

The Cross... According to Jesus

30 Days at the Foot of the Cross in His Own Words

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Dedication:

*To the Lamb who was slain —
and to all who stand at the foot of the cross
and listen.*

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Continue the Journey

Introduction: Listening to Jesus About His Own Death

Every generation of Christians has had its theologians and its explanations of the cross. We have inherited a rich tradition. Paul gave the church the language of justification, reconciliation, and redemption. The writer of Hebrews opened the depths of the priestly imagery of the Old Testament. Peter, John, and the other apostles each contributed their own witness to the meaning of Calvary.

All of this is precious. It is the inspired Word of God. But this series begins with a prior question: What did Jesus himself say about his own death? No one understood the meaning of the cross better than the one who chose it, before the creation of the world.

The answer is more extensive than most followers of Jesus realize. From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus spoke about the cross. He described it, predicted it, interpreted it, and embraced it — not reluctantly, but with full knowledge and clear purpose. He spoke of it first in a night conversation with a curious Pharisee, then in the Temple courts before his opponents. He predicted it three times to his disciples, with increasing urgency and resolve. He explained it at the Last Supper, giving his disciples bread and wine and a new covenant in his blood. And then, on the cross itself, he spoke seven times. Those seven sayings are his own final word on what was happening and why.

Jesus is not a silent figure on the cross, waiting for others to explain him. He is the primary interpreter of his own death.

That conviction is the foundation of this devotional series. For thirty days we will listen to Jesus. We will follow his own words about the cross from his earliest ministry to Golgotha and beyond. We will end where all roads from the cross lead — before the throne, with the hosts of heaven, declaring that the Lamb who was slain is worthy.

This series is written for anyone who wants to understand the cross more deeply — not through the lens of a particular theological tradition, but through the words of Jesus himself. These thirty days are an invitation to stand at the foot of the cross and listen.

Listen to Jesus. He will tell you everything you need to know about what happened there, and why it matters forever.

Day One

The First Word About the Cross

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, so that everyone who keeps on believing in him may have God's own life, given to them forever."

John 3.14–15

It is the middle of the night in Jerusalem, during Passover week. Jesus is just four months into his public ministry. A Pharisee named Nicodemus has come to Jesus in secret. Their conversation has moved to the deepest questions of human existence — how a person can be born again, what it means to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus has just explained the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Then, without warning, Jesus says something that Nicodemus could not have expected.

He reaches back into the wilderness story of Israel recorded in Numbers 21. The people sinned against God and poisonous serpents came among them as judgment. Many died. When Moses interceded, God gave an extraordinary instruction: make a bronze serpent and lift it high on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten could look up at it in faith and live. The image of judgment, lifted high, became the means of salvation.

"In the same way," Jesus says, *"it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up."*

This is the first time in his ministry that Jesus speaks of his death. The Greek verb he chooses carries a double meaning throughout John's gospel: to be physically lifted up, and to be exalted in glory. Jesus sees both at once. The cross will be his physical lifting up — and his greatest glory. What the world sees as ultimate shame, Jesus sees as ultimate revelation.

Notice the word *"necessary."* This was not by chance. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus understood his death as a divine necessity — as inevitable as the dawn.

And the life he promises is not merely an extension of ordinary human life. The Greek word is *zōē* — God's own quality of life, the life of the Trinity, offered freely to everyone who believes in Jesus. This is what he came to give. From the very first extended conversation of his ministry, he tells us exactly what it will cost him: *"it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up."*

The cross was never an afterthought. It was always the plan.

For Reflection

Jesus saw his death as his "*exaltation*" — the supreme revelation of the glory of God. Does this reframe the way you see the cross today?

The bronze serpent required an act of faith — looking up. What does it mean for you today to keep believing in the lifted-up Jesus?

Day Two

The First Prediction: He Begins to Tell Them

"From that time on Jesus began to reveal to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Matthew 16.21

Over two years have passed since the conversation with Nicodemus. Now, Peter has just made the greatest confession of his life: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* The words have barely left his lips when Jesus turns their moment of triumph into a lesson about suffering and death.

"From that time on," Matthew writes — as if a door swings open. Everything before was preparation. Everything after moves toward a cross.

Jesus had been patient. He had nurtured his disciples, waiting until their faith was grounded firmly enough to bear what he was about to say. Now the moment had come to tell them. He would die. He would be handed over to the leaders of Israel. He would be killed. And three days later, he would rise.

Peter's response tells us how much the disciples still had to learn. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. *"Never, Lord! This will never happen to you!"* It is an act of love. It is completely wrong. He is thinking, as Jesus says, from a human perspective — measuring God's purposes by human ideas of success and survival.

Jesus' response is swift: *"Get behind me, Adversary."* The word is startling — the same word used for Satan. Not because Peter is possessed, but because in this moment he is offering Jesus exactly what the enemy offered in the wilderness: a path to the crown that bypasses the cross. Jesus had faced that before. He would face it again in Gethsemane. Every time, his answer was the same.

The cross was not a tragedy that overtook Jesus. It was a mission he embraced with full knowledge and total resolve. There was no other way.

For Reflection

Peter's rebuke came from love but was shaped by human thinking. Where in your own life are you measuring God's purposes by what seems humanly reasonable?

Jesus embraced his cross with full knowledge and total resolve. What would it look like today to follow him with that quality of commitment?

Day Three

The Second Prediction: Still They Could Not Hear It

"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will be raised to life."

Mark 9.31

Several months have passed since the first prediction at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus has been training his disciples in Gentile territory. Now he is returning through Galilee for the last time before turning south toward Jerusalem. And he tells them again.

The text is stark. No extended discourse. No rebuke of a disciple. Just the plain, repeated fact: the Son of Man will be handed over. He will be killed. He will rise after three days. Luke adds that before speaking, Jesus commanded them with unusual urgency: *"Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you."* He knew they had not truly heard it the first time.

He was right. Mark and Luke both record that the disciples did not understand, were afraid to ask, and were filled with grief. The meaning was, Luke says, *"thoroughly hidden from them."* They heard the words but could not comprehend them. Their understanding of the Messiah — shaped by centuries of expectation for a conquering king — had no room for a crucified one.

What do we do with a truth we cannot yet receive? Jesus' answer is to keep speaking it. He does not abandon the teaching because it is not understood. He trusts that the repetition is working, even when the results are invisible. The seeds planted in these confused and grieving hearts will germinate when the resurrection makes everything clear.

Jesus prepares his disciples in advance for realities they cannot yet comprehend. He does not require them to understand before he moves forward.

He requires only that we stay close, keep listening, and follow.

For Reflection

Is there something God has been repeatedly bringing to your attention that you have struggled to receive? What might it look like to open yourself to it today?

Jesus prepared his disciples even when they could not yet understand. How does this shape the way you think about your own spiritual formation?

Day Four

Then You Will Know Who I AM

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man in exaltation, then you will know that I AM — and that I do nothing on my own initiative, but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

John 8.28–29

The setting has changed dramatically. Jesus is no longer speaking to his disciples in private. He is in the temple courts in Jerusalem, in public confrontation with his opponents at the Feast of Tabernacles, just 7 months before the cross. They have asked him twice: "Who are you?" His answer, when it comes, is nothing they were prepared for. *"When you have lifted me up — then you will know."*

The cross, Jesus is saying, is not the end of the argument about his identity. It is the answer to it. When they have arrested him, condemned him, and nailed him to a cross — the very act they intend as his destruction will become the moment of his supreme self-disclosure.

