

A VOICE FROM THE CROSS

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, November 24th, 1861

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At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 3 Number 153

“And sitting down they watched him there.” Matthew 27:36

I SHALL this morning take the words of our text as expressive of the conduct of those who are seeking to learn of Jesus; and I trust most of us I would fain hope all of us, though I must not say that, that would be going too far, I should rejoice at the thought that all of us here this morning were come with the desire to learn something more concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and to do spiritually as they did then literally, to sit for an hour and watch the dear Savior here, to watch in reverence, and to watch in the spirit of prayer, and to look to the Lord and pray to the Lord to instruct us by this solemn scene, in a way that shall increase our acquaintance with the Lord, our love to the Lord, and our decision for him, and shall enable us more and more to glorify his holy name. I will therefore notice the subject under a threefold form. First, *the Saviors dying words*, which were seven; that is to say, there are seven sentences recorded which the Savior uttered on the cross, and all these pertaining to his death. And when we remember that his death was situational, that it was not for himself but for us, this makes all the words interesting unto us, because they all of them pertain more or less to his death and teach us something concerning his death. And if we have a natural liking to treasure up the dying words of those that have departed that were near and dear to us, much more may we desire to treasure up both the living words and dying words of that Friend that is infinitely nearer and dearer than any other friend can be. He is truly, truly, the Friend that loves at all times. I shall notice, then, first, *the Savior's dying words*; secondly, *the manner of his death*; and, thirdly, *the conclusion to which those persons were led who thus sat down and watched him there*.

First, then, I notice *the Saviors dying words*. As they pertain, I say, to his death, all of them say something concerning that which concerns us this morning and will concern us to all eternity. The first sentence shall be that of his quotation from the 22nd Psalm, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” There are many things implied here, but we may just take notice of three. First, you will observe that the Savior calls the Lord *his* God. He never could doubt his Sonship; such a feeling as that could never come into his mind. But the chief thing I wish to notice here is the unquenchable love of Christ. You will observe that just at the time that Jesus Christ said, “My God, my God,” and the words were repeated to give emphasis to the same, that just at this time there was between Christ and God all the sin of his church, a cloud that no creature could penetrate,

associated with the unquenchable (by any creature power) fire of God's almighty and eternal wrath. Yet, notwithstanding this, Christ still loved God with all his heart, with all his mind, with all the soul, his neighbor as himself. Now, my hearers, what must this be but unquenchable love? All our sins could not quench his love to God nor his love to us; and the floods of God's wrath could not quench his love to God nor his love to us: it was still, "*My God, my God.*" Just notice the difference. Why if the Lord afflicts so sometimes, in some instances, in things that we are very much prize, we are tempted to curse the Lord, to hate the Lord. When we read sometimes of some of his dealings, such as his hatred to Esau, in casting out Ishmael, and Hagar, and many other scriptures that appear to us expressive of terrible judgments, we have all sorts of hard thoughts; I have many times felt I should hate such a God. So that when we contrast the difference, how easily the evil principles of our nature are worked up into hatred to God. But then Christ had no sin in him; and, therefore, when he came to this awful moment, even then his love did not fail; his submission, his obedience, did not fail; his decision, which he took for the salvation of sinners, did not fail; it was still, "By God, my God." And I have often thought, Well, if it be sinful, as many ministers tell us it is, and almost cut us off for our infirmity, if it be sinful to doubt my sonship, to doubt that I belong to the Lord, then my remedy is that Christ never doubted; and so I must plead his clearness, his freeness, his perfection; just as fast as my imperfections and faults rise, I must try and find the remedy in the Lord Jesus Christ. Can the love of Christ, then, be quenched now, seeing floods could not drown it then? Here is an anchorage ground. The prophet Isaiah might well, in the contemplation of this great truth, call him the sure foundation; we may rest here with perfect security. But, again, the second point is the question, "Why have you forsaken me?" Now, of course we are not to understand that the Lord Jesus Christ did not know why God had forsaken him, because the Savior himself, personated by David in the 22nd Psalm, explains this matter, where it says, "Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" And we get the answer in the same Psalm: "But you are holy, O you that inhabit the praises of Israel." So, then, Christ must be forsaken for two reasons; first, because being the surety he was held responsible for our sins; he must, therefore, be forsaken in a way I cannot explain, nor shall I attempt to explain, for I do not wish to explain; bless the Lord, here is the truth laid before us that he was forsaken for our sins, and hereby atoned for our having forsaken God. We did in the first Adam forsake God; we have forsaken the Lord; we have all gone astray like lost sheep; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all; so that herein Christ suffered that privation to atone for our having forsaken God. This is one reason, including of course the other parts of the idea, that he was forsaken of God for a time, that we may be forsaken of God never, that God may never forsake us; that he was forsaken a little time, that the Lord might be with us and we with God, and that forever. In the new covenant the law is, that if the Lord be with you, it is simply and exclusively on the ground of Christ's undergoing what he did. And then another reason why he was forsaken was, that Christ might prove himself to be what the Scriptures declare him to be; he was declared to be a Savior, traveling in the greatness of his own strength. And when he is thus forsaken of God shall he stand fast? Shall he give way? No, no; he did stand fast. He looked as a man, and wondered, and there was none to help; his disciples had forsaken him and fled; others were mocking, and others anxiously and solemnly looking on, watching him there; but then he had at command his omnipotent arm; when the Lord was thus absent, and Christ's human nature that's nailed to the cross, he being a divine person, called into operation his own omnipotent power, and by his own arm prevailed himself to be stronger than sin, and he crushed the monster with his own arm; he took the cup of wrath and drank it; he rolled back the mighty ocean of God's wrath with his own arm. Thus, then, here is the unquenchable love

