

CHRIST'S LAST WILL — THE SEVEN WORDS ON THE CROSS.

Text: Luke 23:34 ...

Suggested Hymns:

66, 78, 54, 292, 65

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The texts for our sermon today are the Seven Words on the Cross.

Luke 23:34, ³⁴ *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

Luke 23:43, ⁴³ *And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

John 19:26-27, ²⁶ *When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!"* ²⁷ *Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*

Matthew 27:46, ⁴⁶ *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ... "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

John 19:28, ²⁸ *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"*

John 19:30, ³⁰ *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!"*

Luke 23:46, ⁴⁶ *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Scripture says in Hebrews 9:15-17, ¹⁵ *And for this reason [Jesus Christ] is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death ...* ¹⁶ *For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the*

testator. ¹⁷ For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

This is Scriptural language, confirmed by daily experience. A last will and testament is not in force until the testator has died. Jesus' last will contains seven sentences, the Seven Words on the Cross. In it Jesus makes full provision for all your needs. And having made His last will, He dies.

You, the legal heirs, are gathered here to take possession of the testamentary inheritance as it will be paid out to you sentence by sentence. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Bequest Grants Us Complete Remission (Cancellation) Of All Our Debts

“Father, Forgive Them”

How uncomfortable, how disturbing, yes, worrisome, earthly debts can be! Many a person rolls restlessly on his bed, another loses his sanity, a third may kill himself, in despair over heavy indebtedness.

But far more alarming is our debt with God, our sin. If this remains unpaid, it will result in eternal imprisonment in hell. This debt drove Peter, brave man that he was, to bitter tears. This debt drove Judas, however cunning he thought himself to be, to a horrible suicide. This debt drove Luther, conscientious man that he was, to the cloister and to near despair.

This debt of sin rests all the heavier on us because our conscience tells us that of ourselves we can never appease the wrath of the just and holy God. Many people try as they may to pay their debt with works of their own invention are still under the curse of the Law. The Bible says *“by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in God’s sight.”¹*

The cost of our redemption is too great to be left in our own hands. God must put the whole transaction into the hands of His own Son, Jesus.

This tremendous task occupied every moment of Jesus' life from His birth to this climactic hour on good Friday. Having completed His mission, He is now able to bequeath to us the benefits of His perfect life and substitutionary death in the word *“Father, forgive them.”*

This word is spoken not only in behalf of those murderers about the Cross, but it is directed also to us. It is actually our sin that crucified Jesus. The Jews and the high priest and Pilate are representatives of the whole human race. And just as they and their sins represent you and me, so the forgiveness offered to them is bequeathed to us.

Do not hesitate to receive this forgiveness, even though Jesus adds: ***“For they know not what they do.”*** In line with this statement Peter says that the Jews ***killed the Prince of life, ...*** ¹⁷ ***“Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.”***

Jesus does not wish to minimise the sin of the Jews. That was great indeed. Already in Jesus’ lifetime the Jews had closed their hearts to the influence of His clear words. Their stubbornness had, however, not reached its final stage. With few exceptions these people under the Cross had not yet committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, for which there is no forgiveness.

It was not until they had rejected the testimony of the Apostles concerning Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins that God gave them over to the hardness of their hearts.

But at the moment when Jesus prayed, ***“Father, forgive them,”*** He could and did still pray for His enemies. So long as it is possible, the Lord puts the best construction, even on enmity to God and Himself, ascribing it to ignorance. In this there is comfort for us; no matter how great and numerous our sins, Jesus still offers forgiveness.

Christ’s plea is both powerful and effective. It is not merely a pious wish which may or may not materialise. Jesus has full warrant to pray as He did and a just claim to be heard. When He prayed these words, He held the account book of our debts, receipted in His handwriting and with His own precious blood, before the eyes of His Father and said in effect: ***“Behold, My Father, I am suffering what sinners deserved, their debt is paid; now You can no longer accuse them.”***

It is this forgiveness that is being paid out to you every time you hear, read, and meditate upon the Gospel and every time you partake of His body and blood. Even now, at this very moment, you are being made an heir of the Saviour’s righteousness as you lay hold of it in faith.

2. The Bequest Grants Us An Everlasting Home

“Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise”

All debts are paid. The Psalmist says in Psalm 16:6, *Yes, I have a good inheritance.* But with this release from the eternal debtors’ prison, Jesus bequeaths us an everlasting home in the word, *today you will be with Me in Paradise.*

Paradise is a beautifully descriptive name for heaven. Jesus, now and here, promises you a home, not built with human hands; a place where there shall be no hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor the sun smite us there. This is the home where the wise, those who believe in Jesus as their personal Saviour, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.