Once again Jesus uses the verb meaning to be lifted up — both in physical crucifixion and in exaltation and glory. For his opponents, this would have been impossible to understand. A crucified man is not exalted. A crucified man is cursed and abandoned by God. That is precisely the point Jesus is pressing. What they regard as the ultimate evidence against him, he regards as the ultimate revelation of who he is.

And what will be revealed? *"That I AM."* The Greek *ego eimi* echoes the divine name given to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus is claiming to be the God of Israel — and claiming that the cross will make this undeniable.

How can the cross reveal divinity? Because only God loves like this. Only God is humble enough, gracious enough, and good enough to absorb the full weight of human sin and respond with forgiveness. The cross does not contradict "I AM." It is its most complete expression.

For Reflection

Jesus said his identity would be most clearly revealed in his death. What does the cross tell you about who God is that nothing else could communicate?

"I always do what pleases him." Jesus spoke these words in the shadow of the cross. What would it mean for you to live today with that same singular focus?

Day Five

The Love That Began Before the World

"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. I received this command from my Father."

John 10.17–18

"I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. I do this so that the world may know that I love the Father."

John 14.31

Most people come to the cross asking: how does it reveal God's love for me? It is a good question. But it is not the first question Jesus answers when he speaks about his own death.

Jesus begins somewhere else. He begins inside the Trinity.

In John 10, speaking of his coming death, Jesus says something no one anticipated: *"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life."* The cross, he is saying, is first an expression of love between Father and Son. Before it is anything else — before it is forgiveness, before it is rescue, before it is the greatest act of love toward humanity in history — it is the Father loving his Son because of his willingness to die.

Then, on the night before his death, walking with his disciples toward Gethsemane, Jesus says it again from the other direction: *"I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. I do this so that the world may know that I love the Father."*

Two sayings. Together they frame the cross in a way we often miss: the cross begins inside God. It is the meeting point of two loves — the Father's love for the Son, and the Son's love for the Father. The Father loves the Son because he lays down his life. The Son lays down his life because he loves the Father. This love has existed from before creation. The cross is its full expression.

And what you see there is not duty. Jesus does not go to Gethsemane in resignation. He goes in love. He goes freely, on his own authority, because he loves his Father with a love that has no limit and no end. The cross was his choice — a costly and willing choice.

When you stand before the cross, you are watching what God has done for you. But you are also being allowed to see inside God himself. The cross is first a window into the heart of the Trinity.

This is where the love revealed in the cross begins. Not with us, but with the Father and Son, in the eternal love that is the very nature of God.

Everything else flows from here.

For Reflection

Jesus chose this — freely, on his own authority, out of love for his Father. Not duty. Not obligation. It was a love-gift freely chosen and given.

The cross begins inside God before it reaches you. How does it change the way you receive what Jesus did, to know that what he gave you first belonged to his Father?

Day Six

The Good Shepherd: Love That Does Not Run

"I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

John 10.11

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

John 15.13

We have seen where the love revealed in the cross begins — inside the eternal relationship between Father and Son. Now Jesus shows us where that love goes.

It goes to the sheep.

A good shepherd does not run when danger comes. A hired worker runs. He has no real love for the sheep. They are not his. When the wolf appears, he calculates the cost and leaves. But the good shepherd stays. He puts himself between the wolf and the flock. He lays down his life.

Jesus says this is what makes him good. Goodness, in his definition, is love expressed in sacrifice. The sheep are his. He will not run.

This image would have been immediately understood by everyone who heard it. Shepherding was not a romantic occupation. It was dangerous, lonely, and costly. A shepherd who stayed when the wolf came was not being heroic. He was simply being faithful to the sheep he loved. Jesus takes that ordinary faithfulness and lifts it to the highest possible expression: he is the shepherd who stays not merely at risk to himself, but at the cost of his life.

Then in John 15, on the night before his death, Jesus names what this costs and what it means: *"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."* He is not speaking abstractly. He is speaking of what he will do in a matter of hours. This is the measure he himself places on his own act. No love in history has gone further than this. No love ever will.

The cross is the supreme act of love toward people that has ever occurred or ever will occur. Every other act of love in human history finds its source and its measure here. Jesus did not merely set an example of love. He defined what love is, at the cost of his own life.

The eternal love between Father and Son did not stay within the Trinity. It poured itself out. It went to the sheep. It came to you.

For Reflection

Jesus defines the greatest love as staying when every instinct says to run. Where is God calling you to stay rather than run today — in a relationship, a commitment, a calling?

"Greater love has no one than this." Jesus places this measure on his own death. How does it change the way you receive his sacrifice to hear him name it as the greatest love the world has ever seen?

Day Seven

Enemies Called Friends: The Proof That Love Is Unconditional

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

John 15.13–15

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5.8

We have seen that the love revealed in the cross is the eternal love of the Trinity itself, poured out for people. But a question remains. How do we know this love is truly unconditional?

Jesus answers that question by telling us who he died for. In John's gospel, *“the world”* is not a neutral term. It means humanity in rebellion against God. Enemies. This is who Jesus came for. This is who he is walking toward Gethsemane for. This is who he will hang on the cross for in a matter of hours.

And he calls them friends. Not because of what they have done for him. He says: *“everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”* His friendship is entirely his own gift. He has freely shared with them everything he received from the Father, including his own life.

This is what unconditional love actually means. Not love that overlooks conditions, but love that acts before any conditions have been met. Love that does not wait for worthiness. Love that creates friendship out of enmity, that calls enemies friends and then dies to make it true.

Paul saw this and said it plainly: *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Not after we changed. Not after we believed. While we were still what we were — enemies, strangers, opponents — he died. The cross did not respond to our love for God. It preceded it. It made it possible.

This is why Jesus commands us to love our enemies. It is not an impossible ideal he sets before us to show us how far we fall short. It is a description of what God has already done for us. We love our enemies because that is exactly what he did when he loved us. We were the enemies. We are the friends he made by dying.

The love revealed in the cross is unconditional not as a theological category but as a lived reality — demonstrated at the highest possible cost, to the least deserving possible recipients, before a single condition had been met.

He did not die for the worthy. He died for us.

For Reflection

Jesus calls you his friend — not because of what you have done, but because of what he freely chose to give you before you deserved any of it. How does it change the way you see yourself before God to know that his love for you preceded and created your love for him?

"Love your enemies" is not only a command — it is first a description of what God did for you. Is there someone in your life God is calling you to love not because they deserve it, but because that is the nature of the love you yourself have received?

Day Eight

The Third Prediction: Nothing Hidden Now

"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that stands written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be betrayed and delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him by crucifying him. Three days later he will rise to life."

Luke 18.31–33

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Matthew 20.28

Something is different this time. The disciples notice it before Jesus speaks a word. He is walking alone, out ahead, with a resolve so visible in his body that Mark tells us the disciples were astonished and those who followed were afraid. They have never seen him like this. Jerusalem and the cross is days away, and it is written in every step.

When he gathers the twelve and speaks, he leaves nothing out. This third prediction is the most detailed of all three. Betrayal. Condemnation. Handing over to the Gentiles. Mocking. Spitting. Flogging. Crucifixion. Resurrection. Each element

Luke frames it all: *"Everything that stands written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled."* This is not tragedy. This is the completion of the longest story ever told.

Yet Luke records, one more time, that the disciples comprehended none of it. It was not a failure of intelligence. They simply could not accept what they were hearing. They had no room in their expectations for a suffering Messiah.

