

Some Last Words Part 7

Luke 23:39-43

These words of our Lord that we'll consider in our study today are understood to be the final words that He uttered as He hung there on the cross.

And along with some of the other words He had already said, we do try to imagine some of the many thoughts that might have flooded His mind as He knew that His earthly life and ministry were quickly drawing to a close.

In reality though, we know that we really can't know most of what our Lord might have been thinking during those final moments. I'm reminded of that truth given to us in the Book of Isaiah chapter 55 where our Lord told us simply that,

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher
than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

In an earlier study, we pondered some of the possibilities of what our Lord might have been thinking, especially as He stumbled alongside Simon of Cyrene on the way up that hill to Mount Calvary. But again, we can't know for sure.

But we can know with confidence that He would have been satisfied with His Journey. That yes, He was a man, but yes, He was also God Almighty. And that here, in these very last few minutes as He shed His blood and gave His life, He was accomplishing all that He had come to do. He was satisfying all that was needed to pay for the sins of the world.

And He knew that when He would be resurrected on Sunday, everything would be set aright and the salvation of men and women's souls would be made complete.

Pause with me and let's read the words given here in Luke chapter 23. They are precious words beyond our comprehension. Listen, beginning in verse 44 . . .

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father,

into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)

At the saying of these words, Jesus had been hanging on the cross for about six hours. Before that, He had been publicly abused and mistreated, beaten mercilessly, mocked and shamed by many, some of them the very ones He had been sent to seek and to save.

And as the prophets had foretold, He was now nailed to a cross, pierced through in His hands and His feet, His bones coming out of joint, His tongue cleaving to His mouth for want of water.

And though His miseries be painful and the suffering be beyond measure, none of it compared to the greater suffering that took place "within that mystifying darkness", those eternal hours as the sins of the world were judged and punished to the fullest measure.

We can't know much about those sufferings. Those were mysterious hours with intercessions taking place and accounts being settled on our behalf that are beyond our comprehension.

And why was it dark? What was the meaning of that? After all, these scriptures clearly tell us that God is light and in Him there is no darkness! How can darkness exist in His presence?

Those questions are truly unanswerable! But it is said here that,

⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. (Luke 23:44-45)

I marvel at the attempts at explanation that many preachers and teachers have tried to give for these special words. There are many otherwise very devout believers who insist on the need for integrating natural science into divinely spiritual events. And here, they would contend that an eclipse or some other astrological event took place causing the darkness.

Others would say that real darkness did not actually take place at all, but that these words were simply figurative.

But can an eclipse explain such darkness. So I choose to believe these words as they are given, that these words are not just figurative or allegorical, but literal, that there truly was total darkness over the whole earth and that the sun was literally darkened.

Our scientists would insist that that is simply not possible, that such an occurrence would cause catastrophic cosmic destruction not only on earth but throughout our whole universe.

And perhaps it could! But could not our Almighty God who in the beginning, simply spoke and our whole universe came into existence, simply speak again and calm a catastrophic cosmic tempest, just as easily as He calmed the raging storm there on the Sea of Galilee.

I do fear that such insistence that everything be explained through scientific corroboration enslaves the minds of many otherwise devout believers in Christ.

But notice also . . . hidden within these words is an even greater marvel than the simple darkening of the sun. Here we read in verse 45, "Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two."

I confess that I have such a limited understanding of these words that I fear to venture an explanation, but I will give you what the Lord has given to me.

First, I know there is an inseparable connection between the words, "the sun was darkened" and "the veil of the temple was torn in two". And that it is not a "natural" explanation that we should seek, but rather, a spiritual one.

So then again, what about the "darkness"?

It has been said by some bible scholars that the "darkness" was that time in which God "turned His face away" from His dear Son, unable because of His own holiness to look upon the sin that now filled His dear Son's presence.

I might differ to some extent with those who think such things simply because "darkness" is never ever "dark" to God. He sees everything by the brightness of His glory. As we are told in other places in the scriptures, "nothing is hidden from the all-knowing eyes of God."

But be that as it may, most all do agree that Jesus did endure the sufferings necessary to take away all the sins He had taken upon Himself, whether that suffering be during those three hours of darkness as He hung there on the cross, or perhaps later while He was buried in the tomb, or perhaps both, or perhaps some other way that we have not been told about.

Some bible scholars insist that during this darkness Jesus “descended into hell”? And why would that be so?

Their logic might be as simple as it seems. And that is, if the wages of sin is death, eternal death in hell, then for the Lord Jesus to experience and fully pay our penalty, He would have to suffer no less than what our sin deserves, an eternity in hell.

And yes, that is human logic and perhaps flawed to some degree, but how else could He have done all that was needed and be able to declare that it was “finished”.

Some who grapple with that theology or even argue against its logic would say, “But He didn’t spend an eternity in hell.” If He did, He would still be there.

And in our human measurements of time, that would be true. And so, in that sense, He didn’t. But remember, outside of our human existence, the calculation of “time” is very different.

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit live in a timeless, eternal condition. And time as we understand it to be does not “pass”. They live in an “ever-present now”.

