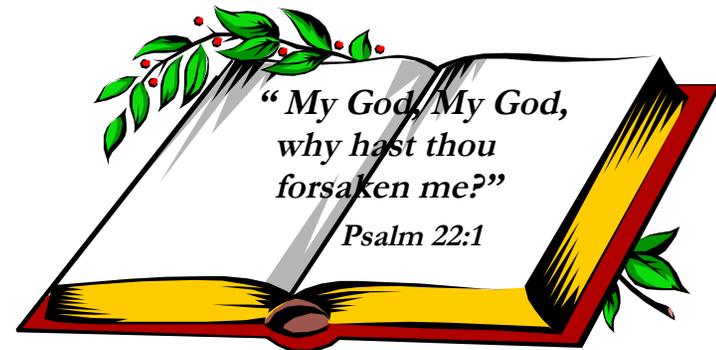


Little Flock #91 - G. V. Wigram

1. O What a debt we owe
To Him who shed His blood,
And cleansed our souls, and gave us power
To stand before His God.
2. Saviour and Lord ! we own
The riches of Thy grace;
For we can call Thy God, our God--
Can bow before His face.
3. Thy Father, too, above,
We worship as our own,
Who gave with Thee the Spirit's cry,
To us His sons foreknown.

E. L. Ferguson - January 2007

THE SEVEN UTTERANCES OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST FROM THE CROSS



JND translation is used for Scriptural references

INTRODUCTION

When reading some Scriptures we feel like the prodigal son in the parable in **Luke 15** who had sandals put on his feet. We are filled with a sense of the grace, privilege and dignity God has lavished on us for He 'has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ' (**Eph. 1:3**). At other times we are conscious of His holy perfection in contrast to our weakness and unworthiness. Like Moses we hear the words, 'Draw not nigh hither: loose thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (**Ex. 3:5**). Surely a consideration of the words of the Lord Jesus from the cross must be counted among the latter. We recoil from probing them in an irreverent, indifferent or intellectual manner, yet we must '... turn aside and see this great sight' for God has recorded it in His Word for our learning. It is to do with the death of our Lord when He secured us for the eternal favour of God.

If the Psalms convey His feelings, the Gospels recall His words. And what words! Whereas He had to say of us, '... the things which go forth out of the mouth come out of the heart, and these defile man' (**Matt. 15:18**), He could say of Himself, 'the words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life' (**John 6:63**). The officers of the Sanhedrin said to their superiors, 'Never man spoke thus, as this man speaks' (**John 7:46**). When the Jews asked Him, 'Who art thou?' He answered, 'Altogether that which I also say to you' (**John 8:25**). All the people in the synagogue at Nazareth on that Sabbath day when He announced the acceptable year of the Lord 'bore witness to him, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth' (**Luke 4:22**). So too His precious words from the cross cleanse, refresh and solemnize our hearts. They describe His wonderful person and express the marvellous grace of God, for '... God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their offences; and putting in us the word of that reconciliation' (**2 Cor. 5:19**). As we ponder over something of the depth of suffering and love they bring before us may we love the Lord Jesus more and become more like Him while we wait to see Him face to face.

It is surely in keeping with the perfection of the suffering and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus that Scripture records *seven* utterances He spoke from the cross and three of them were with a *loud cry*. No one Gospel has them all, but they are all recorded in direct speech at least once. Luke records the first and last words of the Lord from the cross and begins with "Father" because in Luke the Lord Jesus is seen as the Son of Man, the perfect Man. In John's gospel where the Lord Jesus is presented as the Son of God we hear Him delivering his mother to the beloved

THUS WE HAVE THREE LOUD CRIES FROM THE CROSS:

1. THE CRY OF ABANDONMENT

"but about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Matt. 27:46

"And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, [saying], Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Mark 15:34

2. THE CRY OF VICTORY OR CONQUEST

"And Jesus, having again cried with a loud voice, gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom,"

Matt.27:50-51

"And Jesus, having uttered a loud cry, expired. And the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom."

Mark 15:37-38

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now finished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, says, I thirst. There was a vessel therefore there full of vinegar, and having filled a sponge with vinegar, and putting hyssop round it, they put it up to his mouth. When therefore Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and having bowed his head, he delivered up his spirit."

John 19:28-30

3. THE CRY OF COMMITMENT

"And Jesus, having cried with a loud voice, said, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. And having said this he expired."

Luke 23:46

dependent Man. Having said this, He yielded up His spirit; yet we see He is more than Man, for at one moment there was the loud voice, His vigour unimpaired, and the next moment He was dead. In every sense His was a supernatural death.

By this cry the independent life of the spirit is fully and formally owned. The Lord, in dying, commends His "spirit" to the Father. Stephen afterwards, in dying, commends his to Jesus. This is a happy witness to us that both the Lord and His servant looked for something superior to, and independent of, the body. They looked to a condition of *the spirit*. This was not what the dying thief looked for, but what, through surpassing grace, he got. As a Jew he looked for a future kingdom; but his dying Lord promises him present life with Himself in paradise. For "life" as well as "immortality" (incorruption of the body) are brought to light through the gospel (**2 Tim. 1**).

Yes, 'though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered; and having been perfected, became to all them that obey him, author of eternal salvation' (**Heb. 5:7-9**). He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and 'having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God, waiting from henceforth until his enemies be set for the footstool of his feet' (**Heb. 10:12-13**). How much is bound up in the word 'It is finished'.

