

### HW011 It is Finished!

The mob was wild with approval as the Roman soldiers carried out Pilate's command. They untied Barabbas, the revolutionary, the murderer, the enemy of Rome and he walked away to join his comrades who would plot more murderous schemes to overthrow the government. But Jesus they handed over for execution.

The Roman soldiers, men hardened from years of war and gladiator games where soldiers would butcher each other in the arena stripped Jesus and scourged him with the flagrum, the Roman whip knotted with small pieces of metal and bone and bronze. Jesus cried out in agony, his flesh torn, his muscles exposed. The blood poured from his body and he approached death. But he could not die there. The centurion commanded the soldiers to stop. He went to get the placard that would be carried in front of Jesus listing his crime and to retrieve the other two prisoners who were to be executed on that day.

When he left, one of the Roman soldiers said, "Let's have some more fun." They picked up Jesus from the ground, made him stand upright, put a kingly robe around him, forced a crown of cruel thorns upon his head and knelt before him in mock worship. "Hail to the king of the Jews!" They burst into laughter as Jesus stood helpless before them. Then they began to spit upon his face and took a reed and began to hit him about the face forcing the crown of thorns deeper into his bleeding head.

When the centurion returned he shouted out, "Enough. Take him to Golgotha with these two other pieces of scum and crucify them."

Three crosses were produced for that day's victims of Roman execution. The first two men picked up their crosses and headed to the hill where they would die. Jesus picked it up and began to follow, but he could not go far because of the extreme suffering that he had endured already, and he collapsed under its weight.

"You, you there, pick up his cross and carry it for him," the Roman soldier said gruffly to a man named Simon from Cyrene in Northern Africa. And Simon picked up Jesus' cross and followed.

Crowds lined the way from the Roman Praetorium to Golgotha, the skull shaped hill where Romans crucified the enemies of the state. Some were mocking Jesus but many were mourning and weeping. Women were beating their breasts and crying out for the tragedy unfolding before them. Here was the man who had loved them. Here was the man who had had compassion upon them and treated them and so many others with dignity and respect. Here was the man who had healed the sick, fed the poor, given sight to the blind, and set free the oppressed. Why were they doing this to him? They wailed loudly for the suffering of this man, but Jesus turned to them and with compassion and concern in his voice he said,

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“Daughters of Jerusalem. Do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves. Weep for your children. The days will come when the people of this city will bless those who have no children because of the suffering that will come upon it. If they do these things to me, the innocent one, what will they do to those who are guilty?” And the women quieted down, amazed that even in his suffering Jesus was thinking of them and of others and seeking to protect others from harm.

They arrived at Golgotha and walked up the hill. The place was ready for three crosses and the action was swift. The three were stripped of their clothes and thrown to the ground. The vertical pieces of the cross were secured in the ground while the men’s arms were stretched out on the cross beams and tied to the wood. Then, the Romans took the nails and began to hammer hands to the wood as the three cried out in agony. The cross beams were nailed to the vertical piece already in the ground and large spikes fastened their feet to the wood. Then the vigil began – the long, slow wait for death – as the Roman soldiers gambled for the possessions of the ones who were being crucified.

Many people have said that a person’s last words are revealing because they show what has been important throughout life. Who would not want to hear Jesus’ final words? For the previous three years Jesus had taught throughout the land – no one had ever taught like this man. No one ever spoke with such wisdom, such authority, such power – power that liberated people from their illnesses, from their problems, from their sins.

What would He say as He hung there dying? What would Jesus say from the cross of pain?

**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**

The first word from His mouth – Father. He shows where His heart truly lay and He shows the source of His power and wisdom. He who had spoken with His eternal Father before the world began, He who had spoken with His Father during His time on earth, now begins His last moments on earth by speaking to the One whom He loved the most – His Father in heaven.

What would He ask from His Father? “Father, save me? Father, why is this happening to Me?” No, his first words are not for Himself. His first words are for us.

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

How true that is – not just for those who drove the nails through His hands, not just for those who mocked him, not just for those who forced their unjust sentence of death upon him then, but for us as well – *we know not what we do*. We go through life ignorant of God’s will. We make choices that hurt others and hurt ourselves. We live life with hardly a thought for God and His plans for us. *We know not what we do*.

But Jesus, for those Roman soldiers ... and for us asks His Father to do something. He asks His Father to forgive us for our ignorant behavior with the hope that in time we will not only be

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forgiven but also learn in the depths of our heart about who He is and how much He cares for us and that in him only is life.