Folks, I confess that I don’t really know what all these words are trying to convey. But by faith I do know that these scriptures themselves are true, and I believe them.

And someday, once we leave this earthly body that is so influenced and controlled by “time”, we’ll understand much more about it all.

Other than these few words, the Lord has not given me much further explanation regarding that darkness to give to you today, so I’ll not venture further.

But the next words "the veil of the temple was torn in two", those words have received a goodly amount of study and comment from bible scholars.

And it's generally agreed among theologians that the "veil" spoken about here is the curtain within the temple that separated the innermost chamber, the "Holy of Holies", from the outer courts, that place within the inner sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, that place where the mercy seat of God rested and God presided over it, that place where the High Priest would enter once a year to offer up sacrifices for the sins of men.

And until this very special moment in time where we read, "Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two", no person other than the high priest could enter beyond this veil. They would be struck dead instantly.

But here in these words, it is being declared that whatever those mysterious events might have been that took place during those hours of darkness brought about a miraculous blessing for you and me, causing that veil to be torn asunder, to be split open wide, removing the separation that had been in place since the sins of man first entered in.

There in that darkness all outstanding debts were being settled. And through the agonies that the Lord Jesus was suffering, all of mankind was being restored to the position that he once enjoyed. Now man could once again have personal and intimate access into a relationship with God the Father.

Jesus, the Perfect Man, split the veil open and led those who were once captive into the very presence of God the Father.

And now in Him, all the sons of God, you and me, can freely enter in and enjoy intimate fellowship with Almighty God, our Father.

We can, once again, walk and talk in the "coolness of the evening" with our God, fellowshiping with Him lovingly as fellow sons of God. What a sweet gift Jesus has given to us!

And those words that He had spoken only moments earlier, "It is finished" were really true!

And because everything was now completely “finished”, Jesus could go ahead and freely give Himself into the loving hands of His Father, and He could breathe His last. Those words again in verse 46,

⁴⁶ And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' "Having said this, He breathed His last.
(Luke 23:46)

The scriptures tell us that man's life is in the “breath of his nostrils”, the same breath that Jesus Himself first breathed into the nostrils of Adam there in the Garden of Eden when Adam first became a “living soul”.

Now here, with all things being accomplished and His purposes on earth finished, Jesus would have no further need for His own breath of life.

The end of His travail was close in sight. His race had been fully run and the finish line was only a breath away.

And yes, in His resurrection He would breathe again, but then His breath would be the breath of the Holy Spirit that He would pour out upon His disciples. And praise be to God, would also follow on out to you and to me as we receive Him as our Savior and Lord.

But for that moment there on the cross, He would no longer have need of His breath.

As I try to imagine this one moment in the life of Jesus, I wonder what He was thinking. Yes, He was the eternal Son of God, El Shaddai, the Almighty God. So yes, He was thinking thoughts that we cannot begin to imagine.

But what were His thoughts as the Son of Man, His human thoughts?

It is said, though I don't know how anyone could know it, that in our last moments, “our whole life flashes before our eyes”. If that be so, I must say that Jesus would have no regrets, as most all of us would surely have.

He really had done everything right and He had accomplished everything that He had come to do, and He had done them all well. He had healed the sick, fed the hungry, given sight to the blind, even raised the dead.

But much more importantly, He had accomplished all that God His Father had sent Him to accomplish. He had lived a perfect life, without even one occasion of sin. And now here on the cross, He had given Himself as the Pascal Lamb, a perfect Lamb without spot or blemish, a sacrifice suitable to "take away the sins of the world." And I know that God the Father was "well pleased" with His beloved Son.

And His acceptance of the "propitiation" for the sins of mankind was clearly confirmed when He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead!

May we close today with two remaining thoughts concerning these last few words here in verse 46!

⁴⁶ And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" "Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)

First, as He was breathing His last, He was dying as no other ever did. His life was not taken from Him. He freely laid His life down Himself. He said in John chapter 10,

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (John 10:17-18)

Because He had done all that he had come to do, He did not need to struggle as most all of us would do to gain one more breath. He had no further need of another breath of this life. And so, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit." And then He breathed His last!

One bible commentator noted that the reason that God added the words, "with a loud voice" was to confirm that Jesus was not just "worn down" to the point of death. But rather, He still had all of His strength yet remaining within Him.

I confess that I don't know if that was the reason for those words, but I do like them.

They go a step further to affirm that man has no real power over God, that Jesus simply knew that all things truly were finished and that He could now leave His earthly body.

Then finally, these last words, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." These were not words of resignation. These were words of joyful anticipation. The Beloved Son was coming home to be with His Beloved Father.

And His Father was fully trustworthy to receive His Spirit. All the debts of men had been settled and forgiven. And the sin that He had taken upon Himself had been wiped away and now all that remained was a joyful reunion.

But may I add, this was not the end of anything for the Lord Jesus. This was only the beginning. The glory and the honor and the praise that He was about to receive as He would enter into heaven was pomp and glory beyond anything we could imagine.

And I would like to close with two accounts of His homecoming given in these scriptures. First from Philippians chapter 2 where we read,

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

And then from Psalm 24,

⁷ Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. ⁹ Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:7-10)

Pray with me.