How could not all this but impress our souls to their depths? Even the centurion in charge of the execution was persuaded that "certainly this was a righteous Man" (**v.47**). Matthew mentions that the centurion and others with him, also declared Him to be the Son of God, but Luke emphasizes His manhood and so leaves that statement out. On the part of the common people too, how different was their attitude than when clamouring for His crucifixion! Returning from that sight, they beat their breasts, their thoughts deeply solemnized in realizing they had seen what they had never expected, nor could ever forget. May it be so with us beloved!

disciple, stating His thirst for souls and finishing the work that He came to do. This emphasizes His authority as God the Son. In Matthew and Mark the single recording of the Lord being forsaken of God is given. This is fitting considering it is these two gospels which emphasize the guilt of the Jews and the Gentiles respectively. Taking the Gospels together yields what seems to be a clear sequence and divides the utterances into two groups of three and four, coinciding with the division of the six hours that the Lord Jesus hung upon the cross. From the third hour (our nine o'clock) to the sixth hour (our twelve noon) He 'endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself' (**Heb. 12:3**). But '... from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour' (**Matt. 27:45**), and it was then that He suffered at the hand of God. In the first three hours He suffered from men because *He was righteous*, and in the second three hours He was the focus of God's wrath because He Himself was bearing '*our sins*' in his own body on the tree' (**1 Peter 2:24**). Psalm 22 verse 2 may refer to this division when it says, 'My God, I cry by day, and thou answerest not; and by night, and there is no rest for me.' Oh, what a momentous event! It includes the depths of man's unrighteousness and cruelty, *and* the holy judgement and forsaking of God in their terrible completeness. Yet it is also the occasion when, 'Loving kindness and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other' (**Psalms 85:10**), so that God 'should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus' (**Rom. 3:26**). The grace and truth of the Lord Jesus shine through in their perfection, and are expressed wonderfully by what He says as He hung their on the cross for to bring poor rebel sinners to a holy God.



***'And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'* (Luke 23:34)**

Luke's gospel presents the Lord Jesus as the Meal Offering, the Son of Man, the perfect Man.

Only One equal with God could make this request (**Php. 2:6**). Perhaps the Lord Jesus said these words as they nailed Him to the cross, or lifted Him up on it. It appears that He said them very early for Luke records them as being spoken before the soldiers who crucified Him sat down to part His garments and cast lots for them. How appropriate that it should be Luke alone among the Gospel writers

who does this for his is the gospel of the perfect Man. Here at the mercy of men, Jew and Gentile, He receives no mercy because their hearts, hardened by sin, are set on a godless course. They have no conception of His beauty and worth and the awfulness of what they are doing. It is their hour and the power of darkness (**Luke 22:53**). They are the many bulls of Bashan and the dogs encompassing Him (**Psalms 22:12, 16**). *He* is the Man at the greatest extremity yet full of compassion crying out for mercy to be shown to them. What can be fuller in its answer to 'For my love they are mine adversaries; but I give myself unto prayer' (**Psalms 109:4**)

Not only were their hearts hardened, but their minds were empty as expressed by the name of the place where they crucified the Lord Jesus: Golgotha, the place called Skull (**Luke 23:33**). A few weeks later, on the day of Pentecost, Peter was to preach to the Jews that Jesus was 'given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,' but that they had crucified and slain Him by the hand of lawless men' (**Acts 2:23**). On a later day he said, 'And now, brethren, I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers' (**Acts 3:17**), and Paul was to write to the Corinthians that none of the princes of this age knew the hidden wisdom of God, 'for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (**1 Cor. 2:8**). This is the beautiful answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus. All the people had cried, 'His blood be on us, and on our children' (**Matt. 27:25**), but God treats their act as manslaughter rather than murder that He might shew mercy to those who repent and run to the city of refuge for protection from His vengeance (**Num. 35 and Josh. 20**). Thousands did so when Peter preached and found a place of safety in the assembly which they will enjoy for eternity for this high priest will never die again (**Acts 2:40-41, Josh. 20:6, Rom. 6:10 and Heb. 7:23-27**).

It is striking to note that the first and last words the Lord Jesus says from the cross are addressed to His Father and recorded by Luke. Only His Father could fully appreciate the tenderness of this prayer, but the truth goes deeper still. In the language of Psalm 22 this might be referred to as a daytime cry because God is not yet dealing with Him about our sins. His disciples have left Him alone, yet He is not alone for the Father is with Him (**John 16:32**). How appropriate, considering Luke's presentation of the Lord, that here we have something which shows the reality and enjoyment in manhood of a relationship which was in the Godhead from eternity. His Sonship is as true of Him as Man as it is of Him as God, and in the face of the betrayal, denial, rejection and cruelty of men, what a joy it was for Him to speak to One whose heart answered to His heart in the deepest sense of

But let us ponder something of what it meant to the Lord Jesus Himself to say that word. The cross had stood at the end of His pathway here and cast its shadow over every step He took (**John 3:14, 8:28 & 12:31-33**). Many a time 'his hour had not yet come' (**John 7:30**), but He had set His face 'like a flint' (**Isa. 50:7, Luke 9:53**) and knew perfectly what awaited Him. He said in the last week of His life, 'Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour. But on account of this have I come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name' (**John 12:27-28**). How truly He could say of Himself, 'But I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straightened until it shall have been accomplished!' (**Luke 12:50**). The pressure was never more so than in the place of the oil press-Gethsemane-where He 'offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him out of death, with strong crying and tears' (**Heb. 5:7**). He prayed, 'Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me:-but then, not my will, but thine be done.' An angel appeared to Him from heaven strengthening Him, and being in conflict He prayed more intently. His sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth, but, praise Him, He rose from the place of prayer and went out to the place of sacrifice 'bearing his cross' (**Luke 22:42-45 & John 19:17**). Each one who believes on Him can say, 'It was *my* cross, but in wonderful obedience to His Father and compassion for me He made it *His* cross.' How precious then for Him to say, 'It is accomplished' for it signals His liberation from all this. We sense that it may be at this moment that God answers Him 'from the horns of the buffaloes' (**Psalms 22:21**): the point of extremity when the forces that are against Him are about to deliver their fatal blow. He is heard 'because of his piety', and speaks immediately to His Father to commit His spirit to Him and be saved out of death.