The proof of their incomprehension is what happened next. Jesus had just spoken of betrayal, flogging, and death — and his disciples began arguing about who was greatest. Jesus answered with a word that redefines greatness from the ground up: *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* A ransom is a price paid to set captives free. He was not merely going to die. He was going to purchase the freedom of everyone held captive by sin and death.

This is what Jesus was carrying in his heart as he walked alone at the front of that procession — something none of them understood. Six months earlier he had said: *"I*

have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed." Luke 12.50. That distress was the weight of perfect love moving toward supreme sacrifice with full knowledge of the cost.

He was under a death sentence with a price on his head. And he walked openly on the road to Jerusalem, unhurried, because he knew that no one could take his life before the appointed hour.

He was not a victim of history.

He was its Lord.

For Reflection

Jesus spoke of his death as a ransom — a price paid to set captives free. What does it mean to you that his death was not merely sacrifice but liberation? What has he ransomed you from?

The disciples were arguing about greatness while Jesus was walking toward the cross. How does his definition of greatness — *"not to be served, but to serve"* — challenge the way you think about your own life?

Day Nine

Father, Glorify Your Name: The Final Word Before the Cross

"Now my soul has become permanently troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No — it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name! Then a voice came from heaven: "I have both glorified it already, and will certainly glorify it again.'"

John 12.28

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will actively draw all people to myself."

John 12.27–28, 32

It is Monday of Passion Week. Jesus has entered Jerusalem in triumph. Greeks — Gentiles from beyond Israel's borders — have come to the Passover and are asking to see him. Their arrival fills Jesus with joy and grief together. The nations coming to him — that is the purpose of the cross. And the cross going to crown this very week.

For the third and final time in his ministry, the Father speaks from heaven in an audible voice. The first time was at Jesus' baptism. The second was at the Transfiguration. Now, with the cross days away, the Father speaks again. All three times, it concerns the cross. The Father's audible voice in the ministry of Jesus is reserved for the one event that matters above all others.

Jesus' prayer in this moment is remarkable. He does not ask to be saved from what is coming. His soul is in deep, persistent distress — and what he prays is: *"Father, glorify your name."* Not "save me." Not "make this easier." The Father's honor matters more to Jesus than his own life.

Then comes the third and final *"lifting up"* saying in John's gospel, the most expansive of all:

"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will actively draw all people to myself."

The Greek verb is intensive — an ongoing, energetic drawing. The cross is not a local event with limited reach. It is the center of history, pulling every human being toward the love of God. What Jesus does when lifted up will be felt across every culture and every generation until he comes again.

This is the last public word Jesus speaks about his death before it happens. The rest he says to his disciples in private. He came for this hour. He will not turn away from it. And when it is done, nothing will ever be the same.

For Reflection

Jesus prayed *"Father, glorify your name"* in the deepest distress of his life. What would it mean for you to make that prayer your own today, in whatever you are facing?

"I will draw all people to myself." You are one of those people. How does it change the way you stand before the cross to know that Jesus is actively drawing you to himself, even now?

Day Ten

What Is Written About Me Is Reaching Its Fulfillment

"It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."

Luke 22.37 (Isaiah 53.12)

The Passover meal is in its final hours. Judas has left to betray Jesus. The disciples are anxious. The air in the room is heavy. Then Jesus says something that cuts through everything else.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 53.12. Just six words: *"he was numbered with the transgressors."* And he says: *"this is about me. This must be fulfilled in me."*

This is a statement of extraordinary importance. Isaiah 53 is the great Servant passage — the poem that describes a figure who bears the sins of others, who is pierced for their transgressions, who is silent before his accusers, who is led like a lamb to the slaughter, and who makes many righteous by bearing their iniquities. For centuries, the Jewish people had read this passage. No rabbi had ever said it was about himself.

Jesus says it is about him. Not by implication. Not by suggestion. He says it directly, in plain words, at the table on the night before his death.

This matters because it shows us that Jesus understood his death in terms of substitution — of standing in the place of others, bearing what they deserved. Isaiah had written it centuries before.

He came to be numbered with the transgressors. That is not an accident of history. It is the point. He was not merely killed alongside criminals. He was counted among them — taking the place that sinners deserved, so that sinners could take the place that only he deserved.

He knew exactly what he was walking into. And he walked in.

For Reflection

Jesus claimed Isaiah 53 as his own mission. Read Isaiah 53 slowly today. What phrases describe what Jesus did for you personally?

Jesus was "*numbered with the transgressors*" by choice. What does it mean to you that he deliberately took the place of those who deserved judgment?

Day Eleven

The New Covenant in His Blood

“This is my body, which has been given permanently for you. Keep on doing this in remembrance of me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Keep on doing this in remembrance of me.”

Luke 22.19–20

Jesus takes bread. He gives thanks. He breaks it. He gives it to his disciples. Then he tells them what it means.

He takes the cup. He gives thanks. He passes it. *“This is the new covenant in my blood. Poured out for you.”*

These are words no one had ever spoken at a meal before. Jesus is at a Passover table — the covenant meal of Israel, the annual remembrance of God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt. The Passover was built around sacrifice. Blood was painted on the doorposts. A lamb died in the place of the firstborn. Everyone at this table had observed this meal every year of their lives.

Now Jesus redefines the meal around himself. He is the bread. He is the cup. He is the sacrifice. The old covenant was sealed with the blood of animals. The new covenant will be sealed with his own blood. He is both the priest who offers the sacrifice and the lamb who is offered.

The word *“covenant”* is the word for a binding promise, certified by witnesses — but a covenant does not become effective until the death of the one who makes it. Shed blood means a death has occurred. The covenant is now in force.

God had promised a new covenant through Jeremiah and Ezekiel — a covenant of forgiveness, of hearts transformed, of a new relationship between God and humanity. Jesus is saying: that covenant begins tonight. It will be sealed tomorrow by his death. His blood is the proof that it is permanently in effect.

He asks only one thing of his disciples: *“remember me.”* Not as a teacher. Not as a prophet. As the one who gave his body and blood to make the new covenant possible. Every time they eat this bread and drink this cup, they proclaim his death — until he comes.

For Reflection

Jesus said "*this is my body, given for you*" — the word is personal and specific. He did not die for a general category of sinners. He died for you. How does this personal dimension of the cross touch you today?

The new covenant is built entirely on what Jesus did, not on what we do. What promises of the new covenant do you most need to receive today?

Day Twelve

The Road to Golgotha: Love That Has No Thought for Itself

“As the soldiers led him along, they seized a man from Cyrene, Simon, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

A large number of people were following him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them,

‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children...’”

Luke 23.26–28

Less than twelve hours have passed since Jesus spoke of the love that motivated his cross. He has been arrested, tried through the night, scourged, beaten about the head, mocked, and crowned with thorns. Now, at nine in the morning, the soldiers lead him out of the city toward Golgotha — the Place of the Skull.

He cannot carry the cross far. The blood loss, the shock, the repeated blows to his head — within the half mile from the Praetorium to the city gates, he can no longer bear the weight. The soldiers conscript a man named Simon, a Gentile from Cyrene entering the city, and force him to carry the cross.

Simon's presence is significant. It should have been Simon Peter walking beside Jesus in this moment — but Peter is somewhere in the city, shattered by his threefold denial. Instead it is a stranger, a Gentile, pressed into service. Mark notes Simon's sons by name — Alexander and Rufus — as if every reader would know them. Simon became a believer. The cross he carried against his will became his way in.

But the center of Luke's account is not Simon. It is the women weeping for Jesus along the road, and Jesus' response. He stops. He turns. And in the last moments before the nails, with full awareness of what was coming, he tells them not to weep for him but for themselves and their children. Jerusalem's rejection of her Messiah will have consequences he can already see coming.