and here is the unconquerable power; so that, while he was forsaken for our sins, he was forsaken also that he might prove himself to be that which prediction declared him to be, a Savior accomplishing salvation with his own arm.

But then notice the third idea here, “Why have you forsaken me?” Now that could not be on the ground of any sin in Christ; he had no sin, he did no sin. “Why have you forsaken me?” And the Scriptures are clear; it is because he was the surety. He is called the Surety of the Covenant, and our sins were set to his account. Here was sin laid upon the this innocent, the sinless person; and if set to his account, look at the monstrosity of that doctrine that tells us that sin might be sent to the Savior’s account, and he shall suffer for that set sin; he shall atone for that sin; he shall die for that sin; and if that sin be called the debt he shall pay that that; if sin be called an enemy, he shall destroy that enemy, as completely as Samson destroyed the life of the lion; and if sin be called a fire, Christ shall quench that fire, and annihilate its very being. He shall do this, yet the man for whom he did this, may after all go to hell. This is what you free-willers say. The Lord open your blind eyes, and shut your lying mouths, that you may leave off telling lies in the name of God; that you may leave off reproaching Jesus Christ; that you may leave off degrading his atonement; that you may leave off telling lies concerning God; that you may leave off your hostility to his truth, fall down at his feet, and know that none but an Incarnate God could atone for sin; and if an Incarnate God has atoned for sin, it is done, and done forever, the warfare accomplished, the iniquity pardoned. But the second word, or words, I notice of the Savior is, that he prays for his enemies, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” On what ground could he pray for them? Why, he could pray for them on the ground of his atonement. And they did not know what they were doing. I never can, and I have a very hard heart too, as hard as the nether millstone, and I have to lament with the poet,