'And Jesus, having cried with a loud voice, said, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. And having said this, he expired' (Luke 23:46)

All was finished, and the Lord then ***with a loud voice prays***, "Father, into your hands I commit My Spirit." This is the third loud cry the cry of COMMITTAL. In perfect knowledge that the time had come, He expired. He dismissed His own spirit with the authority to lay down His life. None could take it from Him (**Jn.10:17-18**). Wondrous, awesome, amazing sight!

In these closing words on the cross we see the One, who all along had been marked by prayerful submission to the will of God, closing His path as the perfect,

food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work' (**John 4:34**). He anticipated the fruition of this when He prayed in the hearing of His disciples, 'I have glorified thee on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it' (**John 17:4**). Yes, the glorious outcome was never in doubt, and He prayed these words in serenity as if the hour was past already and He was above and beyond it all with His Father in heaven. But then He crossed the torrent Cedron, swollen with winter water, picture surely of what He was about to pass through, and 'gave Himself' on the cross. There the only One who could execute the unique and momentous work that gives glory to God is alone competent to declare it 'finished', and we are like the offerer of old who laid his hand on the burnt offering and found it was 'accepted for him to make atonement for him' (**Lev. 1:4**).

There are echoes of this word in the Revelation but the language is not exactly the same. We read that when the seventh angel pours his bowl on the air there comes out a great voice from the temple of the heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done' (**Rev. 16:17**). The climax of God's judgments on this world is solemn indeed, but it cannot match what the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross. There as we have seen already He dealt with sin as to its root and fruit to glorify God and bring blessing to us. In Revelation it is a matter of God meeting man's rebellion and defiance so that he becomes its involuntary object, and his arrangements, be they economic, religious or whatever, are consumed utterly. But when the Lord does the work of the cross He endures the judgment, glorifies God, secures His purpose, brings blessing to believers and comes forth victorious. He, not the Judge, says, 'It is finished.'

Later we read in connection with the new heaven and the new earth that the Lord Jesus has His bride and the tabernacle of God is with men. Death and all the other sad consequences of sin do not exist for the former things have passed away and the One on the throne makes all things new. How wonderful to read that He instructs John to write for His words are true and faithful, and then says, 'It is done' (**Rev. 21:1-6**). God always finishes what He begins, but we are surely right to say that all He does, including the new heaven and the new earth, has its spiritual and moral foundation in the cross. The work the Lord Jesus did there surpasses every other in its content, significance and intensity so that it is the centre of everything. What God counsels in eternity looks forward to it and what He completes looks back, and His purpose finds its confirmation in the Lord's cry of accomplishment.

all. Surely it was an oasis of refreshment and peace in the midst of the barren clamour that was going on all around Him.

Like Abraham and Isaac of old, Father and Son, 'went both of them together' to the place of sacrifice (**Gen. 22:6, 8**). This Son knew everything, whereas Isaac was in ignorance, but the dependence of the perfect Man is sweet and a beautiful introduction to the dark and dreadful hours to come. His people can follow him here, and at his martyrdom Stephen did so by echoing similar words to the first and last words of His Lord from the cross. While he could not make a judgement as to what his murderers did or did not know, his cry, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge' (**Acts 7:60**), had the same character of mercy. He was imbued with the knowledge of 'Christ once humbled here' and would walk 'even as he walked' (**1 John 2:6**). But he also had a sight of Him 'standing at the right hand of God' (**Acts 7:56**), and looking on Him in His glory with unveiled face was being 'transformed according to the same image from glory to glory' (**2 Cor. 3:18**). It is a precious example of what the Holy Spirit desires to work in all our lives for the glory of the Lord Jesus.



'Jesus therefore, seeing his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, says to his mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then he says unto the disciple, Behold thy mother' (John 19:26, 27)

John's gospel presents the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, the only begotten of God.

How beautifully the Holy Spirit guides Luke and John to witness to the truth and value of each other's particular presentation of the Lord Jesus, and thus confirm the wonderful fact that following His incarnation He is, in His glorious person, truly God and truly man. In His first word from the cross, Luke sets forth something intrinsic to His Godhead glory as it is true of Him even in His dependant manhood and His relationship as the only-begotten Son of the Father. John on the other hand gives us a glimpse of feelings connected with His real and perfect manhood before His death and resurrection. Perhaps **Matthew 13:55** indicates that Joseph had passed away and Mary was a widow and particularly His responsibility because He was her firstborn son. Yet He would not be deflected

from being about His Father's business (**Luke 2:49**). He commits her into the care and love of a disciple who knew His love and who would write later, 'And we have seen, and testify, that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world' and also, 'We love because he has first loved us' (**1 John 4:14, 19**). Perhaps the words of the Lord Jesus to His mother about being about His Father's business were going through her mind as she stood by the cross. Certainly she would have heard Simeon's words echoing across more than thirty years, 'and even a sword shall go through thine own soul' (**Luke 2:35**). She, like the women who had followed Him during the years of His public ministry, was prepared to be as close to Him as possible now, even though all His disciples had forsaken Him and fled.

