

## **The Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross**

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1v18)*

### **Introduction (Isingeniso)**

Over the centuries the passion and the death of Jesus has been an important subject for New Testament (NT) scholarship. While the passion and the death of Jesus is presented uniquely in Matthew 26-27, Mark 14-15, Luke 22-23, and John 18-19, it is a major focus of their respective narratives. Mark's account dominates his narrative to the extent that Kähler (1964:80) describes the Gospel of Mark as "a passion narrative with extended introduction". Following Kähler's description, of Mark, Carroll and Green (1995:5) argue that one can ascribe this description to all four canonical gospels. Furthermore, according to Green (1962:601-602), the tale of Jesus' suffering and death was the first of the growing collection of gospel stories to be available to Mark as an extended narrative. Thus, the passion and resurrection narratives are the oldest and arguably the most important narratives we have about Jesus. The versions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the earliest extant interpretations of these traditions that circulated widely as written documents; however, it is important to acknowledge these traditions were not in the same form as we have them now. As such, the gospels in the New Testament shed important light on how the Jesus tradition was interpreted and applied to different contexts in early Christianity.

In most African communities the Easter season is the most important Christian festival, unlike in most Western origin communities where Christmas is the highlight of the Christian year. During the season of Easter, church attendance is very high. People travel long distances for corporate church gatherings that are held over the Easter weekend. Every Easter season, we as children looked forward to this great celebration, even though we did not understand the true significance and meaning of the event being celebrated. However, we actively participated in the celebrations by attempting the events of the passion narrative. In fact, most of my peers who became Christians did so during these celebrations. The foundations of my own biblical knowledge originate from the Bible stories we were told as children during this period. Despite this instruction, most of my peers did not really understand the meaning of the events in Jesus' life. I, however, felt compelled to gain a deeper understanding of these events and eventually started to study theology.

## **FEW OBSERVATION(S)**

- OUT OF THE 27 BOOKS OF THE NT – ITS ONLY FROM THE FIRST FOUR CANONICAL GOSPELS WE ENCOUNTER THE 7 WORDS!!!
- CHRONOLOGY WE ARE NOT SURE-BUT WE TAKE THE TRADITIONAL PRACTICE [IT DOES MAKE SOME SENSE]
- ONE IN MATTHEW & ONE IN MARK
- THREE IN LUKE & THREE IN JOHN
- BOTH MATTHEW & MARK IS THE SAME WORD
- BOTH LUKE & JOHN ALL THREE OF EACH ARE DIFFERENT
- ALL THESE WORDS ARE BRIEF STATEMENTS – BUT ARE THEOLOGICALLY LOADED WHEN STUDIED CLOSLY IN THE LIGHT OF THEIR CONTEXT!!!!

*IF THAT IS SO WHY THEY ARE MENTIONED HERE & THERE?*

MY ONLY ANSWER WILL BE- I think we can only assume it was due to the evangelist theological motivations. We must remember that when the evangelists wrote what they have written it was not just a matter of mere presentation of the historical events of the Jesus tradition but mainly they were driven by THEOLOGICAL Motivation.

So, when you approach these seven words perhaps it is important to ask your self what THEOLOGY is embedded in this word as the word relates to the context of the Passion Narrative? What theological motif from within the Passion Corpus?

How do we then discern that? Or rather how do we go about searching for the THEOLOGICAL Motif??

Look for what is there in the text? Work with what you see!!!Make sure you look correctly!!!

- Read the text until you here it (read over and over)!!!
- Read prayerfully
- Read backward and forward
- Read in view of the Genre [Narrative] etc.

Think – Interrogate the verse-What does it mean??

Ask right question(s):