This is the selfless love that has defined him from the beginning. He could not save himself and save others at the same time. So he thought of others, and did not think of himself at all.

We are one day from the cross in our meditations. Tomorrow, Jesus begins to speak from it. Listen carefully to what he says. He has been preparing to say it for three years.

For Reflection

Simon carried the cross against his will and became a believer. Has God ever pressed you into service you did not choose, and used it to draw you closer to Jesus?

Jesus' last act on the road to Golgotha was to think of others. What do you need to set aside today to truly hear what Jesus is saying from the cross?

Day Thirteen

The First Saying On the Cross

Father, Forgive Them: A Prayer From the Nails

“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified him, along with two criminals — one on his right, the other on his left. It was the third hour — about nine in the morning — when they crucified him. Jesus kept on saying, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”

Luke 23.33–34; Mark 15.25

The gospel writers say it in four words: *“there they crucified him.”* No description of the nails. No account of the physical agony. Every person in the Roman world knew what crucifixion meant. The writers understood that the important thing about Jesus' cross was not the physical suffering — as real and unspeakable as it was — but what his death accomplished. They do not linger on the horror. They move immediately to something far more extraordinary.

He is praying. But listen to what he is saying.

Luke uses the Greek imperfect tense to tell us this was not a single prayer spoken once at the moment the nails were driven. Jesus kept on saying it — repeatedly, throughout the first hours of his crucifixion. As the soldiers gambled for his clothing. As the crowds hurled insults. As the religious leaders who had engineered his death stood *“Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.”*

Consider who *“they”* includes. The soldiers who nailed him. The leaders who condemned him. Pilate who sentenced him knowing he was innocent. Peter who denied him. The disciples who fled. And every sinner of every generation whose sins made this death necessary — including you and me. He was praying for all of us when no one was praying for him.

This prayer did not come easily. It came from years of living in close union with the Father — the result of a lifetime lived in the Father's presence. Jesus was dying as our Great High Priest, interceding for the forgiveness of the entire human race. His first word from the cross was a prayer.

His death was the answer to it.

For Reflection

Jesus prayed for his enemies while they were actively killing him. Is there someone in your life for whom this kind of prayer feels impossible? Bring them before God today.

When you confess your sins to God, you are agreeing with this prayer of Jesus — that he died interceding for your forgiveness. How does knowing that change the way you come to him?

Day Fourteen

The First Saying (continued)

They Do Not Know: The Scope of His Forgiveness

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

Luke 23.34

There is a word in this prayer that is easy to pass over but that carries great weight: know. *“They do not know what they are doing.”* Jesus is not excusing his executioners. He is not saying their guilt was less real. He is saying something more precise: they do not know who it is they are killing.

The soldiers did not know they were crucifying the Creator of the universe. The religious leaders did not know they were fulfilling the very Scriptures they spent their lives studying. Pilate did not know he was making a decision of eternal consequence. The crowds did not know that the man they were mocking was the only one who could answer the deepest cry of their hearts. Their ignorance was not innocence — but it was real, and Jesus named it with compassion rather than contempt.

This is unconditional love in its purest form. Jesus had taught it throughout his ministry: *“love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, do good to those who hate you.”* Now, nailed to the cross by the people he had come to save, he demonstrates it under the most extreme circumstances. He is not performing a virtue. He is revealing a nature. This is who he is.

When we confess our sins to God, we are not informing him of something he did not know. We are agreeing — the Greek word for confession is *homologeō*, to say the same thing — with a prayer that Jesus already prayed and a payment he already made. Our forgiveness was prayed for from nine in the morning. It was fully paid for by three in the afternoon. We receive it by believing it is true.

There has never been a love like this on earth. The world had never seen anything like this: the Son of God, dying for his enemies, asking his Father to forgive the very people who are killing him.

For Reflection

Jesus prayed with compassion for people whose ignorance did not excuse them. Is there someone whose wrongdoing toward you, you have been holding against them? Can you bring them into the scope of this prayer today?

Confessing sin means agreeing with Jesus about it — not earning forgiveness, but receiving what his prayer and death already secured. What do you need to agree with him about today?

Day Fifteen

The Second Saying on the Cross

The Mocking and the Man Who Saw Through It

“Those who passed by hurled insults at him... The chief priests and teachers of the law mocked him... The soldiers also mocked him... One of the criminals hurled abuse at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

Matthew 27.39, 41

“But the other criminal rebuked him: ‘Don’t you fear God? We are punished justly. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’”

Luke 23.35–42

The mocking came in waves. First the people streaming past on the road into Jerusalem. Then the religious leaders, who had worked for months to bring this moment about. Then the soldiers. And finally, at first, both of the criminals on either side of him.

The gospel writers are showing us something deliberate in this progression. The mockery moved from the farthest away to the closest — from strangers to leaders to soldiers to the men dying inches from Jesus. Everyone joined in. No one defended him. The Lord of Glory hung at the center

The content of the mocking was, with bitter irony, true. *“He saved others; he cannot save himself.”* They meant it as ridicule. It was theology. He could not save others and save himself at the same time. The only way to be the Savior was to refuse to be saved. They were speaking more accurately than they knew.

Then something shifted. One of the criminals — who had been hurling abuse moments before — stopped. He looked at Jesus. He looked at himself. He opened his heart. He had never seen anyone love like this, pray for the people who were killing him, endure contempt with such silence. He rebuked his companion: we deserve this. He does not. Then, in an act of faith unlike any other in the gospel, he addressed a man dying on a cross as a king with a future kingdom.

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He saw through the cross to the crown. In Jesus' darkest hour, this man believed.

For Reflection

The criminal saw something in Jesus that the crowds, the leaders, and the soldiers could not see. What is it about the way Jesus died that opens your own eyes to who he is?

The mocking crowd spoke truth without knowing it: he could not save himself and save others at the same time. How does this sacrifice shape the way you receive his salvation today?

Day Sixteen

The Second Saying (continued)

Today You Will Be With Me in Paradise

"Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'"

Luke 23.43

Eight words. A promise no one could have anticipated, given to the least likely recipient, at the least likely moment. A dying criminal, with nothing to offer and no time left to live differently, asks to be remembered. Jesus gives him paradise.

Notice what the man did not do. He was not baptized. He had not followed Jesus through his ministry. He had not witnessed miracles or shown any fruit of discipleship. He had, minutes before, been adding his voice to the mockery. What he brought to Jesus was exactly nothing — except his need, his honesty about his guilt, his conviction that Jesus was innocent, and his faith that the man dying beside him was a king with a real kingdom.

That was enough. It is still enough today.

The promise Jesus gives is full of meaning. *"Today"* — not at some distant future judgment. Today. Within hours. Death will not be an ending but a transition into the presence of Jesus himself. *"With me"* — paradise is not primarily a place, it is a Person. The eternal life Jesus has been promising throughout his ministry is the life of the Trinity shared with those who believe, beginning the moment we believe. *"Paradise"* — the word comes from the Persian for a royal garden, a place of beauty and abundance prepared by a king for those he loves.

Every person who stands before Jesus is ultimately one of those two criminals. Either we recognize our guilt, acknowledge his innocence, and cast ourselves on his mercy — or we use our remaining breath insisting that his death was justified, and we have no need of his forgiveness. We are either repentant or we remain unrepentant. The repentant criminal brought nothing and received everything. That is the gospel in one astonishing exchange.

