

THE SOWER
ARTHUR (IL) CHURCH OF CHRIST
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THE FIRST WORD FROM THE CROSS

The last words spoken by a loved one are probably the words most indelibly impressed in your mind. There is special significance to words spoken by one who realizes that life is ebbing away. There is no time for frivolous talk, and words are carefully chosen. Such also are the words of Jesus, all of which are precious to the believer, but the final words, as uttered upon the cross by the suffering Savior, serve as a unique window to His soul. They have frequently been referred to as “The Seven Words From Calvary.” History records that there were thousands of Jews that had been hung upon Roman crosses for villainous deeds, but the words they spoke would not in any way resemble the words that mocking crowd would hear from Jesus’ lips the day He was crucified. I wish, in these few lines, to think on Jesus’ first utterance: “Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). What a contrast that must have been to the curses and hate-filled speech customarily heard on similar occasions! In that one sentence we find an invocation, a petition and an argument.

The invocation: His first utterance upon the cross was not addressed to His tormentors, or to the crowd of curious and taunting bystanders, but was a prayer, and the first word of that prayer was, “Father.” He spoke neither words of condemnation, nor words entreating mercy to the multitude, but addressed the heavenly Father. Even the pain and humiliation Jesus suffered that day could not stifle His faith. If ever there had been an occasion when it would appear God’s hand was no longer in control, it would have been that day as Jesus suffered the most unjust judgment ever meted out. Because it was the Father’s will, Jesus endured the cross.

The Petition: He neither cried out for mercy for Himself, nor for judgment against His executioners, but plead, “Forgive them.” It was the language of grace—unmerited favor toward even the worst of offenders. Until Christ, the common word was, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,” but Jesus exhibited a worthier spirit of love. Certainly while He would have had the right as the Supreme Judge to pronounce eternal woe upon all, He instead chose grace and mercy. Surely, if Jesus had not prayed such a prayer as this, as someone once observed, the earth would have opened and swallowed them all up. Instead, their lives were spared that forgiveness could be offered to them, as Peter later would plead with them: “Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

The Argument: “For they know not what they do.” Peter would later say to many of these, “I know that through ignorance you did it” (Acts 3:17). Saul of Tarsus, an early persecutor of believers, would later obtain mercy because, as he said, “I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13). However, though done in ignorance, justice demanded penalty. The guilty still needed forgiveness. However, the hand of judgment was withheld from the Jewish nation for the next 40 years as they had opportunity to repent and accept Christ, until God gave them up to the Roman armies to plunder and destroy. Surely it is only because of man’s ignorance that His judgment is delayed, for He is “longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9b).
–Ron

THINK ABOUT IT: “A lie doesn’t become truth, wrong doesn’t become right, and evil doesn’t become good just because it’s accepted by the majority.” (Source unknown)

“I LIKE MY CHURCH BECAUSE...”

She visited the congregation where I preached a number of times, and we had studied together a few times. The thing that turned her off was the emphasis we placed on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and the importance of the new birth. She brought our studies to a close by saying, “I like my church because we don’t teach any doctrine.”

Sadly, in some places the church has turned from a “believing church” into an assembly of activities with countless programs and committees going to and fro to satisfy their own desires—many of which have less and less to do with being “servants of the Word.”

Far too many folks have become religious consumers. They look to the church to meet their needs—and quickly look elsewhere if they feel their needs are not being met. The emphasis is no longer on God or Jesus Christ, but rather on “me, myself and mine.”

For many years in our world, truth has vanished—leaving it to each person to do as he pleases. As David F. Wells has said, “The bottom line for the modernized world is that there is no truth; the bottom line for the Christian consciousness is precisely the opposite.”

James Orr, over a century ago, stated that the New Testament “comes to men with definite, positive teaching: it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge.... A religion on mere feeling is the vaguest, most unreliable, most unstable of all things.”

In past years, when I had the privilege of standing in Hardeman Nichols’ pulpit, he always said to me, “Preach the Word.” It seems to me, especially now, that the great need of the hour is to “Preach the Word”—it remains the power of God to save.

Or, to quote the inspired Jude, “Contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”
-John Gipson, Little Rock, Ark.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN?

Science should always be a quest for truth. Truth is constant, and will never contradict itself. Some scientists, however, are making every effort to silence scientists who are questioning Darwinism and favoring what has been referred to as “Intelligent Design” (ID). The ID movement came about a few years ago because the more scientists discover in nature, the more apparent it becomes that things are not what they are because of happy accidents. The complexity of design found throughout nature indicates there must have been a designer. To the Christian, of course, that designer is God.

To some, so obsessed are they with their anti-God philosophy, this conclusion is firmly dismissed. Such will permit no questioning of their long-held evolutionary views which have allowed no room for God. To these, all things exist through an impersonal force working through naturalistic means, not through a God who would have infinite powers, including the power of creation—creating all things from nothing.

It is especially abhorrent to these that any Intelligent Design concept should be allowed to be presented to children even as a theory, while evolution, though unproven, is presented as fact. Under the guise of “separation of church and state,” evidence for creation must be withheld in the classroom because it has religious overtones, while the religion of secular humanism is avidly promoted. Impressionable children are thus propagandized to reject the concept of God and accept the Darwinist creed. This is not a “separation of church and state” issue, but a question of liberty to pursue the truth wherever it is found. --
Ron

IN OUR PRAYERS: Sammy continues to do well following her surgery. *** Doris needs relief from her back pains. *** I had a biopsy on my ear Wednesday, and the doctor expects it to be cancerous. *** Wayne Polk (Shelbyville minister) has a number of health problems. *** Keep our government officials in your prayers that they might respect God's laws in their decisions.