It is this home that Jesus has gone to prepare for us, and from it He shall return to receive us to Himself. To this heritage, too, we may apply the words of 1 Corinthians 2:9, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

Heaven is an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, which does not fade away, where we shall rest from all our labours. Such is the Paradise now offered to you as your home forever.

And who is to enjoy the bliss of this everlasting home? A murderer and thief. Can this be true? It certainly is. Heaven is offered to every penitent thief and murderer. And this includes you and me.

“What, am I a murderer?” Yes, for *“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.”*² If there were no other reason for condemning the world for sin, this alone would make everyone subject to eternal damnation. Indeed, all of us are murderers when judged by God’s Law. Therefore it becomes a wonderful comfort to hear this word spoken also to us *“today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

“With Me.” With Jesus! This makes heaven a paradise. Communion and everlasting fellowship with Jesus who so loved us that He gave His life for us. Heaven is the place of bliss where we shall have no earthly and temporal evils, where we shall forever be in the company and presence of Jesus. In heaven His

thoughts and desires will be ours in the fullest sense of the word. Our wishes shall be in absolute conformity with His.

As long as we remain on this earth, we are prone to thoughts, words, and deeds which hurt the Saviour, which helped to crucify Him. And the newborn man hates this evil inclination. It grieves the Christian to see how often he still sins. However, in heaven, with Jesus, all these disappointments and heartaches, caused by our lust-filled flesh, shall cease.

3. The Bequest Grants Us Foretastes Of Heaven Experienced In The Church “Woman, Behold Your Son!” “Behold Your Mother!”

The full enjoyment of heaven we shall experience in the next life, but already here we are granted many a foretaste of heaven’s bliss. *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* Today heaven belongs to you. In order that we may possess and enjoy some of heaven’s bliss while yet in this vale of tears, Jesus bequeaths us a delightful home on earth in the midst of the comforting fellowship with other believers. This He does in the words spoken to His mother and to John, *“Woman, behold your Son!” “Behold your Mother!”*

Although here Jesus creates an outward relationship of family ties, yet by this very act He joins them into an even closer fellowship and communion, into a spiritual family. These faithful few under the Cross are the beginning of the family of Jesus Christ, commonly known as the Church. This communion of saints continues throughout the ages, but its membership is in a constant state of flux. Some lose their status as members of this family, to which others through Baptism and conversion are daily added.

The comfort you receive in the home of this happy family of Jesus Christ on earth comes to you through the Word of the Saviour. He made each Christian a priest in his own right, so that in Divine Services, Sunday School, Confirmation, and other agencies of the church, we teach and admonish one another through Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In this home we forgive each other our sins, and through the means of grace we are made possessors of all that Jesus has earned for us. And this is a foretaste of heaven.

Just as the angels and God in heaven are concerned about our well-being, so in this earthly home, in the Church, each member is concerned about the material

and spiritual welfare of others. We are different members of the one family of Jesus Christ. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 that *the members should have the same care for one another.* ²⁶ *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

4. The Bequest Grants Us Peace

“My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

The inheritance may offer remission of debts, a new home, happy fellowship; yet there is the constant danger of the loss of possessions through war and the rumours of war. To remove this threat, Jesus wills us peace, a peace which the world cannot give, in the word, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*”

Do these words say anything about peace? Properly understood, they do. This one short sentence, coming from the mouth of Jesus who Himself is holy and spotless, yet burdened with all the sins ever committed, expresses all the punishment and tortures of hell which the Saviour experienced in your and my stead.

Since He has suffered hell’s full torture for us, we know with certainty that we need not suffer it, ¹⁴ *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*³

And so, even though we cannot form an adequate conception of the abyss of suffering which Jesus endured while He was forsaken of God, yet we do know that out of its depth flows peace with God for poor sinners. The war between us and God has ended. He is no longer angry with us. Peace has been restored.

And He sends out His messengers with the instructions, “*Comfort, yes, comfort My people!*” *Says your God.* ² “*Speak comfort to Jerusalem [the Church], and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned.*”⁴ Now nobody can rob us of our inheritance or spoil our joys in the assured hope of life eternal.

5. The Bequest Grants Us Source Of Refreshment And Comfort

“I Thirst!”

While we are in this vale of tears, surrounded by the world assailed from within by our evil flesh, there is a constant warfare against the new man, against the Heaven-born spirit. In this battle of faith against the filth of sin we are in constant need of refreshment.