For Reflection

The criminal brought nothing to Jesus except his need and his faith. What are you tempted to bring to Jesus — your achievements, your efforts — that he is not asking for?

"With me." Paradise, for Jesus, is defined by his presence. How does this shape what you are actually hoping for when you think about eternal life?

Day Seventeen

The Third Saying on the Cross

Woman, Here Is Your Son: The Birth of the New Family

“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his own home.”

John 19.25–27

It has been three hours. The first two sayings — the prayer for forgiveness and the promise to the repentant criminal — were addressed outward, to enemies and strangers. Now Jesus turns to the small group of people who loved him, standing close to the cross. The crowd was vast; the faithful were few. Among them: his mother Mary, her sister, Mary Magdalene, and the apostle John.

Jesus was the eldest son in his family. After Joseph died, the care of Mary had fallen to him. Even now, even here, he discharges that responsibility. He speaks to his mother and to John, and in doing so creates something entirely new: a family bond between two people not related by blood, formed by his word from the cross.

“Woman, here is your son.” The address — *“Woman”* rather than *“Mother”* — is not cold or distant. It is the same word he used at the wedding in Cana, and it carries a dignified, tender respect. He is releasing her from dependence on him as her earthly son, and giving her something greater: a place in the new spiritual family he is dying to create.

This third saying reveals what the first two only implied. Forgiveness and eternal life are personal gifts, received individually. But they lead somewhere. They lead into belonging — into the family of God, where every barrier of blood and background is broken down by the love Jesus is pouring out on this cross. He had prayed for this unity in John 17. Now, from the cross, he makes it real.

John took Mary into his own home from that hour. This quiet act of obedience was the first expression of the new spiritual family Jesus died to create — people who belong to one another because they belong first to him.

For Reflection

Jesus created spiritual family across the boundaries of age and blood, giving his mother to a young disciple who was not her son. Who has God placed in your life as spiritual family across boundaries you might not have chosen?

Is there a broken relationship with another believer that the cross calls you to restore? Is there someone whose need you are aware of that you have left unmet?

Day Eighteen

Three Hours of Darkness

"At about the sixth hour — noon — darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour — three in the afternoon — for the sun stopped shining." Luke 23.44–45;

Mark 15.33

The first three sayings of Jesus on the cross all came during the first three hours — from nine in the morning until noon. Then the sky went dark.

It was not an eclipse. Passover fell on a full moon, when a solar eclipse is impossible. This was a supernatural darkness — a covering of the earth at the very hour when the Son of God was bearing the sins of the world. Creation itself was responding to what was happening at Golgotha.

For three hours, Jesus bore our sins in silence. No sayings are recorded from the darkness. The crowd was still there. The mockery may have continued. But from noon to three, the narrative goes quiet — as if the gospel writers understood that what was happening in those hours was beyond the reach of language. The sinless Son of God was taking into himself the full weight of the accumulated evil of the human race. The darkness was fitting. It was as Jesus had said when he was arrested in Gethsemane: *"This is your hour — when darkness reigns."*

The darkness was also a sign. Throughout Scripture, darkness accompanies the judgment of God — the plague of darkness in Egypt, the darkening of the sun in the prophets as a sign of the day of the Lord. Now the sun hid its face because of what sinful humanity was doing to its Creator, and because of what the Creator was enduring on behalf of sinful humanity. Both realities were true at once: the worst thing human beings have ever done, and the best thing God has ever done, at the same time and place.

Today we simply stand in the darkness with Jesus. Not to explain it, not to hurry past it toward the resurrection. The three hours of darkness are part of the cost. They are part of what it means that *"God so loved the world."*

For Reflection

The darkness covered the land for three hours while Jesus bore our sins. What does it mean to you that he endured this in silence, for you?

We sometimes want to move quickly from suffering to resolution. Is there something in your own life that you have been rushing past that God may be asking you to sit with more honestly?

Day Nineteen

The Fourth Saying on the Cross

My God, My God: A Declaration From the Darkness

"At about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice,"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" — which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'"

Mark 15.34;

Matthew 27.46

Three hours of darkness have ended. It is three in the afternoon. And Jesus cries out — loudly, in Aramaic, the language of his childhood and prayers — words that have troubled believers ever since: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

They are a quotation. They are the opening line of Psalm 22.

In Jesus' day the Scriptures were not divided into chapters and verses. The scrolls contained only consonants, with no spaces between letters and no punctuation — just an unbroken line of text. Each psalm was identified by its first line, the way we might refer to a song by its opening words. When Jesus cried out these words, every person within earshot who knew the Scriptures — and at Passover in Jerusalem, that was nearly everyone — would have recognized immediately: he is invoking Psalm 22. This is a declaration.

Psalm 22 is the most detailed prophetic description of the Messiah's suffering in the Old Testament. It describes a man mocked by those around him, his hands and feet pierced, his garments divided by lot. Every one of these details had been literally fulfilled at Golgotha that day. The soldiers had already gambled for Jesus' clothes — fulfilling verse 18. His enemies had already quoted verse 8 back at him in mockery. This was the third reference to Psalm 22 in the crucifixion narrative, and the most important.

By crying out the opening line, Jesus was citing the entire psalm. He was saying: *"This psalm is being fulfilled in my body right now."* And crucially, Psalm 22 does not end in abandonment. It ends in triumph — in the declaration that *"all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD."*

Jesus was not just expressing desolation. He was also claiming victory.

For Reflection

Jesus interpreted his own death through the lens of Scripture, even from the cross. Do you know the Scriptures well enough for them to interpret your own suffering?

Psalm 22 ends in triumph. Jesus cited it from the cross as a claim of victory, even in desolation. How does knowing this change the way you hear his cry today?

Day Twenty

The Fourth Saying (continued)

The Psalm Jesus Claimed From the Cross

“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down ‘before him... They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: ‘He has done it!’”

Psalm 22.27, 31

Psalm 22 moves through four distinct sections. It opens with the cry of desolation Jesus quoted — the anguish of one who feels utterly abandoned. Then it shifts to trust: the psalmist remembers that God has always been faithful, and holds on. Then comes the physical description of suffering — bones out of joint, strength dried up, hands and feet pierced, garments divided. Finally, the psalm breaks open into a sweeping vision of victory that reaches to the ends of the earth: every nation turning to the LORD, every family of the nations bowing before him, a people yet unborn hearing the proclamation: *“He has done it.”*

Jesus' cry from the cross was not a quotation of the first verse only. It was the invocation of the whole psalm. He was saying: “every word is being fulfilled in my body right now. And the ending — the nations turning, the generations yet unborn hearing the good news — that is what my death will accomplish.”

The writer of Hebrews quotes the central section of Psalm 22 and places it on the lips of the risen Christ, leading his brothers and sisters in worship: *“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”* (Hebrews 2.12, citing Psalm 22.22)

The risen Jesus leads the praise that the crucified Jesus claimed in advance. The progression from Psalm 22.1 to Psalm 22.31 is the progression of the gospel story itself: from desolation, through suffering, to the triumph of resurrection and proclamation to the nations.

Jesus believed, to the very end of his suffering, that his death would draw all people to himself. He had said so four days earlier: *“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will actively draw all people to myself.”* Now, nailed to the cross, he affirmed it one more time — in the ancient words of a psalm that ends with the whole earth bowing before the LORD.

You are one of the people yet unborn whom Psalm 22 foresaw. You are part of what Jesus was claiming when he cried out from the cross.

For Reflection

Jesus saw his death as the beginning of a worldwide proclamation reaching every nation. How does this vision shape your sense of what you have been given?