The distinct impression given by the gospel narratives and what we know of the practice of crucifixion in those days is that though the scene was very public it was also intimate in a most intimidating way. The Lord and the two thieves crucified with Him were hanging no more than a few feet above the ground so that the rulers and the surging crowd of people were able to get very close to Him to hurl abuse, ridicule and reproach in His face. What a distressing experience it must have been for His mother and the other women to be there and to hear it all. But how much more for Him! How deeply those words, 'He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him. For he said, I am Son of God' and, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save' (**Matt 27:43**) and (**Mark 15:31**) must have affected Him.

There is no record of His mother or the other women saying anything to the Lord Jesus. Given the state of their hearts and the understanding of their minds what could they have said? In this sense there was an inability even on the part of these brave women to rise to that for which His spirit yearned, 'Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am overwhelmed: and I looked for sympathy, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none' (**Psalms 69:20**). But despite this *He* spoke and comforted them, and in the case of His mother provided for her need.

These words appear to be spoken relatively early, for we read in connection with later happenings that the other women 'stood afar off ... beholding these things' (**Luke 23:49**). Evidently as time passed and the darkness had come they had moved away from the cross. Surely it is in keeping with His perfect sensitivity and care that He commutes her distress by committing her to one who took her to his own home 'from that hour' (**John 19:27**). **Proverbs 19:22** says, 'The charm of a man is his kindness', and how charming He is in the face of man's carelessness, hatred and cruelty, both in the kindness He shows to His mother and the

(**Ex. 11:5**). He presents the Lord Jesus as the perfect servant of God (indeed, of all) and the sin offering. The word he uses for the way the Lord cries (*afeiz*) means '*sent forth*'. We might say that having dealt with sin in all its spiritual and moral repugnance to the satisfaction of God He retires in the true character of His servant-hood to let the word itself announce that all is done. We were 'serving various lusts and pleasures' but He does the work that we could never do at all cost to Himself that 'the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God' might appear (**Titus 3:3-5**).

Luke's gospel follows a moral order in recording the events of the Lord's life. His subject is the constant and even flow of grace with which the Holy Spirit was absolutely complacent and the Father found full delight. The manifold and precious attributes of the Lord's person were perfect in themselves and in relation to each other even under the most severe testing. The fine flour of the meal offering of old deluged with oil and dressed with frankincense is but a picture of this. So it is that Luke describes in detail how the Lord 'offered himself spotless to God' by the eternal Spirit (**Heb. 9:14**) but does not dwell on the sacrifice itself. Nevertheless he does refer to the beginning and end times of the three hours of darkness, and records that 'the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple rent in the midst' (**Luke 23:45**). How these references witness to a specific event when something so solemn and significant occurred that the ruler of the natural day was deprived of light-bearing and the curtain which symbolised our darkness away from God's wonderful light was torn asunder. Surely this is confirmation, in the very gospel that presents His life here as the perfect Man, that God's glory and our salvation in regard to sin and sins rest entirely on the work of the cross.

John alone of the gospel writers records these words for who but God can weigh up such a matter in the divine balance and declare that it has been accomplished. In the original language it is literally one word (as was the expression of thirst), and the Lord Jesus *says* it but does not address it to anyone. These features give it the character of an emphatic pronouncement that is both authoritative and absolute. It reminds us too of the burnt offering for it was His delight to do the will of His Father: 'Wherefore coming into the world he says, Sacrifice and offering thou willedst not; but thou hast prepared me a body. Thou tookest no pleasure in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin. Then I said, Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will' (**Psalms 40:6-8, Heb. 10:5-7**). He taught His disciples to pray: 'Let thy will be done as in heaven so upon the earth' (**Matt. 6:10**), and exemplified it in His course here: 'My

marvellously. He deals with sin and sins 'that we might become God's righteousness in him' and 'that he might bring us to God' (**2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 3:18**). Furthermore the word 'finished' or 'accomplished' in the original language means 'brought to an end' or 'carried out to the full', and the tense used has the force that it abides so for eternity. Yes, the work is evidently completed and never needs to be repeated. What wonderful assurance this gives us! Truly, the words of the psalmist are fulfilled: 'Loving-kindness and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other' (**Psalm 85:10**).

But the scope of the blessing goes wider and further still for the Lord Jesus is 'indeed the Saviour of the world' (**John 4:42**).

Wider because His cry of accomplishment confirms that He is 'the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world' (**1 John 2:2**).

Further for if the prophet asks, 'and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living,' the psalmist answers, 'A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done it' (**Isa. 53:8, Psalm 22:30-31**).

Yes, 'the world to come' will be filled with the knowledge of what He has done, but let us who have come into the blessing now live in spiritual and moral conformity with it despite 'the present evil world'. Let us remember that He accomplished the work 'that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit'; indeed that 'we may live to righteousness' (**Rom. 8:4, 1 Peter 2:24**).

Matthew, the gospel of Zion's king and the trespass offering, uses a remarkable word to describe the way in which the Lord Jesus cries (kraxaz). It is an onomatopoeic word often used in Scripture for *loud, instant* and *highly charged utterances*. How appropriate that the One whose accusation rightly declares Him King should not only assert Himself in this way, but in doing so confirm what His spirit anticipated in the Psalms: 'then I restored that which I took not away' (**Psalm 69:4**). His people, the Jews, though especially privileged (**Rom. 9:4-5**), were chiefly responsible for the act which capped man's rejection of God and His Christ (**Acts 10:36-39**), but He makes restitution for the despite and dishonour done to God and even adds thereto.