Two other men are dying with Jesus – thieves, brigands, revolutionaries against Rome. They are breathing their last with him. Jesus is surrounded by sinners. But it was always that way with Jesus. The holy God who was perfect and sinless as he walked this earth seemed to find His place on earth with such irreputable people. It was that way all throughout His ministry. Whores, rebels, traitors, the homeless and the helpless were strangely drawn to Him. And in His death, it would be no different for he would die between two thieves.

One of the thieves joins with the mocking crowd – “if you are the Messiah, if you are the one promised by God, then come down from the cross and get us down as well.”

But the other refuses to join in. He looked upon Jesus. There was something about him that was different. Maybe this man had heard Jesus teach before. Maybe he had come to a crossroads in his life because of the teaching of Jesus – a chance to repent, a chance to change his lifestyle, a chance to leave his life of lying and stealing and cheating and running and hurting others and being hurt.

But he had made the wrong choice. He had continued in his life of crime and now he was paying for it on a Roman cross. If only he had listened to Jesus earlier maybe he wouldn't be paying for his stupidity by being nailed to a piece of wood.

But maybe Jesus could still help him. He was still breathing. He was still alive. There were a few moments of life left. Maybe Jesus could still do a miracle – no, not a miracle like the other thief was mockingly requesting, not a miracle to come down from the cross, but a different kind of miracle. A miracle that changes a man on the inside. A miracle that stays with a man forever.

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Can we not hear ourselves say these very words? “Jesus, I should have listened to you earlier. Jesus, you are my only hope. Jesus have mercy upon me. Jesus, remember me.”

And then Jesus uttered His second word. He looked upon the man dying with him and said, **“Truly I say to you. Today you will be with me in paradise.”**

“I will do more than remember you,” Jesus says. “I will take you to be with me in the place of paradise. On this very day, you will be freed, not only from this Roman cross but also from all of your sins and you will live with me forever in glory.”

Remarkably, Jesus continues to speak. Suffering so much, one wonders how he could speak at all but it's not just that words came out – the wonder is what words came out. He forgives those who nailed Him. He promises paradise to the man dying by His side.

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Jesus is suffering, but He has not lost His authority. He has not lost His power. He has not lost His mission to seek and save those who need His healing touch. He continues to reach out even to the end.

And now He reaches out in a most intimate way. His mother has come!

His mother is at the foot of the cross with his beloved disciple, John. John has brought Mary to Jesus for his final moments and she is looking upon her boy hanging naked on a piece of rough wood. Who can imagine the horror of Mary?

Every mother wants to see her son do well. Every mother wants to boast in her boy. Every mother wants her son to achieve but here is Mary looking upon the conclusion of what seemed to hold so much promise – her son is dying like a common criminal with trained killers and vicious mockers by His side.

Her life raced through her mind. The announcement of the angel Gabriel, the miraculous conception, the journey to Bethlehem, the visit of the shepherds and the magi, the long road to Egypt as they looked behind in fear that Herod's troops would find them and kill them. The pleasant years of growing up in beautiful Galilee. That terrifying moment when he was 12 and they feared that they had lost him only to find him in the temple teaching the rabbis! And then his ministry. How proud she was of him. He turned the water into wine. He healed the sick. He taught with compassion and mercy. And now ... this?

What can this mother do for her son? Nothing. Helplessness and shocking grief consume her. She weeps uncontrollably as her hands embrace his nail pierced feet and she kisses them and washes them with her tears.

And then Jesus speaks His third word. He looks at His mother and says:

**“Woman, this is now your son.”**

He turns His gaze away from Mary and toward John, His beloved follower who is kneeling by her side, his arms around her, comforting her, supporting her in her unimaginable grief. Mary follows Jesus' gaze and looks toward John. And then both look at Jesus as He continues.

**“Son, this is now your mother.”**

And Jesus returns His gaze from John to look back at Mary.

They both understand. John is to care for Mary from this point forward. Jesus, dying on the cross, arranges for his mother's care in her old age.

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In this act, Mary finds strength. If Jesus can minister to her and provide for her even in his last excruciating moments, what else can He do?

His mother and beloved follower John begin to walk away, but the sky grows dark – not with clouds and rain, but a different kind of darkness, a darkness like the world has never seen and then they hear a cry, a terrible cry that pierces through the heavens right to the throne of God – and they look back as Jesus screams out the fourth word,

### **My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?**

Jesus is quoting from the Word of God. Jesus is quoting from the psalm of the suffering man who felt less than a man, who felt like a worm, who was reproached and despised, who was surrounded by evil beasts, whose strength was dried up like a broken piece of pottery, who was pierced by the anger and spite of men.