“All things of feeling show some sign
But this unfeeling heart of mine,”

and yet I never can read this 27th of Matthew, the 15th of Mark, the 23rd of Luke, and the 19th of John, those four chapters containing the mockeries that the enemies practiced towards the Savior, and the way in which they treated him and blasphemed him; I never can read those chapters without shuddering and trembling. I often think, Ah, if they did but know what they were about when they spat in his face, and when they crowned him with thorns, when they arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and put a mock scepter into his hand, and bowed the knee, and reviled on him when he was on the cross, ah, I have thought. Little did they think what they were doing. One movement of his finger might have crushed them to powder in a moment. Little did they think what power they were despising; little did they think that person whom they were thus treating, though man, was at the same time true, Almighty God. Truly, their sin was great. And yet, great as their sin was, there was a greatness in Christ’s sacrificial death that enabled him to pray for them. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Perhaps you will say, was that power answered? Certainly, it was. But then, mind one thing; don’t delude yourself; never mind what the world may say, keep to the word of God. The Savior did not say, forgive, them all; but he said “Father, forgive *them*.” Christ knew whom he intended in that pronoun *them*, and God the Father knew who were included in that pronoun *them*. The day of Pentecost soon arrives; and down comes that Eternal Spirit, first into the souls of 3000, then into the souls of thousands afterwards; so that thousands of the people who had joined in these mockeries, in the crucifixion and despising of Christ, even not excepting

the thief on the cross, for whom he was saved reviled Christ as well as the others who were not saved. The time arrived when thousands of these Jews were brought to bow to the Savior, enjoyed pardoning mercy, and walked in the peace of God, and the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; so that Christ's prayer was answered. And what does it show us? Why, that where ministers may meet with men, or women either, if you have ridiculed religion ever so; if you have blasphemed ever so; and if you have been a persecutor; if you have been as bad as the worst among them all, yet if you are now convinced of that evil, and convinced of your state as a sinner, as there was sacrificial excellency enough in Christ's work to lay the foundation of prayer for his immediate murderers, surely you need not despair. No, your heavenly, your spiritual brother Joseph, will say "you meant it unto evil, but God meant it unto good." And he will receive you kindly and lovingly. "Him that comes unto me," let him have been what he may, "him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out." I learn, then, from this wondrous prayer the amplitudes of his grace, the efficiency of his death, the greatness of his mercy, and the certainty and acceptance of every poor sinner that is brought to trust in him.

The third word I may name is that address to the thief we have so often spoken of. Now you learn, my hearers, here in Matthew, that these two malefactors both of them cast the same in his teeth. I wish you to notice this. They both reviled him. How was it, then, that the eyes of one were so opened that he began to fear God, and to tremble at God, and to have a feeling of prayer toward God? And while that conviction was in his mind the Holy Ghost opened the eyes of this poor dying malefactor, and he saw that the person by his side was Lord of heaven and earth; he saw that the person by his side was King of kings and Lord of lords; he saw that the person by his side was dying, certainly not for the righteous, for there was none righteous to die for; there was none righteous, no, not one, dying for sinners. He saw that the person by his side was going into a glorious kingdom; and he saw that this same person was there going to plead the blood that he was then shedding, the sufferings he was then undergoing; he was then going into the presence of God to plead that wondrous death on behalf of guilty, ruined man. When that was opened to him, he saw there was a way in which he might pray at last, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." But before he did that, notice, he gave testimony of Christ. "Do you not," he said to his fellow malefactor, "fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly." There is an honesty of heart, you see; very rare for criminal to acknowledge that he is there justly but there is honesty of heart, "we indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing amiss;" he is a sinless man. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Truly, I say unto you, today shall you be with me". What a mercy it does not end there. Ah, the poor thief might have said, supposing the Lord stopped there before he uttered the other words, Where will that be? But the dear Savior goes on to say, "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." You asked me to remember you when I come into my kingdom; why, you shall go directly to Paradise. If there is one part of the kingdom more delightful, more glorious than another, that is the part in which you shall be with me. "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." I have often rejoiced at that, because many people that know nothing about religion vitally, though they meddle a great deal with it, say, Well, the thief got to heaven, but then you can't think that he got to a very high or very respectable part of heaven. I daresay there are some other parts some inferior parts, which he was not admitted into; but, instead of that, he is brought into the very best part at the first, if there were such a thing. Not that I believe there is any best part, or any worse, but I'm speaking after the manner of men. As Paradise was the first place on earth where the Lord's presence was enjoyed, so here, "Today shall you be with