Mark, on the other hand, takes us 'from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sitteth on his throne, even unto the firstborn of the bond-woman that is behind the mill'

confidence He displays in His disciple. He perfectly discharges this particular responsibility in connection with the first man, and in doing so sets a wonderful example to us. He does not commit her to His brothers and sisters, for as yet they were unbelieving. We read in **Acts 1:14** that both she and His brethren were in the upper room giving themselves 'with one accord to continual prayer.' No doubt too God used it in developing John's ministry in regard to the truth of the family of God, and in particular the spiritual welfare of godly women and their children.



'And Jesus said to him, Verily I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43)

So far we have heard the Lord Jesus pray for His enemies and provide for His mother. Now we hear Him make a very wonderful promise to one of the two thieves crucified with Him. Years later Paul, speaking of his own service, was to say to the elders of the assembly in Ephesus, 'that thus labouring we ought to come in aid of the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive' (**Acts 20:35**). Was the Lord exemplifying these words in the way He comes to the aid of a dying but repentant thief, and gives him the very best of Heaven though He Himself is suffering the very worst of man's hatred and about to endure the wrath of God? It is a remarkable incident! If we are right to judge that the Lord spoke early to meet the need of His mother in her silent grief, then it is a wonderful contrast to see Him ready to respond at what appears to be the last opportunity for the thief to cry to Him for help.

It is the only case in the whole matter of the cross where someone is recorded addressing the Lord Jesus with esteem and reverence. Matthew relates in connection with the reviling of the passers-by and the mocking of the religious leaders that '... the robbers also who had been crucified with him cast the same reproaches on him' (**Matt 27:44**). Mark does the same, but only Luke describes the change that took place in one of them, and it shows how God can work in the worst. John writes of the Lord, 'He came to his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he the right to be children of God, to those that believe on his name' (**John 1:12**). This man had come to realise what his fellow thief did not: that if the Lord Jesus was to save Himself He could not save them, and that if He was to save them then He Himself must die. There was a work of the Spirit in His heart which recognised God was true and every man false

(Romans 3:4). He justified God and condemned Himself. Repentance brings us to the very bottom so that God might take us to the very top. Paul's testimony in a nutshell to both Jews and Greeks was, 'repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ' **(Acts 20:21)**. The repentant thief had heard the Lord's prayer to His Father and His words to His mother and His disciple. He had witnessed His calm and holy demeanour. This One was so different from himself, and yet so approachable. During His public ministry He had said, 'All that the Father gives me shall come to me, and him that comes to me I will not at all cast out' **(John 6:37)**. The thief hung beside the Lord Jesus for at least another three hours before he died, but he was not able to speak to Him again. He died after the Lord Jesus, but when he did so it was secured in Christ **(1 Thess 4:16)** because he had taken his opportunity to get right with God when it had come to him those hours before. If you do not know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour we would plead with you to do the same now.

If speaking those words of confession and faith brought salvation to the thief, hearing them must have been a delight to the heart of the Lord Jesus. What a change from the enmity and folly of impotently taking sides against Him with those who had crucified them. Pilate the governor queried His kingship, but then announced it from the judgment seat and put it as a title on the cross in three languages, possibly to bait the Jews. They used it as a device to force the governor's hand. The soldiers made a mockery of it. The chief priests taunted the Lord with it. By contrast the repentant thief recognised it as being 'not of this world ... not from hence' **(John 18:36)**. He says, 'Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom' **(Luke 23:42)**.

Had not the Lord Jesus spoken of Himself in the parable when He had said, 'A certain high-born man went to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and return' **(Luke 19:13)**. This man, close to death as he was, realised there was another world and order of things to reckon with. He was in this sense safer than the people who milled about the cross in the energy of life, but without a thought of the future and the consequences of the event in which they were participants.

The words are wonderful. Firstly, '*Verily*' or truly. Secondly, '*I say*': something pronounced by the Lord Himself with His personal authority. Thirdly, '*to thee*': it was for the man himself to enjoy. Fourthly, '*To-day*': he did not have to wait until the Lord came in His kingdom; it was something that would be his before the day was out. Fifthly, '*thou shalt*': it was certain. Sixthly, '*be with me*': the promise intimately connected him with the Lord Jesus Himself. Seventhly, '*in paradise*': it would be in

We realise also the blessed words that the prophet pens later: 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed' **(Isa. 53:2-5)**. How plain that salvation can be found in none other but the One 'who, when reviled, reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not; but gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously; who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' **(1 Pet. 2:23-24)**.

As we have seen before, men did not know how great a transaction was taking place, though they contributed the sin that made it necessary and furnished the hateful circumstances in which it occurred. But, praise God, the One who did know and suffered as the focus of it all knew also that all things were now finished, and says so in the word before us. The fact that this is close to the plaintive expression of thirst, and the cry of forsakenness just before that, should fill our hearts with a deep appreciation of His dedication to the will of God and grace toward us.

The words of Solomon's spouse are a fitting commentary: 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither do the floods drown it' **(Cant. 8:7)**. It is the only one of the seven utterances that the Lord says from the cross that is recorded or referred to in all the gospels **(Matt. 27:50, Mark 15:37, Luke 23:46, John 19:30)** although the synoptists describe it simply as a loud voice or cry.

In these respects the Holy Spirit gives it a significance of similar import to the one we saw in connection with the cry of forsakenness. How rightly so, for it complements the depth of suffering registered then with a height of triumph now. It is testimony in circumstances of weakness to strength in victory, not resignation in failure or defeat.