Psalm 22 moves from desolation to trust to triumph. Where are you in that arc today?

Day Twenty-One

The Fourth Saying (continued)

Forsaken? What Jesus Actually Lost on the Cross

"The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

John 8.29

"He will never leave you nor forsake you."

Hebrews 13.5

The question that Psalm 22 raises — and that Jesus' fourth saying presses upon us — is one the church has wrestled with ever since: was Jesus actually separated from his Father on the cross? Was the Trinity torn apart?

The answer requires care. To say that Jesus experienced no real forsakenness is to minimize what he endured on our behalf. To say that the Trinity was literally dissolved — Father and Son completely separated — is to undermine the nature of God. The eternal unity of the Godhead cannot be broken. Whatever happened on the cross, God did not cease to be Trinity.

What Jesus lost was the conscious experience of his Father's presence.

Throughout his entire ministry Jesus had lived in unbroken conscious communion with his Father. *"The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone."* This was not merely a claim — it was his daily experience. The Father's presence was the ground of his identity, the source of his peace and joy.

On the cross, bearing our sins, Jesus tasted what it is like to live without the conscious awareness of God's presence — the normal experience of every human sinner. It is what we were born into. For Jesus, it was the most devastating experience of his existence. He had lived in unbroken conscious communion with the Father from eternity. Now, for the first time, he knew what our darkness felt like from the inside.

He endured it for us, so that we would never face it permanently. Because he tasted our forsakenness, we are given his fellowship. The promise sealed by his suffering is the promise his name always carried: *"EMMANUEL. God with us. Always. To the very end of the age."*

For Reflection

Jesus entered the experience of God-forsakenness so that you would never face it permanently. How does this change the way you interpret seasons in your own life when God feels absent?

Jesus had to rely on faith rather than feeling during his darkest hour. What does it mean for you today to trust in God's presence even when you cannot feel it?

Day Twenty-Two

The Fifth Saying

One More Act of Love: The Final Obedience

“Later, knowing that everything had now been permanently finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsting.’ A jar of wine vinegar was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink...”

John 19.28–30a

Thirst was not an incidental feature of crucifixion. It was its defining agony. The blood loss, the exposure, the physical effort required simply to breathe meant that the body lost water at a brutal rate. Jesus had endured it for six hours. He had been offered relief twice before and refused both times. He would not dull his pain or his consciousness. The atonement required his full presence within his own suffering.

But before he speaks, John tells us something extraordinary about the state of Jesus' mind in this moment. Jesus knew that everything was finished. The atoning work was complete. Every prophecy had been fulfilled in his body. The debt was paid. Nothing remained to be done.

And Jesus was still looking for ways to love. Not for relief. Not for the end of his suffering. Having given everything — his clothes stripped, his blood

David had written in Psalm 69: *“They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”* David meant it figuratively. Jesus saw it and recognized something: here was a detail of Scripture he could still fulfill, literally, in his own body, in the final moments of his life. Not because it was required. The atonement was already complete. But because he was still looking for ways to love his Father when love required nothing more.

So he said the word. He asked for the drink. He received it. That sip of wine vinegar was not a reflex of suffering. It was a deliberate act of love — honoring an obscure detail of Scripture with his own body when nothing required it and no one would have noticed if he had not. The only reason was love.

We look for ways to limit our obedience. We ask how little is enough. Jesus, in the last minutes of his life, with the work already finished, asked how much more was possible. That is not duty. That is love.

See how much he loved his Father. See how much he loves you.

We have come full circle. In Day 5 we saw that the cross is rooted first in the eternal love between Father and Son — that before it is anything else, it is the Son expressing his love for the Father at infinite cost. Now, in the final minutes of his life, with the work completely finished, that same love is still burning. It has not been diminished by a single degree across six hours of agony. It is still looking for ways to give.

From the eternal love that sent him to the cross, to the final obedient sip of vinegar, to the childlike trust of his last breath — this is what love that never fails looks like, all the way to the end.

For Reflection

Jesus looked for ways to extend his obedience when nothing more was required of him. In what area of your life are you asking "how little is enough?" What would it look like to ask instead, "what more is possible?"

Jesus' final act was love freely given, not love obligated. How does this shape the way you understand your own obedience to God — as duty, or as love?

Day Twenty-Three

The Sixth Saying on the Cross

Tetelestai: The Keystone of the Cross

"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It has been permanently accomplished.'"

John 19.30a

When Jesus finished the drink, he spoke his sixth saying. Five words in English. One word in Greek: *Tetelestai*.

It is the perfect tense of the verb *teleō* — to complete, to bring to its intended end, to accomplish fully. The Greek perfect tense describes an action completed in the past whose results continue permanently into the present. Jesus was not saying: "This is over." He was saying: "This has been accomplished once and for all." Nothing can undo what Jesus has accomplished through his death.

The word carried rich meaning in the ancient world. When a debt was cancelled in full, *tetelestai* was written across the document — paid permanently, with no remaining obligation. When a sacrifice had been properly completed in temple worship, the same word was spoken. When an artisan finished a commissioned work, he would say *tetelestai*: the piece is brought to its intended completion. Jesus used all of these meanings at once. Our debt: paid in full. The sacrifice: finished. The work: complete.

John had already used the same perfect tense earlier in verse 28, telling us that Jesus knew everything was finished before he asked for the drink. Now Jesus speaks that reality aloud — not for his own benefit, since he already knew, but for ours. This word is our word. It was spoken for every person who would ever doubt whether the cross was enough, whether their sins were too many, whether God's forgiveness could really be as complete as the gospel claims.

Tetelestai answers every one of those doubts. Not with argument, but with declaration. The Son of God, in his final lucid breath, said: "*it is done.*" Permanently. Completely. Nothing needs to be added. Nothing can be added. This single word is so full that we will spend two more days receiving it.

For Reflection

Tetelestai was written across a paid debt in the ancient world. What debt do you still feel you owe God that Jesus has already marked "paid in full"? Can you receive that today?

Jesus spoke this word for your benefit, not his. He already knew it was finished. What does it mean to you that his last declarative word before death was a word addressed to your need?

Day Twenty-Four

The Sixth Saying (continued)

What Was Finished: The Scope of His Accomplished Work

“For by one sacrifice he has permanently perfected—for all time-- those who are in the process of being made holy.”

Hebrews 10.14

When Jesus said *tetelestai*, what exactly was finished? The question matters, because the answer defines how we live before God.

The first saying from the cross was a prayer: *“Father, forgive them.”* That prayer was the petition of our Great High Priest, interceding for the forgiveness of the entire human race. The sixth saying, *tetelestai*, was the declaration that the payment for that prayer had been made. The petition and the payment together form the complete gospel. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness from nine in the morning. By three in the afternoon he had paid the price that made the answer to that prayer permanent.

What was finished? Everything the Old Testament sacrificial system had been pointing toward for fifteen hundred years. Every lamb, every goat, every bull offered on every altar in Israel since the first Passover in Egypt had been a shadow — a repeated, temporary sign pointing forward to this

What was finished? The fulfillment of every Scriptural prophecy about the Messiah's death. Prophecy after prophecy had been completed in the preceding six hours — the thirty pieces of silver, the casting of lots for his garments, the piercing of his hands and feet, the darkness — every detail recorded centuries in advance, completed in the body of the Son of God. Jesus said it all *“had to be fulfilled.”*

And what was finished was the barrier between God and humanity. The torn curtain of the Temple is the visible confirmation of what *tetelestai* declared: the wall is down. The way is open.

