

The original text of Matthew's gospel helps clear up the confusion of whether He died before or after the spear was thrust into Him. In **Matthew 27:49**, after He took the drink of vinegar, we read, “But the rest said, ‘Let Him alone! Let us see if Elijah comes to save Him.’” Most Bible versions then go straight to **verse 50** which says that He cried out again and gave up His spirit.

Fred Coulter in his “A Harmony of the Gospels” writes, “The latter half of this verse, which begins with the words ‘Then another took a spear...’ has been omitted from the King James Version. However, a majority of ancient manuscripts contain this part of the verse; these manuscripts include the codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus...Older translations which contain the complete verse are the Moffatt translation and the Fenton translation” (p. 304).

From the latter half of **verse 49** it should read, “Then another took a spear and thrust it into His side and out came water and blood. And after crying out again with a loud voice, Jesus yielded up His spirit.”

In conclusion, it is a tough calling to bring EVERY thought into the obedience of Christ, especially when we are in great pain physically and emotionally. As we study the perfect caring example of Christ as He suffered on the cross leading up to the Passover season, it should be a great motivation to all of us to live and to react in a godly way at all times, both good and bad.