But heaven stops its ears. The Son stares up at the One who cannot, who will not, reach down or reply.

The Father had planned it. Jesus endured it. The Spirit enabled it. The Father was laying upon him the iniquity of us all. The sinless one was bearing the sins of the world.

The end would now come quickly. Jesus had forgiven His executioners, promised paradise to the thief, arranged for His mother's care, and offered himself for the sin of the world. For one moment, He could turn His attention to His own needs.

### **"I am thirsty."**

"I am thirsty," he said. Parched from a night of spiritual oppression and a day of human torture Jesus had only one request – he wanted a drink of water. He who had created the world with its oceans, seas, and vast river systems, was thirsty.

A jar full of sour wine was there; so, they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth.

Jesus received the drink. And then with renewed strength he straightened up on the cross and he seemed to look out on the world from the hill of Golgotha. He seemed to gaze far away as if he were looking at all lands, all peoples, all nations and he said,

### **"It is finished!"**

"It is finished," he said. It has been completed! He had accomplished everything the Father had asked Him to do. He had come to the earth. He had loved His family. He had taught God's word. He had healed the sick, and He had suffered for the sins of all mankind, your sins – and mine.

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Everything that needed to be done to re-open the door to eternal life had been accomplished. Everything that needed to be done to record our names in the Book of Life had taken place. Everything that needed to be done to give us access to the Tree of Life had been done. “It is finished,” Jesus said.

Jesus looked up into heaven. And this time, His Father’s face was smiling over the one who had obeyed even to the point of death. And when Jesus saw His Father’s joy, He said his last word from the cross.

**“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”**

And having said this He breathed His last and when he exhaled his last breath it seemed that the winds of heaven were unleashed. The ground shook and people looked around in fear as Jesus’ body hung lifeless on the cross.

The Roman soldiers looked to their centurion and pleaded with him. “Let us finish the job. Let’s kill them and be done with this!” They went to one of the criminals on the cross and with a heavy hammer swung it with all their force onto his legs. The criminal cried out in agony as his slumped down, his broken legs unable to lift himself up so he could breathe. They did the same with the other criminal who quickly died as well. But when they came to Jesus they said, “No need. He is already dead. Look, and a soldier pierced his side with a spear and blood and water that had collected around his heart gushed out onto the ground.” And prophecy was fulfilled – that even in his cruel suffering, not a bone of him would be broken.

In the crowd that had watched the spectacle, a man was standing who was part of the ruling council of Israel. But this was no mocker. This was a man who loved Jesus. This was a man who had not gone along with their plans to arrest and try him and hand him over to the Romans. His voice and that of a few others had been drowned out by the frenzy of the majority and he had watched the whole proceeding with grief and helplessness. But now he could do something. His name was Joseph of the village of Arimathea. He courageously walked back into the city and asked to see Pilate.

“Yes, what is it that you want now!” Pilate was so disgusted with the members of the Jewish ruling council. He knew that Jesus was innocent and that they had handed Jesus over to him so that he would do their dirty work for them. He thought he had washed himself from the whole sordid mess and now here was another Jewish ruling member asking for a favor!

“What is it that you want?”

Joseph said, “Jesus of Nazareth is dead. I ask that your centurion hand the body over to me. I will give him a proper burial.”

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“Dead? Already? It takes days for a crucified man to die. Are you sure?” Pilate turned to his servant and said, “Bring the centurion to me” and when the centurion arrived Pilate said, “This man here says that Jesus is dead. He wants his body but we must be sure that he is dead.”

“Yes, governor. Jesus is dead. The others are dead as well. I can assure you that Jesus is dead.” Pilate then turned to Joseph and said, “The body is yours.” And Joseph breathed a sigh of relief and with help from his friends, they took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped his body in a linen cloth, and carried him to Joseph’s family tomb that had been carved out of the side of a hill in Jerusalem.

With torches, they made their way into the inner recesses of the tomb and carefully placed his lifeless body on a ledge that had been hewn into the rocky hillside. Joseph took one more look at Jesus, laid his hand upon his head, prayed, and with grief in his heart turned away leaving him in darkness of death.

When Joseph emerged, women were outside the tomb, Mary Magdalene, another Mary and other women to see the place where their beloved Master was laid. Joseph looked upon them and recognized them as followers of Jesus. He said to them, “Peace be with you all. It is over. He is dead and I have given him this resting place. I know you want to see him and I know you want to anoint him but the Sabbath is upon us. We must return to our homes and rest. You can come after the Sabbath with spices for his burial. But now, we must leave him.” And they rolled the large stone upon the entrance to the tomb just as the sun was setting. The life of Jesus was over.