

The Seven Last Words of Christ

The Fourth Word: Anguish

Matthew 27:46

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The Fourth Word: Anguish

Introduction

It is often profitable to study the last words of dying men. Many sermons have been preached on the last words of Jesus. As he hung on the cross on that first Good Friday he uttered seven short sentences or phrases. We usually call these the “seven last words of Christ.”

For the past few Good Fridays we have been examining these so-called “last words” of Christ.

The first word that Jesus uttered was a word of *forgiveness* addressed to the Father on behalf of those who were crucifying him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

The second word that Jesus uttered was a word of *salvation* spoken to the thief on the cross: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

The third word that Jesus uttered was a word of *compassion* addressed primarily to his mother who he entrusted into the care of the apostle John: “Dear woman, here is your son” (John 19:25-27).

The fourth word that Jesus uttered was a word of *anguish* addressed to the Father. It is found in Matthew 27:46:

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

Lesson

Max Lucado gives the following account in his book titled *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*.

The summer of 1980 in Miami was nothing to smile about. The Florida heat scorched the city during the day and baked it at

night. Riots, lootings, and racial tension threatened to snap the frayed emotions of the people. Everything soared: unemployment, inflation, the crime rate, and especially the thermometer. Somewhere in the midst of it all, a *Miami Herald* reporter captured a story that left the entire Gold Coast breathless. It was the story of Judith Bucknell. Attractive, young, successful, and dead.

Judith Bucknell was homicide number 106 that year. She was killed on a steamy June 9th evening. Age: 38. Weight: 109 pounds. Stabbed seven times. Strangled.

She kept a diary. Had she not kept this diary perhaps the memory of her would have been buried with her body. But the diary exists; a painful epitaph to a lonely life. The correspondent made this comment about her writings:

In her diaries, Judy created a character and a voice. The character is herself, wistful, struggling, weary; the voice is yearning. Judith Bucknell has failed to connect; age 38, many lovers, much love offered, none returned.

Her struggles weren't unusual. She worried about getting old, getting fat, getting married, getting pregnant, and getting by. She lived in stylish Coconut Grove (Coconut Grove is where you live if you are lonely but act happy).

Judy was the paragon of the confused human being. Half of her life was fantasy, half was nightmare. Successful as a secretary, but a loser at love. Her diary was replete with entries such as the following:

Where are the men with the flowers and champagne and music? Where are the men who call and ask for a genuine, actual date? Where are the men who would like to share more than my bed, my booze, my food. . . . I would like to have in my life, once before I pass through my life, the kind of sexual relationship which is part of a loving relationship.

She never did.

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Judy was not a prostitute. She was not on drugs or on welfare. She never went to jail. She was not a social outcast. She was respectable. She jogged. She hosted parties. She wore designer clothes and had an apartment that overlooked the bay. And she was very lonely. “I see people together and I’m so jealous I want to throw up. What about me! What about me!”

Though surrounded by people, she was on an island. Though she had many acquaintances, she had few friends. Though she had many lovers (fifty-nine in fifty-six months), she had little love.

“Who is going to love Judy Bucknell?” the diary continues. “I feel so old. Unloved. Unwanted. Abandoned. Used up. I want to cry and sleep forever.”

A clear message came from her aching words. Though her body died on June 9th from the wounds of a knife, her heart had died long before. . . from loneliness.

“I’m alone,” she wrote, “and I want to share something with somebody.”

Loneliness.

It’s a cry. A moan, a wail. It’s a gasp whose origin is in the recesses of our souls.

Can you hear it? The abandoned child. The divorcee. The quiet home. The empty mailbox. The long days. The longer nights. A one-night stand. A forgotten birthday. A silent phone.

Cries of loneliness. Listen again. Tune out the traffic and turn down the TV. The cry is there. Our cities are full of Judy Bucknells. You can hear their cries. You can hear them in the convalescent home among the sighs and shuffling feet. You can hear them in the prisons among the moans of shame and the calls for mercy. You can hear them if you walk the manicured streets of suburban America, among the aborted ambitions and aging homecoming queens. Listen for it in the halls of our high schools where peer pressure weeds out the “have-nots” from the “haves.”

