

## Last Words

There's something about a person's "Last Words" that inspire our curiosity or seem especially important

- In a court of Law a dying declaration of testimony can be admitted as evidence
- The survivors of an unsolved crime receive comfort if the perpetrator confesses before passing on
- Separated family members wonder if the prospect of dying will cause a loved one to agree to reconciliation
- Christians hope dying unbelievers will profess faith on their deathbed
- The disciples of sages and philosophers wait to hear one last drop of wisdom from the lips of their mentors

Do you desire to be a true disciple of Jesus?

Let me warn you the path isn't an easy one, however you will experience the power of God in ways you didn't even know were possible

On this journey success cannot be measured in units of convenience and comfort

Not only do Jesus' last words reveal what was on His mind as He was dying but offer a road map for us who want to live a life in the unobstructed presence of God

### John 13:36 (NKJV) At the Last Supper

<sup>36</sup> Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

- For once, these men would have to wait while Jesus went on without them
- This must have been disorienting
- They were used to following Jesus
- For now, they could only go so far
- Jesus added, “*You will follow later.*”

Then for the rest of their lives they would learn to follow Him through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the words Jesus had spoken to them

- He told them He was the way and the life
- He told them to go and make disciples
- Those disciples would have to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow
- In fact, most of them followed Him into martyrdom
- He said He would be with them to the end of the age

The Apostle Paul also understood the power, as well as the suffering you will need to endure as a follower of Christ

- Yet He was determined to keep on going

### Philippians 3:13–14 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus' first words to His disciples was a simple, "Follow Me." He wanted them to follow Him and leave everything else behind

Through the cannon of scripture, we have the "Last Words" of Jesus forever preserved for us to read and examine

While Jesus hung on the cross in His last hours He made several short statements that are commonly known by many preachers as Jesus', "Seven Last Words"

In the Bible, seven is the number of completion

From the cross, Jesus voiced *three prayers, a promise, a piece of family business, a complaint, and a declaration*

- Jesus is not only the Son of God but also the greatest teacher of all time
- He continued teaching to His last breath
- These Last Words still have a great deal to say to you and I

## **A Word of Forgiveness**

**Luke 23:34 (NLT)**

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."\* And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.\*

- Remember you and I put Jesus on the cross as surely as anyone in His own day
- That means He was interceding with the father on our behalf
- He makes this statement almost immediately after being lifted up on the cross

Starting the evening before he has been...

- Betrayed by one of His own disciples for money
- Arrested by the temple soldiers
- Interrogated by the high priest Annas
- Tried with falsified evidence by the Jewish ruling council
- Denied by His most vocal supporter, Peter
- Beaten by temple soldiers
- Questioned by the Roman Governor, Pilate
- Questioned by the ruler of Galilee, Herod Antipas
- Questioned a second time by Pilate
- Whipped by Roman soldiers
- Condemned to death by Pilate at the insistence of the locals
- Mocked by Roman soldiers and crowned with thorns
- Forced to carry His cross to the place of execution
- Stripped
- Nailed to the cross
- Lifted up in the air to hang from His nailed-pierced hands and feet until dead

Jesus wasn't denying their guilt, he was just recognizing they didn't understand the full magnitude of what was taking place

- The Romans thought they were punishing a criminal
- They had no idea they were crucifying the "Author of life"  
– Acts 3:15
- He practiced what He preached

Matthew 5:44 (NLT)

<sup>44</sup> But I say, love your enemies!\* Pray for those who persecute you!

He continues to do the same

**Hebrews 7:23–25 (NLT)**

<sup>23</sup> There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. <sup>24</sup> But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. <sup>25</sup> Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save\* those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

Every spiritual journey starts with realizing we need forgiveness

- What is your personal definition of forgiveness?
- Have you ever prayed to receive God's forgiveness and be saved?
  - If so, when and how? If not, what's holding you back?

When you think of the things you have done that were wrong and that you needed God's forgiveness for, what stands out in your mind, and why?

- What unconfessed wrongdoing do you need God's forgiveness for right now?
- What are some ways in which other people have forgiven you in the past?
- How have you forgiven others in the past?
- Whom do you need to forgive right now?
  - For what?
  - How could you go about it?

Our spiritual journey is the presence of God

- There all is holy, pure and exposed to His light
- A place where we are declared righteous by receiving His righteousness

Forgiveness is the first step on our spiritual road yet it is something we can never get past in this life

- Whenever we do wrong, (and we will)
- Whenever we have others wrong us, (and they will)
- We need to seek forgiveness as well as give it the way Jesus has set for our example

We can only come to God through the torn body of Jesus

**Matthew 27:51 (NLT)**

<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart,

- This curtain was about an inch thick, thirty feet wide and sixty feet tall
- It was ripped from the top
  - Making no mistake that God did this

It separated the “Most Holy Place” from the rest of the temple

- It was the place where God’s presence dwelled
- Only the high priest could go in there
  - Once a year, on the day of atonement
  - The curtain separated people from God
  - Jesus had made a way for man to get to God

We can now approach God through the shredded, gouged, punctured and pierced body of Jesus Christ

## Hebrews 10:19–22 (NLT)

<sup>19</sup> And so, dear brothers and sisters,\* we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> By his death,\* Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. <sup>21</sup> And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, <sup>22</sup> let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

- There are times we fail and make mistakes
- The good news is forgiveness doesn't come with an expiration date
- It doesn't matter if it's the first time or the 1,500<sup>th</sup> time
  - Ask for forgiveness and that's what you get
  - Every time!