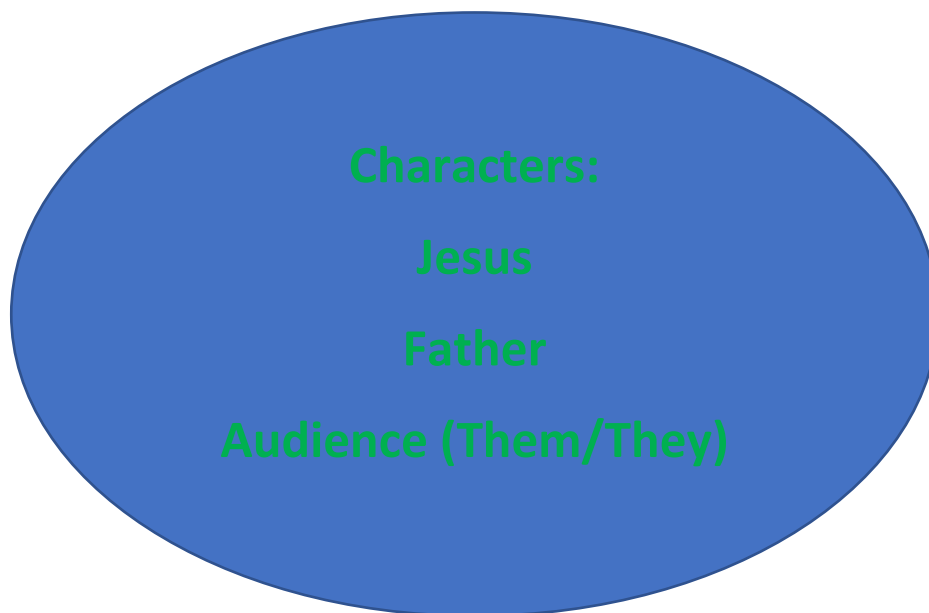
- Who is speaking?

- What is he/she saying?
- Where is he/she saying what he/she says?
- When is he/she says what he/she says?
- Why???

Take Action- Take home / what must I do??

1. The First Word: Luke 23v34

Jesus said, “**Father**, **forgive them**, for **they** do not know what **they** are doing.”



What do we see here? What are we hearing??

- Jesus is speaking to the Father
- What is He (Jesus) saying to Father? – Father FORGIVE THEM!!!
- Why must the FATHER FORGIVE THEM?? – Answer they KNOW NOT What they are doing!!!
- What are they doing??? – Crucifying Jesus
- But WHY they Crucify Him??

Then Let’s think through!!!!

- What is the main thing in this request? FORGIVENESS FOR THEIR WRONG DOING TO THE INNOCENT SON OF GOD!!!!
- HOW DOES THIS VERSE RELATES TO THE REST OF THE PASSAGE?
- How does it relate to Luke’s overall theme? – Salvation for both Jews & Gentiles

### **The First – Text: Luke 23:34**

*"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots." ....*

This verse describes a moment during the crucifixion of Jesus, in which he prays for forgiveness for those who are responsible for his execution. The phrase "Father, forgive them" expresses Jesus' compassion and his desire that his executioners not be held accountable for their actions. He acknowledges that they do not fully understand the gravity of what they are doing, and therefore asks God to forgive them.

The second half of the verse describes the soldiers who were present at the crucifixion dividing up Jesus' clothing by casting lots, a common practice among soldiers of the time. This emphasizes the stark contrast between the cruelty of the execution itself and Jesus' plea for forgiveness and compassion.

This statement is a powerful demonstration of Jesus' compassion and forgiveness, even in the midst of extreme suffering. Despite the fact that he was being unjustly treated, tortured, and ultimately killed, Jesus prayed for forgiveness for those who were responsible for his crucifixion. This verse is often seen as a powerful example of the Christian belief in forgiveness and the transformative power of love. It is a reminder that even in the face of great suffering and injustice, it is possible to respond with grace and compassion rather than anger and bitterness.

Despite being falsely accused, betrayed, and unjustly sentenced to death, Jesus demonstrates remarkable mercy and love towards his executioners and those responsible for his crucifixion. By saying "they do not know what they are doing," Jesus is acknowledging that those who were crucifying him were not fully aware of the gravity and consequences of their actions. They were acting out of ignorance, fear, or a sense of duty without realizing the full extent of the harm they were causing.

Through his prayer for forgiveness, Jesus models the Christian belief that forgiveness is a central aspect of God's character and a foundational practice of the faith. It emphasizes the idea that forgiveness is not about excusing or condoning the wrongs done to us, but about extending grace and compassion to those who have hurt us, even if they do not fully understand the impact of their actions.