me in Paradise.” And what does this teach us? It teaches us not to despair on account of our state as sinners. Why, if the Lord heard that poor dying thief, and took him that day to Paradise, why should we despair? By what process was the thief prepared for Paradise? The Holy Ghost regenerated the man. He had faith in the Savior’s blood, and so was spiritually and mystically washed in that blood. He had faith in the Savior’s righteousness, in the Savior’s power, or else he would not have cried to him; and he had confidence in the Savior’s innocence, “This man has done nothing amiss;” in a word he had the faith of God’s elect. Here, then, we have set before us the infinite efficacy of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Sitting down, they watched him there.”

The fourth word I notice is his providential care. Look at the wonderful dealings of the Lord, and the wonderful display of his sovereignty. Now, you would naturally think, and I should naturally think, and we should all naturally think, in the light of natural reason, that the Savior, such a person as he was, would have taken good care that his mother should have had some handsome income for life, to rest upon, some handsome house to live in, that he would have made her comfortable for life, independent of everybody, and that she should need no sympathy from anybody; and yet, so far from this being the case, it appears her husband was dead, for we hear nothing of Joseph after the Savior was twelve years old, and his mother seems to have been very poor, so poor as to need a friend to take her into his house, and take care of her; and therefore, on the cross, he said to John, “Behold your mother,” and said to her, “Behold your son.” John understood it, and from that day he took Mary the mother of Jesus into his own home, as an act of kindness. This is an assurance from Calvary’s cross. What is it? Why, it is the voice of Providence from Calvary’s cross; and I would rather have a promise of Providence from Calvary’s cross than from any other place whatever. If I have a promise, I mean in the old covenant form, I may lose it; or, apart from Christ I may lose it; but if the Lord will be with me, in his providence, by Christ Jesus, then I am sure he will never leave me nor forsake me.

Then, the fifth word of the Savior was his thirst; “he said, I thirst.” I passed by the literal meaning of that, and come to it spiritually, “I thirst.” He had thirsted all his lifetime for God; he had thirsted all his lifetime for our welfare; and now his thirst was more intense than ever. I thirst for the entire destruction of sin; I thirst for victory over death; I thirst for the complete salvation of my people; I thirst for God. I long now to accomplish the work; I long now to end the scene; I long now to endure the last agony; I long now to quench the last spark; I long now to meet and rollback the last wave; and I now thirst to be with my Father. I think that is the meaning; and I am sure, if he thirsted to the end, and thirsted to be with God, I say, if the dear Savior did this, it is by him that we do the same thing; that is, we thirst for God. And oh! Happy for us when we are so spiritually minded that we feel after all, whatever providential favors the Lord may bless us with, they are all fleeting, and all mere vapors and mere toys, in comparison of the one uninterrupted scene of the fullness of joy, pleasures for evermore, in his presence, so as to participate with Christ in this, and to say we thirst for God. Ah! That very thing which the natural man wishes to get away from, the natural man says “Ah! That dreadful death, spoils everything! That dreadful judgment to come spoils everything! That dreaded eternity to come spoils everything!” And I will not contradict you, sir. If you are a prayerless man, Sir, you are right, death will spoil everything with you; judgment will spoil everything with you; eternity will spoil everything with you. But if, on the other hand, you are a Christ seeking man, a God seeking man, if you are thirsting for God, however, at present, you may be in the dark as to the truth, if you have an abiding concern in your soul, and are thirsting for God, then he who has given you a little light, will give you more light yet; he was given you a

little acquiescence with the way of salvation, will give you more; and then, so far from death spoiling everything with you, it will be gain; so far from judgment spoiling everything with you, it will be your coronation day; and so far from eternity spoiling everything with you, it will be that long, that endless day, wherein there shall be no sorrow, no pain; where in perfection in you, round about you, and with you, will exist untarnished and untarnishable, and that forever. Ah! That the soul in contrast between the man wending his way to hell, and the man that is brought out of the paths of sin and death to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ!