For Reflection

The old sacrifices had to be repeated because they were never sufficient. Jesus' sacrifice never needs repeating because it was completely sufficient. How does this shape the way you approach God today?

Every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah's death was fulfilled at Golgotha. What does this level of precision tell you about the God who planned this from before the world began?

Day Twenty-Five

The Sixth Saying (continued)

No Offering Needed: The Holy Spirit bears witness to tetelestai.

“For by one sacrifice he has permanently perfected—for all time-- those who are in the process of being made holy. The Holy Spirit also continues to bear witness to us (in Scripture) about this. First he says: ‘This is the covenant I will establish with them after that time, says the Lord. I will place my laws in their hearts, and I will inscribe them on their minds.’ Then he adds: ‘Their sins and their lawless acts I will never, ever remember against them.’ Now where this kind of forgiveness is in effect, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.”

Hebrews 10.14–18

“He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears.” John 16.13. When the Spirit testifies to the finished work, it is the voice of Jesus still speaking. The Father had spoken three times with an audible voice about the cross. The Son declared tetelestai from the cross itself. Now the Spirit continues to testify — the Greek verb is present tense, an ongoing witness — through the new covenant promise: God no longer remembers our sins. Father, Son, and Spirit speak with one voice: it is done. *Tetelestai*.

Declaring it and living it are not the same thing. This truth is harder to receive than it sounds. The human heart does not naturally rest in a finished work. We are built for effort. When guilt presses in — for sins we have repeated, for failures whose consequences still affect people around us — the instinct is to do something. To punish ourselves. To work harder. The theology is wrong, but the impulse is deep.

Some have taken this further than impulse. In many cultures, people practice forms of self-inflicted suffering in the belief that their own pain could add something to the payment Jesus made. It cannot.

Either Jesus finished the work of atonement, as he said, or he did not. If he did, then the only right response to our sin is to agree with him about it — to confess, which means to say the same thing he says — and to receive the forgiveness he purchased. To attempt to add our own payment is not devotion. It is a declaration that his blood was not enough.

His blood is enough. The Spirit testifies to this — and does so with the strongest language available. *“Their sins and their lawless acts I will never, ever remember against*

them." That double negation is emphatic. It does not mean God forgets, as though the past slipped from his mind. It means he has made an unbreakable commitment never to bring those sins against us again. *"Now where this kind of forgiveness is in effect, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary."*

The case is permanently closed. Receive that today. You are forgiven.

For Reflection

Is there a sin or failure for which you are still trying to make your own payment? Can you name it honestly before God today and receive tetelestai over it?

What would change in your daily walk with God if you truly lived as someone whose debt has been permanently cancelled — not as a theory, but as the most certain fact of your existence?

Day Twenty-Six

"Father, Into Your Hands": A Child's Prayer on the Lips of God

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'"

Luke 23.46

The seventh and final saying of Jesus was not whispered. Luke tells us he called out with a loud voice — a detail that matters. A man in the final stages of crucifixion, after six hours of blood loss and dehydration, does not shout. There is no air, no strength, no voice. The fact that Jesus cried out loudly at the moment of his death was itself a witness — not the defeat of a life extinguished, but the sovereign act of the Son of God choosing the moment of his own death.

The words themselves were not improvised. They were a quotation from Psalm 31.5. In Jesus's day, devout Jewish parents taught their children to end each day with these words — a bedtime prayer, the last words before sleep. Jesus had prayed these words thousands of times. Now, in the moment of his death, he reached for the prayer he had known since childhood and offered it to his Father.

Hear the intimacy. After the cry of desolation — *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* — after the darkness and the weight of the world's sin, Jesus died with the word *"Father"* on his lips. Not "God." Not "LORD." Father. He had lived in that intimacy. He died in it.

He did not die in despair. He did not die questioning. He died trusting — with his spirit consciously placed in his Father's hands. The cross did not destroy the relationship between Father and Son. It expressed it — at the deepest level, at the greatest cost.

This is how the eternal Son of God ends his earthly life: with a child's prayer, and a Father who receives him.

For Reflection

Jesus died with a childhood prayer on his lips, trusting his Father completely after the most extreme suffering imaginable. What does this tell you about the kind of trust God is inviting you into?

Jesus said "*Father*" — not "God," not "LORD." He died in the intimacy of a child with a Father. How do you approach God? With the intimacy of a child, or with the distance of a servant before a master?

Day Twenty-Seven

He Gave It: The Voluntary Death of the Son of God

"No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have the power to lay it down, I have the power to take it up again. I received this instruction from my Father."

John 10.18

"Then he bowed his head and gave up his last breath."

John 19.30b

John records two details about the death of Jesus that are easy to miss. Both carry great weight. After Jesus spoke his seventh saying, he bowed his head. And then he gave up his last breath.

Both verbs are active. He bowed. He gave. This is not a man overcome by death. This is a man choosing it.

Four months earlier, at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, Jesus had said it plainly: *"No one takes my life from me. I lay it down on my own initiative."* From the moment of his arrest in Gethsemane we have seen this on display. He stepped forward to identify himself when the soldiers came, and they fell back. He healed the ear of the high priest's servant. He told Pilate that Pilate's only power over him came from above. He refused the pain-deadening drink. He prayed. He spoke seven times

The centurion who had watched many men die on crosses knew immediately that something unprecedented had happened. People did not die like this on crosses. They did not choose their moment. They did not cry out loudly at the end. They did not bow their heads with quiet deliberateness. The centurion declared: *"Surely this was a righteous man — the Son of God."*

Jesus lived as he died — in full, voluntary, sovereign control. No one took his life from him. He gave it. Not in resignation, not in defeat, but as the ultimate expression of freely chosen love. That is not the end of a story. It is the turning point of all history.

For Reflection

The centurion recognized something in the way Jesus died that he had never seen before. What is it about the death of Jesus that compels recognition, even in those who did not set out to believe?

Day Twenty-Eight

From Desolation to Trust: The Arc of Faith

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Psalm 22.1

"Into your hands I commit my spirit."

Psalm 31.5

Most of Jesus's contemporaries had memorized the Psalms. They prayed them daily. Psalm 22 and Psalm 31 were not distant texts to be looked up — they were living prayers, woven into the fabric of Jewish devotion from childhood. Jesus had prayed them hundreds of times.

He quoted both from the cross.

That is not a coincidence. It is a discovery. Within the span of his death — hours apart — Jesus moved from the opening cry of Psalm 22 to the closing prayer of Psalm 31. His contemporaries hearing those words would have recognized both psalms immediately. They would have understood what he was doing.

He was praying. Not performing. Not quoting scripture to make a theological point. He was a man in agony reaching for the prayers he had known since childhood — and in doing so, showing us the path through darkness.

Notice this: three of Jesus's seven sayings from the cross were prayers. *"Father, forgive them."* Then, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Finally, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* They were not scattered randomly — they were the first, the fourth, and the seventh. Beginning, middle, and end. The prayers frame and anchor the entire experience. The cross begins in prayer, passes through the deepest prayer ever prayed, and ends in prayer. It was not only a declaration and a completion. It was a sustained conversation with the Father, held together by prayer from first word to last.

The progression from Psalm 22 to Psalm 31 is the flow of that conversation. Psalm 22 opens in the abyss — the cry of one utterly alone, abandoned, surrounded by enemies. Psalm 31 opens from a different place entirely: *"In you, LORD, I take refuge."* Jesus traversed the distance between those two psalms in three hours of darkness, bearing what no one else could bear, holding on to a Father he could no longer feel.