### **Second – Text: Luke 23:43**

*Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise"*

This statement was made in response to one of the criminals who was being crucified alongside Jesus. The context of the statement is that both criminals were taunting and mocking Jesus as he hung on the cross. However, one of the criminals had a change of heart and began defending Jesus, acknowledging that he was an innocent man and asking for Jesus to remember him when

he entered into his kingdom. It was in response to this expression of faith that Jesus made the statement: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

This statement has been interpreted in different ways by different Christians, but it generally implies that the repentant criminal would be saved and receive eternal life in heaven with Jesus after his death. The word "paradise" refers to a place of peace, rest, and joy in the presence of God. The statement is significant because it demonstrates Jesus' willingness to forgive even the most unlikely of sinners and his power to save them from death and judgment. It also emphasizes the importance of repentance and faith in Christ as a means of obtaining salvation.

Paradise is a place of blessing where the righteous go after death. The word paradise is usually used as a synonym for "heaven" (Revelation 2:7). When Jesus was dying on the cross and one of the thieves being crucified with Him asked Him for mercy, Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Jesus knew that His death was imminent and that He would soon be in heaven with His Father. Therefore, Jesus used "paradise" as a synonym for "heaven." The apostle Paul wrote of someone (probably himself) who "was caught up to paradise" (2 Corinthians 12:3). In this context, paradise obviously refers to heaven.

There has always been a separation of believers and unbelievers after death (Luke 16:19-31). The righteous have always gone to paradise; the wicked have always gone to hell. For right now, both paradise and hell are "temporary holding places" until the day when Jesus Christ comes back to judge the world based on whether or not individuals have believed in Him. The first resurrection is of believers who will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive rewards based on meritorious service to Him. The second resurrection will be that of unbelievers who will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of God. At that point, all will be sent to their eternal destination—the wicked to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15), and the righteous to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21—22).

### **Third – Text: John 19:26-27**

*"Woman, here is your son and son Here is your mother"*

This statement was made while Jesus was on the cross and addressed to his mother, Mary, and his disciple, John. The context of the statement is that Jesus, knowing that he was about to die, entrusted the care of his mother to John. In this moment, Jesus saw his mother standing nearby, along with the disciple whom he loved. He then said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." By doing so, he entrusted the care of his mother to John, and in turn, John was to treat Mary as his own mother.

This statement is significant because it demonstrates Jesus' love and compassion for his mother and his concern for her well-being even in the midst of his own suffering. It also emphasizes the importance of community and mutual support among believers, as Jesus was entrusting the care of his mother to one of his closest followers. In a broader sense, this statement can also be

seen as a symbol of the care and compassion that Christians are called to show to one another, particularly to those who are vulnerable or in need.

#### **Fourth- Text: 15:34 & Matthew 27:46**

*"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"*

"Eloi, Eloi" is a phrase that appears in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion in the New Testament of the Bible. Specifically, it is recorded in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 as one of the last statements that Jesus made while he was dying on the cross.

In both accounts, Jesus cries out in Aramaic, *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"* which translates to "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This statement has been interpreted in different ways by theologians and scholars, but it is generally understood to express the deep sense of abandonment and suffering that Jesus was experiencing on the cross.

Some scholars have suggested that Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22, which is a lament written by King David in which he expresses his feelings of abandonment by God. By quoting this psalm, Jesus may have been drawing attention to the fact that his crucifixion was fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Regardless of the specific interpretation, the cry of "Eloi, Eloi" is a powerful expression of the intense suffering and isolation that Jesus endured on the cross, and it has become a significant part of Christian theology and worship. It is also a reminder of Jesus' humanity and the depth of his sacrifice for the salvation of humanity.

#### **Fifth- Text: John 19:28**

*"I thirst,"*

During the approximately six hours Jesus Christ hung on the cross, our Lord spoke seven final statements. One of those statements is recorded in John 19:28: "Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'"

The apostle John links Jesus' statement "I thirst" to the fulfillment of Scripture. There were, in fact, at least twenty Old Testament prophecies fulfilled during the twenty-four hours surrounding the Lord's death. By highlighting how Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled throughout Jesus' crucifixion, John showed that everything was happening according to God's plan.

When Jesus said, "I thirst," from the cross, He was alluding to a prophecy in Psalm 22:15: "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death." The apostle John had cited this same psalm earlier regarding the dividing of Jesus' garments among the Roman soldiers (John 19:23).

In response to Jesus' request for something to drink, the soldiers offer Him wine vinegar: "A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the

hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips" (John 19:29). Wine vinegar was the cheapest and easiest wine for soldiers to acquire. It was probably diluted with water.