I notice the Saviors sixth words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." On what ground? On the ground of his precious atonement. We are told he entered by his own blood. Just as the Savior on the ground of his perfect atonement, commended his spirit into the hands of God, so he commands the church, into the hands of God, on the ground of his atonement. Here stand I this morning, your humble servant, a poor sinner as any out of hell, and yet I shall certainly see God's face with joy. I know that Jesus commends me to God on the ground of his perfect work. You say, "How do you know Jesus commends you to God?" From this, that Jesus Christ is commended to me, that Jesus Christ is lovely to me. I love him in his person; I love him in his living words; I love him in his dying words; and I will never believe a poor sinner can be brought into the endearments of redeeming love, can be brought into the endearments of Calvary's cross, and conformed to the order of new covenant truth, and be lost at last. Such a thing never was, and never will be. Not he that commends himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commends. I cannot commend myself; I can only loathe myself, and tell the Lord what a poor, worthless worm of the earth I am; but then Jesus receives sinners, washes, and clothes, and makes them perfect, and commends them to God by what he himself has done. "They watched him there:" He will bear watching everywhere.

Then his last word, seventh word, is that given in John, "it is finished;" and then "he bowed his head;" not his head fell down, mind; no, but "he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost;" that is, the spirit. "Ghost" is an old Saxon term, meaning the same as the word "spirit." One is a Saxon word, and the other is a Latin word; the word "spirit" comes from the Latin, and the word "ghost" comes from the Saxon. Both words mean the same thing. There they have not always been employed synonymously in our own language. "Giving up the ghost," therefore, was giving up the soul. Now, what a sweet testimony was that "It is finished!" What was finished? But I will not go into particulars here, I will say only one thing upon this finishing, and that is this, that the work which the Father gave him to do was now finished. He had before finished the active department, that of his life; and now the passive, that of his atoning death. Now, what did the Father give him to do? Why, that has delighted my soul beyond measure. If ever you want me to preach a sermon in a hurry and call me up in the middle of the night to do it, if you give me the ninth of Daniel, the latter part of that chapter, I shall not want to study it. I have always four or five sermons in my mind upon that subject, that this Messiah was to finish transgression; that was the work given to him. I had a try at it, but I broke so many times, became bankrupt so many times, I was ashamed to set up in that free will business again. "And he shall make an end of sin;" then I can't do it, won't try it, "and make reconciliation for iniquity." Transgression means the inroad of the man upon God's truth. Sin means coming short of conformity to God's law. Iniquity means deadly malice against the truth of God: "the remanent of Israel shall do no iniquity." And hence those who have organized systems of hostility to God's truth, those systems are called "mysteries of iniquity", and at the last great day some of the people that have not been, perhaps, reproached for transgression and sin, and stood pious before men, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity."

Now, Christ made reconciliation for all the malice and enmity that ever has been shown by his people, in their ignorance, against his truth. Christ finish this, and he has brought in everlasting righteousness: "It is finished." Well, if it is done it is done. I am no more afraid of seeing my sins when I come to God's judgment seat then I am of seeing the man in the moon there. I am no more afraid of any one of the commandments of the law saying a word to me at that time than I am afraid of the marble tables, lost nobody knows where, rising up and reading the ten commandments to me. Sin is gone, the law is gone, the curse is gone, the devil is gone, and trouble is gone, it is all gone together. It is all finished; and there we take our stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. This was Christ's dying testimony. These, then, are the seven dying words of the Savior.