This moan in a minor key knows all spectrums of society. From the top to the bottom. From the failures to the famous. From

the rich to the poor. From the married to the single. Judy Bucknell was not alone.

Many of you have been spared this cruel cry. Oh, you have been homesick or upset a time or two. But despair? Far from it. Suicide? Of course not. Be thankful that it hasn't knocked at your door. Pray that it never will. If you have yet to fight this battle, you are welcome to listen if you wish, but I'm really speaking to someone else.

I am speaking to those who know this cry firsthand. I'm speaking to those of you whose days are book-ended with broken hearts and long evenings. I'm speaking to those of you who can find a lonely person simply by looking in the mirror.

For you, loneliness is a way of life. The sleepless nights. The lonely bed. The distrust. The fear of tomorrow. The unending hurt.

When did it begin? In your childhood? At the divorce? At retirement? At the cemetery? When the kids left home?

Maybe you, like Judy Bucknell, have fooled everyone. No one knows that you are lonely. On the outside you are packaged perfectly. Your smile is quick. Your job is stable. Your clothes are sharp. Your waist is thin. Your calendar is full. Your walk brisk. Your talk impressive. But when you look in the mirror, you fool no one. When you are alone, the duplicity ceases and the pain surfaces.

Or maybe you don't try to hide it. Maybe you have always been outside the circle looking in, and everyone knows it. Your conversation is a bit awkward. Your companionship is seldom requested. Your clothes are dull. Your looks are common. Ziggy is your hero and Charlie Brown is your mentor.

Am I striking a chord? If I am, if you have nodded or sighed in understanding, I have an important message for you.

The most gut-wrenching cry of loneliness in history came not from a homicide victim or a prisoner or a widow or a patient. It came from a hill, from a cross, from the Messiah.

"My God, my God!" he screamed, "Why have you forsaken me?"

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Never have words carried so much hurt. Never has anyone been so lonely.

The crowd quietens as the priest receives the goat; the pure, unspotted goat. In somber ceremony he places his hands on the young animal. As the people witness, the priest makes his proclamation: "The sins of the people be upon you." The innocent animal receives the sins of the Israelites. All the lusting, adultery, and cheating are transferred from the sinners to this goat, to this scapegoat.

He is then carried to the edge of the wilderness and released. Banished. Sin must be purged, so the scapegoat is abandoned. "Run, goat! Run!"

The people are relieved.

Yahweh is appeased.

The sinbearer is alone.¹

And now on Skull's hill, the sinbearer is again alone. Every lie ever told, every object ever coveted, every promise ever broken is on his shoulders. He is sin.

God turns away. "Run, goat! Run!"

The despair is darker than the sky. It is more than Jesus can take. He withstood the beatings and remained strong at the mock trials. He watched in silence as those he loved ran away. He did not retaliate when the insults were hurled nor did he scream when the nails pierced his wrists.

But when God turned his head, that was more than he could handle.

"My God!" The wail rises from parched lips. The holy heart is broken. The sinbearer screams as he wanders in the cosmic wasteland. Out of the silent sky come the words screamed by all who walk in the desert of loneliness. "Why? Why have you forsaken me?"

Why did Jesus do it? Oh, I know, I know. I have heard the official answers. "To gratify the law." "To fulfill prophecy." And

¹ Paraphrase of Leviticus 16:22.

these answers are right. They are. But there is something more here. Something very compassionate. Something yearning. Something personal.

What is it?

I may be wrong, but I keep thinking of the diary. "I feel abandoned," she wrote. "Who is going to love Judith Bucknell?" And I keep thinking of the parents of the dead child. Or the friend at the hospital bedside. Or the elderly in the nursing home. Or the orphans. Or the cancer ward.

I keep thinking of all the people who cast despairing eyes toward the dark heavens and cry, "Why?"

And I imagine him. I imagine him listening. I imagine him holding out his nail-pierced hands showing that he who also was once alone, understands.

Oh, friend, if you are here tonight, and if you feel yourself crying out, "Why?" know that he understands. He was once abandoned so that you might never be alone again.

Oh, cry out to him and ask him to come into your life and to fill that loneliness that only he can fill. For that is why he came. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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