Earlier, Jesus refused a drink of vinegar, gall, and myrrh offered to Him to relieve His suffering (Matthew 27:34 and Mark 15:23). After that, the soldiers mockingly offered Him wine vinegar but did not allow Him to drink (Luke 23:36). But here, several hours later, Jesus states, "I am thirsty," thus asking for a drink. This time, the soldiers give Him some. This action was a fulfillment of Psalm 69:21: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

Immediately after receiving the drink, Jesus says, "It is finished," and then bows His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30). There is another, very practical reason Jesus says, "I thirst," from the cross. The Lord asks for a drink so that He might clearly and powerfully declare His final statement, "It is finished."

Hanging on the cross, Jesus suffered bitter agony and darkness while covered in our guilt, sin, and shame. When the act of purchasing our redemption was complete, nothing more was needed. Everything Jesus had come to do on earth was now finished. The Scriptures were fulfilled. Christ's work was done, the battle was over, the victory was won. All that God had purposed and all the prophets had foretold was complete, and Jesus surrendered Himself to death. From the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we learn that, as Jesus died, He cried out with a loud voice (Matthew 27:50; see also Mark 15:37). Luke reports, "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 23:46).

Jesus said, "**I thirst**," from the cross because He wanted His lips and throat moistened to utter one final victorious shout before He died. The death of Jesus Christ finished His work of redemption, atonement, and reconciliation. Through Christ's substitutionary and sacrificial death on the cross, the Lamb of God paid our debt and took away our sin. Our ransom complete, Jesus, with a resounding voice, wanted all people to hear these words—words that still ring strong today: "It is finished!"

### **Sixth- Text: John 19:30**

*"It is finished!"*

Of the last sayings of Christ on the cross, none is more important or more poignant than, "It is finished." Found only in the Gospel of John, the Greek word translated "it is finished" is *tetelestai*, an accounting term that means "paid in full." When Jesus uttered those words, He was declaring the debt owed to His Father was wiped away completely and forever. Not that Jesus wiped away any debt that He owed to the Father; rather, Jesus eliminated the debt owed by mankind—the debt of sin.

Just prior to His arrest by the Romans, Jesus prayed His last public prayer, asking the Father to glorify Him, just as Jesus had glorified the Father on earth, having "finished the work you have given me to do" (John 17:4). The work Jesus was sent to do was to "seek and save that which

is lost" (Luke 19:10), to provide atonement for the sins of all who would ever believe in Him (Romans 3:23-25), and to reconcile sinful men to a holy God. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). None other but God in the flesh could accomplish such a task.

Also completed was the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies, symbols, and fore shadowing's of the coming Messiah. From Genesis to Malachi, there are over 300 specific prophecies detailing the coming of the Anointed One, all fulfilled by Jesus. From the "seed" who would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, to the prediction of the "messenger" of the Lord (John the Baptist) who would "prepare the way" for the Messiah, all prophecies of Jesus' life, ministry, and death were fulfilled and finished at the cross.

Although the redemption of mankind is the most important finished task, many other things were finished at the cross. The sufferings Jesus endured while on the earth, and especially in His last hours, were at last over. God's will for Jesus was accomplished in His perfect obedience to the Father (John 5:30; 6:38). **Most importantly, the power of sin and Satan was finished.** No longer would mankind have to suffer the "flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). By raising the "shield of faith" in the One who completed the work of redemption and salvation, we can, by faith, live as new creations in Christ. Jesus' finished work on the cross was the beginning of new life for all who were once "dead in trespasses and sins" but who are now made "alive with Christ" (Ephesians 2:1, 5).

### **Seventh- Text: Luke 23:**

*"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"*

The statement "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" is a word from Jesus Christ while he was executed on the cross. This statement was made by Jesus just before he died on the cross.

In this moment, Jesus was expressing his complete trust in God the Father and surrendering his spirit to him. By saying "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," Jesus was acknowledging that his life was coming to an end and that he was ready to entrust his soul to God.

This statement is significant because it demonstrates Jesus' unwavering faith in God, even in the face of death. It also emphasizes the idea that death is not the end, but rather a transition from one life to another. Additionally, it serves as an example for Christians to follow, showing the importance of trusting in God and surrendering to his will, even in difficult circumstances. Overall, this statement is a powerful expression of Jesus' devotion to God and his willingness to give his life as a sacrifice for the salvation of humanity.