

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, on Good Friday, April 18, 2003 at Second Presbyterian Church. Scripture: John 19:17-30

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Take 30 seconds to remember the last words of a loved one. Maybe you hear angry words. "I'm never going to speak to you again!" Maybe ordinary words. "I'll see you." Maybe tender words. "Hold my hand." Maybe words of faith. "Jesus!" Perhaps the mostly frequently used last words are, "I love you." On September 11, 2001, people in the twin towers and hijacked planes telephoned their loved ones. A son called his mother, "I'm going to die. I love you." A woman called her husband. "I just want you to know I'll love you always." A husband called his wife. "There are three men and they say they have a bomb. I don't know who they are. I love you, I love you, I love you." The last words of countless men and women facing death are, "I love you." Tonight we remember three of the last words of Jesus. Each one says, "I love you."

Jesus said, "Woman, behold your son." In the middle of his suffering, Jesus was thinking of his mother. Many a dieing man thinks of his mother. David H.C. Read, an army chaplain during WW2, held the hand of a mortally wounded man, a big, tough, Army Sergeant. His last words were, "Mommy!" In the Old Testament book of Isaiah the Lord says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." Even on the cross Jesus didn't forget his mother. Jesus never forgets those he loves - so cast all your cares on him for he cares for you.

Jesus said, "I thirst." Jesus really suffered. Crucifixion is the most terrible method of execution invented by the perversity of human ingenuity. *Hanging* is less painful. *Lethal injection* is much less painful. *The guillotine* is more merciful. *The electric chair* can't compare. Jesus really suffered.

Jesus thirsted because he was drained emotionally, spiritually and physically. The One who said, "Whoever believes in me shall never thirst" says, "I thirst." The One who said to the woman at the well, "I will give you living waters" says, "I thirst." The One who said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me" on the cross says, "I thirst."

The thirst of Jesus reminds me of the rich man's thirst in hell. You remember the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The hungry poor man sat begging at the gates of the rich man's estate while the rich man ate and drank sumptuously. When the poor man died he went to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man died and

went to hell. In hell he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I’m in agony in these flames.” On the cross Jesus experienced the agony and thirst of the rich man in hell. On the cross Jesus descended into hell. He thirsted like a man in hell so that we need never experience that thirst. Tonight, when we drink the cup, may you hear the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give the living water thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live.”

Finally, Jesus says, “**It is finished.**” One of life’s most rewarding experiences is to finish something. Several years ago, a Jamaican Bob Sled team made it to the finals at the Olympics. They were on their way to win a medal when their sled turned over before the finish line. But the team didn’t give up. They climbed out of the sled, lifted it on their shoulders, and *carried* it across the finish line. They didn’t win, but they finished.

When Jesus was dieing he said, “I’ve finished the work I set out to accomplish. I came to take away the sins of the world. Done. I came into the world to save sinners. Finished. I’ve come that they might have life. Accomplished. We believe in the finished work of Christ. We don’t have to add anything to it. We *can’t* add anything. Jesus paid it all, all to him we owe.”

How many projects have you started and never finished? Are there spouses who’ve heard someone say, “When are you going to finish that project?” And how many spouses have heard someone say angrily, “Are you finished yet?” Every one of us comes to the end of life with unfinished business.

“It is finished” means “it’s complete.” What makes life complete? If you come to the end of life with a million dollars, but don’t have Christ, would your life be complete? If you come to the end of your life and have a PhD, but you don’t have Jesus, would your life be complete? If you’re young and healthy and play championship basketball, but don’t have Jesus, would your life be complete? On the other hand if you come to the end of your lives without money, college degrees or health – yet you have Jesus your life will be complete.

Jesus said his last words and then “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” If you love Jesus remember his last words. Jesus remembered his mother to assure us that he’ll never forget his loved ones. He thirsted so we should never thirst in hell. He completes the work of salvation so that “all who believe in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Prayers of the People: B

Gracious God, because we are not strong enough to pray as we should, you provide Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit to intercede for us in power.

In this confidence we ask you to accept our prayers.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for the church. *Silent prayer.*

Faithful God, you formed your church from the despised of the earth and showed them mercy, that they might proclaim your salvation to all.

Strengthen those whom you choose today, that they may faithfully endure all trials by which you conform your church to the cross of Christ.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for creation. *Silent prayer.*

Creator of all, you entrusted the earth to the human race, yet we disrupt its peace with violence and corrupt its purity with our greed. Prevent your people from ravaging creation, that coming generations may inherit lands brimming with life.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for the world. *Silent prayer.*

Sovereign God, you hold both the history of nations and the humble life of villages in your care.

Preserve the people of every nation from tyrants, heal them of disease, and protect them in time of upheaval and disaster, that all may enter the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for peace. *Silent prayer.*

Judge of the nations, you created humanity for salvation, not destruction, and sent your Son to guide us into the way of peace.

Enable people of every race and nation to accept each other as sisters and brothers, your children, on whom you lavish honor and favor.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for those who govern us. *Silent prayer.*

God Most High, in Jesus of Nazareth you show us the authority that pleases you: for he rules not by power or might, but serves in obedience to your will.

George W Bush

Barack

We pray for all in authority over us: for our President, N., for Congress, for our Governor, N., and our state legislature, (and N., N.). Deliver them from vain ambitions that they may govern in wisdom and justice.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for this community. *Silent prayer.*

Merciful God, since Jesus longed to protect Jerusalem as a hen gathers her young under her wings, we ask you to guard and strengthen all who live and work here.

Deliver your people from jealousy and contempt that they may show mercy to all their neighbors.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for all families and those who live alone. *Silent prayer.*

Holy God, from whom every family on earth takes its name: Strengthen parents to be responsible and loving that their children may know security and joy.

Lead children to honor parents by compassion and forgiveness.

May all people discover your parental care by the respect and love given them by others.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

✓ Let us pray for all who suffer any sorrow or trial. *Silent prayer.*

Compassionate God, your Son gives rest to those weary with heavy burdens.

Heal the sick in body, mind, and spirit. Lift up the depressed. Befriend those who grieve. Comfort the anxious. Stand with all victims of abuse and other crime. Awaken those who damage themselves and others through the use of any drug. Fill all people with your Holy Spirit that they may bear each other's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us give thanks for the lives of the departed who now have rest in God. *Silent prayer.*

Eternal God, your love is stronger than death, and your passion more fierce than the grave.

We rejoice in the lives of those whom you have drawn into your eternal embrace.

Keep us in joyful communion with them until we join the saints of every people and nation, gathered before your throne in ceaseless praise.

God of glory, you see how all creation groans in labor as it awaits redemption.

As we work for and await your new creation, we trust that you will answer our prayers with grace, and fulfill your promise that all things work together for good for those who love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**