The transaction is great indeed, but the One who undertakes it is greater still. He who is truly God and truly Man in one glorious Person is able to satisfy all *God's* holy and righteous requirements on *our* behalf. During His life here He said of Himself, 'Many good works have I shown you of my Father,' and others said of Him, 'He does all things well' **(John 10:32, Mark 7:37)**. But what can rival the work of works that brings glory to God and blessing to us about the question of sin? It is the work to which all the other works point, and on which they all depend. We might have thought that an act that glorifies God in all His holiness and righteousness would exclude any thought of salvation for sinful and sinning man but, no, a perfect sacrifice to Him on our behalf *must* accomplish both, and that

him come to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water' (**John 7:37**), and 'And let him that is athirst come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely' (**Rev. 22:17**).

May it be our desire and resolution, as those who have received of His fulness, to return to Ephesian first love for Him, and never be like that Laodicean lukewarmness He will spue out of His mouth after the assembly has been raptured. It should surely move us that when He departed His life here His last remembrance of the behaviour of men towards Him was the bitter taste of the drink of vinegar they gave Him when He said, 'I thirst'. We have only a very limited conception of what this meant to His holy and gracious sensibilities, but we can be assured that He delights to receive refreshment now in the form of love from overflowing hearts. Let us then render our drink offerings of worship and dedication to Him while we wait for Him to take us to be with Himself in His Father's house above.



'When therefore Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished' (John 19:30)

These words were also uttered with a loud cry. This is the second loud cry, the cry of VICTORY or CONQUEST.

When the Lord Jesus received the vinegar the Scripture was fulfilled in every respect as to the details of His life. The expression of His thirst bespoke His devotion to God, but the sour wine was testimony itself to the worthless thoughts men had of Him. It was ever so: 'He came to his own, and his own received him not' (**John 1:11**). In a coming day they will mourn, 'every family apart', no doubt in the words of the prophet: 'He hath no form nor lordliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and left alone of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their faces; despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; and we, we did regard him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.'

These words uncover our own hearts too, and we must identify ourselves with their sad confession, though in grace we have been given to see already 'the King in his beauty' (**Isa. 33:17; Zech. 12:12,**).

the place of delight; the presence of God Himself. This man, disreputable though he was naturally, had come by faith to possess what the Lord Jesus, in His perfect manhood, looked forward to. 'Thou wilt make known to me the path of life: thy countenance is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' (**Psalms 16:11**). As he became identified with the Lord Jesus in the shame and degradation of '... the death of the cross' (**Phil 2:8**), so he would enjoy life with Him in the glory of Heaven. It might be taken as an illustration of the truths of **2 Timothy 2:11-12**, '... if we have died together with him, we shall also live together; if we endure, we shall also reign together.' What a change of scene! What a great salvation!

The Lord has not yet received the kingdom in public display and returned to this world. '... we see not yet all things subjected to him' (**Heb 2:8**). We are in the waiting time which John calls 'the tribulation and kingdom and patience' (**Rev 1:9**). The kingdom is present in mystery form to be worked out morally in the hearts and lives of individual believers who are its subjects. The Lord Jesus is prefigured by David, in rejection and 'escaped to the cave of Adullam' (**1 Sam 22:1**). We are 'the poor in spirit' of **Matthew 5:3**, prefigured by those who went down to David, who were in distress, in debt and of embittered spirit. They 'collected round him ... and he became a captain over them' (**1 Sam 22:2**).

We have heard how richly the Lord Jesus answered the prayer of the repentant thief. We have seen that it was not only a matter of salvation, but also one of delight for the Lord Jesus. Within a relatively short time the thief was 'dead and gone' as far as this world was concerned, but 'with Christ' which is far better by God's reckoning (**Phil 1:23**). Now the Lord Jesus is looking for us 'the living' to continue to give Him delight while we remain in this world and have the opportunity to do so. This is especially the case at the Lord's supper or breaking of bread when we call Him to mind saying to us, 'This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me' (**1 Cor 11:24-25**). Each Lord's Day He desires to gather us together to His name to announce His death 'until he come' (**v 26**). We are gathered by the Holy Spirit around Him, and as we hear His words afresh we may break through like the three mighty men who heard the words of David when he longed in the cave that one would give him 'to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is in the gate' (**2 Sam 23:15**). They broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well and took it to David. He would not drink it, but poured it out to Jehovah because it was the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives. But Jesus is worthy of the spiritual

energy that would break through every hindrance in this life to give Him the worship that justly belongs to Him. As He waits to receive His Kingdom, return through the gate and be given His rightful place in this world, let us, His heavenly people who will come with Him at that time, learn something from the repentant thief, and even now refresh Him with our response of appreciation for His glory and beauty. 'He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head' (**Psalm 110:7**).

We have heard Him from the third hour (our nine o'clock) to the sixth hour (our twelve noon) when He 'endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself' (**Heb. 12:3**). In these first three hours He suffered from men because He was righteous, yet what moves us about the three words He says during this time is that they express compassion for men. How He exemplifies the teaching He had given His disciples three years earlier on a mountain in Galilee, 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you' (**Matt. 5:44**). The shadows have overtaken the brightness of those first days of public ministry when He announced the constitution of His kingdom. His people have delivered Him up to be crucified by the Romans. He is on a mountain with an altogether different aspect-Golgotha.

4

'but about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46)

'and at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34)

The sixth hour registers a distinct and solemn change. The first three hours have been characterised by man's deep moral and spiritual darkness, and the words of the Lord Jesus have been pure, bright lights in the midst of it. This is the first loud cry, the cry of ABANDONMENT. But now the scene becomes darker in a strange and terrible way. The very heavens declare it, 'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour' (**Matt. 27:45**). Man has thought, said and done his worst, but in the second three hours the Lord Jesus endures suffering of a completely different order because it is at the hand of God. Why? It is because God makes Him who knew not sin 'sin for us', and He Himself

But the part men take is so different. Towards the end of **Psalm 42** there is a repetition of the reproachful words: 'Where is thy God?' This reflects what happened at the cross. In the first three hours the Lord Jesus hung there, the chief priests mocking, with the scribes and elders, said, 'He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him. For he said, I am Son of God' (**Matt. 27:41-43**).