There are many things that we know are right to do and still don't do them

There are many things that I know are wrong to do and I still do them

- I sin against God repeatedly
  - And you do as well
- We say hurtful words
- Go places or do things we shouldn't
- We don't say the words He told us to speak
- We don't give the thing we know He wanted us to give

Many times, when we sin it's not a lack of knowledge but a lack of passion

- Grace is not something we only receive once
- God even forgives us when we know exactly what we do
- Yet, that's no excuse to keep on sinning

### John 1:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

### Romans 6:1–2 (NLT)

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? <sup>2</sup>Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

- Grace and forgiveness is a motivation to change
  - In fact, grace is the power to change
- Why would we deliberately sin against a God who is so giving and so forgiving toward us?
  - We need to keep a sensitive heart
  - Recognize our sin for what it is
  - Repent immediately

*“Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”*

– John Newton, ageing “Amazing Grace,” composer

### 1 John 1:8–9 (NLT)

<sup>8</sup>If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. <sup>9</sup>But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.



There is nothing we can do to earn God's forgiveness. But when we have received it, we do have a responsibility to forgive others

### Matthew 6:14–15 (NLT)

<sup>14</sup> “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

- We don't have to forgive to receive forgiveness
- That would be contrary to the whole message of the New Testament

What Jesus is really saying is if we don't forgive we won't receive the freedom and benefits of salvation in the way He desires us to

- Unforgiveness keeps us in a prison

### Matthew 18:21–22 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

- Some translate 77 times, others say 490
- Jesus wasn't saying there's a specific number
- We don't stop forgiving on the 78<sup>th</sup> or 491<sup>st</sup> time
- We are supposed to forgive like Jesus

### Ephesians 4:32 (NLT)

<sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

### Matthew 18:23–24 (NKJV)

<sup>23</sup> Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

- A talent equaled twenty years of a working man's wage

Right from the start you can see that Jesus is telling a parable, (not a true story) where the amount of money is impossible to borrow or repay

- Its equal to a bazillion
- We tend to minimize our mistakes and maximize others mistakes
- This is why Jesus suffered the way He did
  - Our debt is enormous

### Matthew 18:25–27 (NKJV)

<sup>25</sup> But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. <sup>26</sup> The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' <sup>27</sup> Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

- This is a picture of what Jesus did for you and I
- God canceled our debts and let us go
- He wiped clean a debt that would have been impossible to repay

You would think the guy in the story would be so happy that he would take all the other servants out to dinner and pay the check

### Matthew 18:28 (NKJV)

<sup>28</sup> “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’

- A denarius was a day’s wages
- Significant yet miniscule in comparison to the debt he was forgiven
- These are the kinds of debts we are all guilty of
  - Being cheated
  - Being lied to
  - Being disrespected

They are real, and they matter to us. However, stacked next to the mountain of debt God forgives us, look like a molehill

### Matthew 18:29–33 (NKJV)

<sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ <sup>30</sup> And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. <sup>32</sup> Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’

- The master calls the servant “*wicked*”
- He expects the servant to forgive
- Just the way he forgave him

### Matthew 18:34 (NKJV)

<sup>34</sup> And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

- Every time we don't forgive, we are the ones held captive by that *choice*
- We are not supposed to receive forgiveness and then withhold it from others
- If we do it is to our own peril
- We imprison ourselves

### Colossians 3:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.

- Are you giving forgiveness that same way as the Lord?
- Freely, generously, and not because the person deserves it?

Are you choosing to forgive because it's the right and reasonable thing to do?

When we've been wronged what we want is justice

- We want them to pay
- We secretly, or not so secretly want them to get what they deserve

When we do wrong we want mercy, not justice

- That's exactly what God gives us, again and again

## Four steps to forgiving others

### Recognize no one is perfect

When we are bitter and unforgiving we tend to *hate* that person

- When we hate somebody, we tend to lose our perspective about that person
- We tend to dehumanize the offender
  - We forget they are a person
- Remember: We're all in the same boat

### Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NLT)

<sup>20</sup> Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.

- We expect forgiveness when we do wrong
- We should expect to give it as well

### Relinquish your right to get even

### Romans 12:19 (NLT)

<sup>19</sup> Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back,"\* says the LORD.

- This is the heart of forgiveness
- You deserve to retaliate, but you must commit not to do so
- It's not fair, but it's healthy
- This isn't a one-time decision but a daily one that may even require moment-by-moment decisions

## **Respond to the evil with good**

This is how you know you've fully released someone from the wrong that has been committed against you

- Humanly speaking, it's nearly impossible to respond to evil with good
- You'll need God's help
- You'll need the love of Jesus to fill you up
- Why? God's love doesn't keep track of wrongs  
– 1 Corinthians 13

## **Refocus on God's plan for your life**

You stop focusing on the hurt and the person who hurt you  
Instead, you refocus on God's purpose for your life

God's purpose for your life is greater than any problem or pain you might be currently facing

As long as you continue to focus on the person who has hurt you, that person controls you

- In fact, if you don't release your offender, you will begin to resemble them

### **Philippians 3:13–14 (NLT)**

<sup>13</sup> Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.