This is the shape of faith under the most extreme conditions. Not the absence of anguish — Jesus did not pretend the darkness was not dark. Not the silencing of honest cries — he voiced the desolation fully, with the opening words of Psalm 22. But underneath the anguish, something that did not break: trust that the Father was still there, still good, still faithful. And on the other side of the darkness, the childlike prayer: into your hands.

He showed us the way. Jesus showed us how the Psalms are meant to be used. When you are in the darkness, pray them. Cry Psalm 22 honestly, as he did. You are invited to arrive at Psalm 31. Carry on your conversation with the Father.

And the one who walked that path before you — through the darkness, all the way to the Father's hands — will walk it with you.

For Reflection

Three of Jesus's seven sayings from the cross were prayers. What does it mean to you that he maintained conversation with the Father even through desolation and darkness?

Jesus moved from the cry of Psalm 22 to the trust of Psalm 31 within the span of his death. Where are you in that arc today — in the cry, in the darkness between, or arriving at trust?

Day Twenty-Nine

Heaven Responds: The Torn Curtain and the Shaking Earth

"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Luke 19.40

"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life."

Matthew 27.51–52

Jesus gave up his last breath, and creation responded.

Six days before the cross, the crowds had praised Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. When the religious leaders demanded he silence his disciples, Jesus answered: *"If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."* The crowd did not fall silent that day. The stones did not need to speak.

At Golgotha it was different. The crowd had gone. The disciples had fled. The one who had entered Jerusalem in triumph died in near silence. And the stones cried out. The curtain of the Temple — a thick veil separating the outer holy place from the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwelt — was torn in two. From top to bottom. The direction matters: no human hand tore it from below. God tore it from above. The wall between sinful humanity and the holy God — reinforced by every law, every sacrifice, every priestly ritual of fifteen centuries — was removed in an instant by the God who had just received the payment that made its removal righteous.

The Holy of Holies had been entered by one man, once a year, with blood that was not his own. Now it stood open. The writer of Hebrews says: *"We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body."* Hebrews 10.19–20 (NIV). The torn curtain is the torn flesh. The open sanctuary is the open access. Come in.

The earth shook. Rocks split. Graves opened. Many holy people who had died were raised to life, appearing in Jerusalem after the resurrection. They were a sign, a first installment of the harvest Jesus's death had made possible. The death of Jesus opened graves.

Heaven and earth bore witness. God tore what had divided us. He shook everything that stood between us and him.

For Reflection

Jesus said the stones would cry out if his people fell silent. At his death, they did. What does it mean to you that creation itself bore witness to the cross?

The curtain was torn from top to bottom — by God, not by human effort. What does it mean to you that your access to God was opened entirely from his side, at his cost?

Day Thirty

Worthy Is the Lamb: A Doxology at the Foot of the Cross

"Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!'"

Revelation 5.11–13

Thirty days ago we began with a question: What did Jesus himself say about his own death?

We have listened to him speak about his cross — and what we have heard is staggering. The Lamb was slain according to a purpose established before the world began. He predicted it with full knowledge. He prepared for it. He walked into it with sovereign freedom. Before the cross he explained it. From the cross he interpreted it in seven sayings that opened the depths of what God was doing. His death tore the curtain, shook the earth, and opened graves.

What it accomplished is beyond measure: the full revelation of God's love, complete forgiveness of our sins, and access to the living Presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Eternal life begins now and stretches into eternity — sealed in the new covenant and its promises, delivered with truth, joy, and the peace he promised — *"my peace I give you"* — poured into us by the Holy Spirit and never exhausted.

No death in human history stands in the same category as the death of Jesus.

There is only one possible response to a death like this. It is the response heaven and earth are already making. All creation crying out with one voice before the throne:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!

Worthy to receive power — because he surrendered his power to save us.

Worthy to receive wealth — because he became poor so that we might become rich.

Worthy to receive wisdom — because he chose the apparent foolishness of the cross to confound the wisdom of the world.

Worthy to receive strength — because he was crucified in weakness and raised in power.

Worthy to receive honor — because he accepted dishonor, shame, and mockery without self-defense.

Worthy to receive glory — because he treated the cross as his glory, and his glory as the revelation of the God who is love.

Worthy to receive praise — because his first word from the cross was a prayer for his

Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea is gathered before the throne. The scope of the worship matches the reach of the redemption. Jesus said he would draw all people to himself, and Revelation 5 is the vision of that drawing completed — the gathered harvest of every tribe and tongue and nation, standing before the One who was lifted up outside Jerusalem and changed everything.

We began this journey in the night, with Nicodemus asking questions and Jesus speaking of a necessary lifting up. We end it in the light of the throne, with questions answered — shining from the face of the risen, reigning, worshiped Lamb.

The cross was his — his deliberate choice, his willing sacrifice, his body and soul given until the price was fully paid. And the cross was for us.

The scars in his resurrection body are the eternal proof.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Amen.

- Response

The whole creation is praising the Lamb who was slain. How will you add your voice?

Continue the Journey...

Continue the Journey

If these thirty days have helped you listen more carefully to Jesus, the story does not end at the cross.

The Lamb who was slain is alive.

The cross was not the final word. Resurrection was.

The next volume continues the journey.

The Risen One...According to Jesus

For forty days after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, opened the Scriptures, restored the fallen, commissioned his followers, and prepared them for continued life in his invisible Presence. After his ascension he actively continued his ministry on earth through the Holy Spirit.

The Risen One...According to Jesus provides a devotional for each of the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost. It follows the resurrection sayings of Jesus in chronological order, drawing from all four Gospels and Acts — with the same commitment that shaped this volume:

Jesus interprets his own work.

Just as he explained his death in advance and interpreted it from the cross, Jesus also interpreted his resurrection, his ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

He spoke of the necessity of his rising.

He opened the Scriptures.

He declared his authority.

He promised the Spirit.

He commissioned the nations.

If The Cross...According to Jesus reveals what his death accomplished, The Risen One...According to Jesus reveals how the risen Christ understands his ongoing reign and presence with his people.

The same voice.

The same authority.

The same Jesus.

Released on Amazon and on the www.johnstephenwright.com website on Good Friday, 2026.

A Free Gift: The Secret of Power...According to Jesus

The Lamb who was slain is worthy of all power.
But the way he exercised power was unlike anything the world has ever seen.
He did not conquer by force. He did not defend himself. He did not preserve his own strength.

He chose weakness. As Paul wrote: *"he was crucified in weakness."*

He allowed himself to be misunderstood, opposed, rejected, and crucified — and in that apparent weakness, the power of God was unveiled.

The cross is not only what saves us. It is how God works.

After the resurrection, Jesus would speak again to one of his followers and reveal the pattern plainly:

"My power is perfected in weakness."

The same Lord who said *tetelestai* also declared that his power reaches its intended completion not in human strength, but in surrendered dependence.

The pattern that shaped his death now shapes our life.

If The Cross...According to Jesus has shown you what his death accomplished,

The Secret of Power explores how that accomplishment becomes the operating principle of your daily walk.

It is a short, focused mini-book on one of the most paradoxical truths Jesus embodied and proclaimed:

God's power does not bypass weakness — it works through it.

The Secret of Power is offered as a free companion to this volume.

It invites you to live the way Jesus died: trusting God, embracing dependence, and discovering strength where the world sees only weakness.

The Lamb who was slain is worthy.

And the way of the Lamb is still the way.

This mini-book is available as a free download at:

www.johnstephenwright.com

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No controversy.

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