They say, 'This man calls for Elias.' They cannot believe there is any connection between Him and God. He is a crucified and, therefore, cursed man. In their view He can only be crying to God's long promised representative, Elijah, to deliver Him. This shows the extent to which they hold Him in contempt, for it is unmistakable that His cry is to God. Perhaps they are startled by the loudness of it. In their experience of crucifixions no one who has hung on a cross for so long has cried out with such strength. There seems to be a feeling that this is so special that it may actually presage Elijah's intervention. One (no doubt one who heard the words 'I thirst') fetches the vinegar and the rest allow it to be given to Him in view of this visitation. So at best it is a gift borne of callous curiosity, and really amounts to derision and reproach upon reproach for Him. His spirit in the Psalms says: '...for thy sake I have borne reproach', '...the reproaches of them that reproach thee have fallen upon me. And I wept, my soul was fasting; that also was to my reproach,' 'Thou knowest my reproach, and my shame' and 'Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am overwhelmed' (**Psalm 69:7, 9-10, 19-20**).

The vinegar of those days was a thin sour wine more likely to set the teeth on edge than quench thirst (**Pro. 10:26**). Some six hours earlier, when He came to Golgotha, the soldiers 'gave to him to drink vinegar mingled with gall' but having tasted it He would not drink (**Matt. 27:34**), no doubt, because the gall (or myrrh in Mark) was a kind of primitive drug and He would enter into all that God allowed and laid upon Him. Subsequently they 'made game of him, coming up offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself' (**Luke 23:36-37**). But He does not save Himself in the least degree. He is doing the will of the One who sent Him. Men cannot assuage His thirst but their actions, introduced by His words, serve to fulfil the poignant commentary of His Spirit in the Psalms: 'Yea, they gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink' (**Psalm 69:21**).

In His life He had delighted to give men and women to drink freely of His grace, and still does today: '...whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever, but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life eternal' (**John 4:14**), 'If any one thirst, let

hyssop round it, they put it up to his mouth' (**John 19:29**). It thus appears that the Lord must have expressed His thirst very soon after His cry of forsakenness and this shows us that the two are intimately connected. One is to do with Him as the Man who suffers at the hand of God as the *trespass* and *sin* offering. The other is in keeping with John's presentation of Him as the Son of God for He says it knowing that all things are now finished and with the purpose that Scripture might be fulfilled, and as the *burnt* offering.

It is true that the words 'I thirst' speak of extreme physical thirst. The spirit of the Lord Jesus in the Psalms anticipates this: 'My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my palate' (**Psalms 22:15**). Thirst is one of the terrible physical sufferings that belong to crucifixion, and man's response is to offer a vessel 'full of vinegar'. The Lord's experience of thirst is therefore another moving glimpse in John's gospel of feelings connected with His manhood. But the meaning of what He says to thirst is firstly a spiritual one. It is the yearning the Holy Spirit leads the psalmist to describe when he writes: 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God' (**Psalms 42:2**). This is intensely personal to the Lord Jesus (this utterance is the only one of the seven that refers to Himself alone) it is imbued with a desire that is exclusively for God.

Till then tears are His bread day and night. The ungodly say to Him all the day, 'Where is thy God?' He pours out His soul within Him. He is delivered up by the multitude when His desire is to lead them into God's presence and blessing. And, oh, how His soul is cast down. But despite it all His confidence is in God, and He remembers Him from the land of the Jordan which means '*descender*' and speaks of death, from the Hermons which suggests *seclusion*, even *aloneness*, and from mount Mizar or '*smallness*'. No doubt the remnant who flee to these geographical locations in the time of Jacob's trouble will experience something of the same moral condition. However, they will wait for their God in safety in the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice. In contrast the Lord Jesus is exposed to all the horror of the three hours of darkness. Trouble is near, and there is none to help.

He is the scapegoat bearing upon Him all our iniquities to a land apart from men. He is a worm, and no man and 'all thy breakers and thy billows are gone over me.' It is His desire for God and His dedication to His will expressed in the words 'I thirst', that give His part in all that happens here its beautiful burnt offering aspect (**Psalms 42:1-7, Cant. 2:14, Psalms 22:6, 11 and Lev. 16:21-22 & 1:7-9**).

bears 'our *sins* in his body on the tree' (**2 Cor. 5:21 and 1 Pet. 2:24**). God condemns 'sin in the flesh'-the root principle of lawlessness that works in us, and the Lord Jesus suffers 'for sins'-the fruit in thought, word and deed of that principle (**Rom. 8:3 and 1 Pet. 3:18**). Our thoughts cannot begin to plumb the depths of His suffering when God deals with Him in unerring and unsparing judgment about these alien and obnoxious things. The very bowels of creation cry out; "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts ..." (**Psalms 42:7**)

Surely it is significant that this cry is at the centre of the seven words of the Lord Jesus from the cross. The words here are the profoundest ever to have been uttered. They express the complete desolation of One who is wholly pleasurable to God yet forsaken by Him because He is suffering for our sins and sin that He might glorify God and bring blessing to man. Whose mind, apart from God's, can comprehend the greatness of this transaction and the issues involved, the pain for the Lord Jesus personally and the gain for God and for us who by grace believe. Surely all this connects with the trespass and sin offering characters of the gospels of Matthew and Mark respectively, and is another reason why their authors record the cry rather than Luke and John, our reporters up till now.