But who will offer us comfort in affliction, love in losses and bereavements, friendship when others desert us, hope when despair would destroy us, forgiveness when our sins alarm us? Fellow redeemed, I assure you that Jesus has provided us with the only true source of comfort and refreshment, and this He did when He cried in agony, ***“I thirst!”***

Because Jesus is true Man, He was suffering a real physical thirst. During the fifteen-hour torture from Thursday midnight till late Friday afternoon He experienced inordinate thirst. The burning sun and indescribable pain of crucifixion had only intensified the thirst.

But this thirst is also indicative of His thirst for communion with God, as well as of His thirst for the rescue of your and my soul. Here stands fulfilled the word of Psalm 42:2, ² ***My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*** Remember, these words are spoken as He still experiences the hot anger of God’s wrath upon your sin. Therefore immediately connected with His thirst was His great longing for your soul’s salvation.

But, thanks be to God, the next word from His parched lips assures us that this rescue has been accomplished. How does His thirst benefit you and me in the heat of battle when the whole world seems against us or when our afflictions would snuff out the last rays of hope? Ah! These beneficial fruits of His unspeakable thirst He has placed into the everlasting springs of His Word.

John 7:37, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. John 4:14, ¹⁴ ***“whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”*** And Revelation 22:17, ***And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.***

Yes, from His thirst-quenching Word alone we gain strength for the patient endurance in all the battles of life.

6. The Bequest Grants Us Complete Retirement (From The Law And Service To Sin) “It Is Finished”

Many a last will and testament makes provision for an early retirement from work and for a pleasant evening of life. Likewise our Saviour’s legacy provides complete retirement from the works of the Law as a way of appeasing God.

This Jesus does in the word *“It is finished.”* The debt has been paid; the punishment has been endured; righteousness has been earned; God has been reconciled; Paradise has been opened; the Church, as an entry hall to Paradise, has been established. The great work of redemption has been completed.

With His cry *“It is finished”* Jesus would say: *“Redeemed, there is nothing you can add to Christ’s vicarious satisfaction.”* And to those who still try through works of their own to render God propitiation, He says in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

Thanks be to God, we now rest from the futile endeavour to save ourselves by the works of the Law. Through faith we appropriate all that Christ has earned for us. And even this faith is not the work of man, for only through the preaching of the Cross is saving faith generated in our hearts.

But the Gospel of accomplished redemption delivers us also from serving sin, so that we are free to serve our loving Redeemer. Being made free from sin, you become servants of God. It is not unusual for the retired person to take up other forms of activity. Retirement does not necessarily mean inactivity. And so it is with the Christian.

Beginning with the first glimmer of faith, the new man in Christ engages in activities in behalf of Jesus that daily grow in intensity. Christ redeemed us from all iniquity that He might make us zealous to do good works.⁵

The person who believes the Gospel of accomplished redemption manifests his faith in good works. The Christian adorns his earthly life with the fruits of righteousness, faithfully pursues his calling and serves God in it, exercises his love for the brethren, and extends the Kingdom of God on earth.

So, then, ***“It is finished”*** retires us from service to sin and makes us ready to work whole-heartedly for Jesus who bought us with a price. May we always grow in His service.

**7. The Bequest Grants Us
Blessed Departure From This Life To Life Everlasting
“Father, Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit”**

The most precious part of a person is the soul. While the body passes through the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus makes complete provision for your soul’s safekeeping by depositing it into the hands of His Father.

A man going on a journey will leave his treasured inheritance and valuables in a safe, lest he lose them. Jesus here points to the only Keeper of our souls, His Father, and thus assures us a blessed departure from this life and a happy entrance into heaven.

The hands of our loving Father through Jesus Christ are fireproof — hell cannot touch us there. His hands are burglarproof — Satan cannot rob us of our inheritance. With a joyful heart the heavenward traveller journeys through this world; and when he reaches the end, he lets the Saviour carry him safely across. ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.***⁶

The Christian confesses, ***“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”***⁷ Having, then, placed his soul into the Father’s hand, it makes no difference to the Christian whether he lives or dies. We read in Philippians 1:21, ***“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”***

So on this Good Friday we have seen how the Seven words of Christ apply to our daily lives. We have again through faith in His Word received the testamentary inheritance, with all debts paid, a home assured, even now in the company of fellow redeemed, at peace with God, refreshed by the eternal springs from on high, with full retirement from the Law and from service to sin, we are ready to live right and to die right.

Let us conclude with these words of Scripture, Romans 14:8, ⁸ *For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Rom. 3:20

² 1 John 3:15

³ Heb. 10:14

⁴ Isa. 40:1-2

⁵ Titus 2:14

⁶ Psalm 23:4

⁷ 2 Timothy 1:12