But I hasten to notice *the manner of his death*. How did he die? I will take but two views of his death. I intended to have taken nine or ten; but must take only two, because of my eight pages. First, he died in a perfection of submission. Not a murmur escaped his pure lips; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He died in a perfection of submission; he suffered without sinning. He suffered all that man could inflict, and that devils could inflict; suffered all this; and yet there was not anything that he suffered from men that formed any part of his atonement. It was not that which men inflicted that formed any part of his atonement. His atonement consisted in enduring God's wrath, not man's wrath. Satan took the opportunity to rush in upon the Savior at this very time when he had to endure God's wrath. Satan watches his opportunity, he is a downright old coward, to take advantage of us when we are down. But here he had got his master, for notwithstanding all that Satan could do, the Savior sinned not; he bare it all; in all this Jesus sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. Then, secondly, he died sovereignly. This evidently struck the minds of the people, some of them very much. He ought to have been there two or three days; that was the time they were usually on the cross, sometimes more than that. So that, when it was finished, he departed to his heavenly Father; he did not die from natural exhaustion; he did not die because he could not live any longer, I don't understand that for a moment; why, he cried with a loud voice, even in his last words. He died sovereignly. "I have done the work", and now I will depart. The victory is complete, and I will depart. I have wrought out the eternal perfection of the people, and now I will depart." He died sovereignly, according to his own words, "No man takes my life from me: I lay it down of myself, and I take it again. This commandment have I received from my Father." "I have received the commandment, and I have power to do it;" and he didn't do it.

Now let us look at *the conclusion to which these persons were led who thus sat down and watched him there*. Let us look at the effect that this had upon the minds of the people present, of some present; and I trust it has had the same effect upon our minds long ago. It brings me into the subject of his Sonship, can't help it. "When the centurion, and those who were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done", the rending of the rocks, the opening of the graves, the darkness that covered the earth, the rending of the veil, "they feared greatly saying, "Truly, this was the Son of God." Well then, if this be the Son of God, then it comes to this, that "if God spared not his own Son", there it is, "but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Would you wish, my hearers, to arrive at a better conclusion than that? The son of God! Here is the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Here, then, we cannot have too much confidence in God. Now, the next word ought to be a warning to some of you that don't see with me the Sonship. In our day, people deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; they tell us that his Sonship lies in his Deity, and that God was the Son of God; that

is the doctrine they preach. They don't believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; they say that he is the Son of God as God, independent of his manhood, and so God is the Son of God; not Jesus Christ, but God the Son of God, that's their doctrine, that God is the Son of God. But what says the Holy Ghost by the centurion in Mark 15? "Truly, *this man* was the son of God." Oh no! Say people nowadays, that's wrong; the centurion was wrong. If he were, the Holy Ghost is wrong, for the Holy Ghost has caused the evangelist to record it! And if the centurion had been wrong, the Holy Ghost would have corrected it by the evangelist. But the Holy Ghost has caused the evangelist to record the fact, stated by the centurion that, "this man was the Son of God." They say, God is the Son of God; I say, Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and if you want to put us off with the heathen fable of a begotten Divinity, I will not go with you; I will stop where I am till you come to me, and you must when you get to heaven, if not before. The centurion's testimony is confirmed by the Holy Ghost: "This *man* was the Son of God." That is the conclusion; so that I am led to the same conclusion, that, "This was the Son of God" This man was the Son of God. And then, what is the last conclusion? Why, in entire accordance with it: "Truly, this was a righteous man." Ah, so he is, in a twofold sense, personally and relatively; first, personally a righteous man, and secondly, he is the eternal righteousness of his people. Thus, then, I get the Son God; and secondly, I get the order of his Sonship "This *man* was the Son of God." No! says eternal generation, I don't believe that the Holy Ghost has confirmed. Then I am sorry for you. God open your blind eyes and bring you out of your stupid doctrine of God being the Son of God. God is not the Son of God; God is God, and this man is the Son of God; and this man is a righteous man, and his people are righteous in him.

Thus, they sat down, and watched him there; and so, I have tried this morning to help you, for the apostle says, "We are helpers of your joy." I have tried to help you this morning to watch the dear Savior at Calvary's cross. I hope it will not be unprofitable, and that we are led to the right conclusions, and to rejoice that this God is our God forever and ever.