Scripture often connects darkness with the judgment of God and distance from Him. This was never more so than here, but it seems there is an awful silence too. God not only draws a veil over what men can see of His suffering Servant, but puts a hand, as it were, over their irreverent and ignorant mouthings also. For these three hours only the words of the Lord Jesus are to be heard. The Psalms speak of Him groaning (**Ps. 22:1 and 102:5**), but this conveys something of what He feels rather than says. It is the anguish of His spirit throughout the time He hangs on the cross, and especially when He endures God's judgment. But He does not cry out, nor is there reproach or protest in His heart. Rather He accepts in quietness what God lays upon Him for it pleases Jehovah 'to bruise him; he hath subjected him to suffering' (**Isa. 53:10**). He identifies and deals with all God's holy indignation, and expresses nothing of what it costs Him to exhaust it until He has gone to the full extent of suffering. 'My God, I cry and thou answerest not' (**Ps. 22:2**). But there is another silence still-the silence of God. These words of patient enquiry also give the answer: 'thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel' (**Ps. 22:3**).

Here there is the spiritual barrenness of Golgotha where God is absent except in so far as He is judging the Lord Jesus. Surely the words of the Psalmist come to mind: 'I am become like the pelican of the wilderness, I am as an owl in desolate places' (**Ps. 102:6**), though, no doubt, they also refer to man's desertion of Him

too. The thought of the Lord lifting up His voice to call to His God in this way is particularly emphasised by the intensive form of the Greek word (avnebo`hsen) used in Matthew's gospel. What must it have been for Him to utter it? Yet both gospels say **He cried with a loud voice** emphasising immediately that it was not in any way a despairing gasp but rather a cry resonating with power. Though 'crucified in weakness' from a human point of view He takes up the matter of sin in the greatness of His person. Every act and every expression, even this cry, is testimony to this and an assurance that the matter will be settled forever.

The cry is also the first time in the gospels that the Lord Jesus addresses God as God rather than Father. The instances of His addressing God as His Father are wonderful declarations during His life down here of His enjoyment of that eternal relationship. Despite all the testing nothing broke in on it right up to the cross, even in Gethsemane where He was pressed beyond measure and took the cup of God's judgment from His Father (**Matt. 26:39-42, John 18:11** and **Heb. 5:8**). But the force of the words of His cry now that He drinks the cup seems to be that during these three hours He endures the forsaking of God rather than enjoys His relationship with His Father. Yet in going so low He is, as ever, perfectly pleasurable to His Father; an aspect of His suffering foreshadowed in the fat of the sin offering which was burned on the altar 'for a sweet odour to Jehovah' (**Lev. 4:31**). But how bitter it was for Him to forgo what filled Him with delight and at the same time find Himself forsaken by God after a life of constant and unclouded communion.

The Lord Jesus casts Himself on *His* God with this double cry of dependence, 'My God, my God'. Here man in the person of the Lord calls to God in deepest devotion. The form of address is different in the two gospels for Matthew gives the Hebrew word 'Eli' whereas Mark uses the Chaldean word 'Eloi' which is closely related to the Aramaic language of the time of Jesus, especially in Galilee. The first means 'my Mighty One'; the second simply 'My God', though it can be traced back to the meaning of the first. The difference may allude to the perspectives of kingship and bond-service in the two gospels. We have noticed already their trespass and sin offering characters, which would remind us of God's special dealings with regard to Israel as well as those to do with sin in the world as a whole. The elevated language of the Jew is appropriate to the gospel of Zion's King (**Ps. 2:6** and **Matt. 21:5**), while the common vernacular of Palestine with its borrowings from outside Israel is suited to the gospel of the 'bondman of all' (**Mark 10:44**). In

filling out both offices the Lord Jesus must suffer in the way He expresses in this cry.

The scene is pure in the sense that God judges righteously and the One who suffers is holy. What soils the scene is our contribution-our sins and the sin that produces them. It is because of these and these alone that God leaves the Lord Jesus, and He has to cry out in distress, 'Eli Eli lama sabachthani' or 'why hast thou forsaken me?' Perfect in devotion, deep in pathos; these words sum up what the Lord felt throughout these three hours. His spirit in the Psalms develops the thought: 'why art thou far from my salvation, from the words of my groaning?'; 'Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help', and 'thou, Jehovah, be not far from me; O my strength, haste thee to help me' (**Ps. 22:1, 11** and **19**). We could not cry such words for we have a sinful nature that deserves judgment and separation, and makes such a holy enquiry and prayer quite impossible. He does not deserve them yet suffers them as our Substitute to deliver us forever. What love! Adam began our sorrowful history by disobeying God in the delightful surroundings of Eden, and one of the first consequences of this was that he and his wife, hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah Elohim' (**Gen. 3:8**). In contrast the Lord Jesus provides the basis on which that sorrowful history will be ended by obeying God in the most contrary of circumstances. But in doing so He cries words that express His desire for God's presence. Praise His name.



'After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now finished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, says, I thirst' (John 19:28)

The last four of the seven utterances the Lord Jesus says from the cross seem to follow in short succession. We learn this about His cry of forsakenness and expression of thirst from comparing the gospels of Matthew and Mark with the record of John. Matthew writes that when some of those who stood there heard the cry of forsakenness they said, 'This man calls for Elias. And immediately one of them running and getting a sponge, having filled it with vinegar and fixed it on a reed, gave him to drink' (**Matt. 27:47-48**).

Mark's account is very similar, but neither record refers to the Lord's words: 'I thirst.' This is left to John who then goes on to confirm: 'There was a vessel therefore there full of vinegar, and having filled a sponge with vinegar, and putting