

Comfort in Pain

By Santiago Lange



Many people face the pain that comes because we fall short of our dreams, or because our words unintentionally wound those we love, or their words wound us. Perhaps many of us have come to the church because we, like a child whose favorite toy is broken, came running to the Father hoping beyond hope that He would give us a timely word to glue it all back together again. So, we listened intently to the Word that comes from the pulpit, waiting for that one truth that, stings a little, but cleans out the wound and makes us whole again.

The seven last sayings from the cross are no exception. In particular, the last three "words" from our Lord are brought to us to bring healing. These words are not left to the scholars or to the intellectual elite. They are for us. These three last sayings, "I thirst," "It is finished," and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," contain great encouragement for us in times of drought and pain.

Often, one of the requests of the dying is for just a little something to drink. In the sadness of that moment of grief, we do everything in our power to fulfill that request. In His time of suffering, the same thing happened to our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips" (John 19:28-29).

Jesus said, "I thirst." It is the shortest of the sayings, yet pregnant with meaning. In fact, we can glean very important lessons from that saying that bring us comfort. We are reminded, for example, that suffering always has a purpose.

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I thirst (John 19:28). The agony which Jesus endured was all part of God's plan and in the same way; God has a purpose for our pain. We see that God understands our pain because He experienced suffering too. One of the essential truths of the Christian faith is the two natures of Christ. Not only was Jesus fully God, but He was also fully man. Some claim that Jesus is God but was never really a man. Early Christians had to deal with a religious movement known as the Gnostics who also believed this. Others claim that Jesus was a man, a really good one, but not really the Creator of the universe. But, the Bible declares without wavering that God became man.

We see the importance of this doctrine in this passage, when our God, as a man, felt what it was like to feel life pulling away. He felt the moment of dehydration. And looking over the entirety of His life, we see even more shared pain. He experienced the death of a dear friend,

Lazarus, and He wept. He was tempted to sin as recorded in Matthew, Mark and in Luke. He was made fun of, called a drunk, beat up, abandoned by His closest friends and left to hang alone on the cross. He experienced real suffering.

Consider the words of the writer of Hebrews:

Hebrews 2:14-18: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Hebrews 4:15 says this "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin."

Our God-man experienced the same life-difficulties that we all face in some form or other.

Philip Yancey and Dr. Paul Brand in their book, *In His Image*, say this...

"Our prayers and cries of suffering take on greater meaning because we now know them to be understood by Him [God]. Instinctively, we want a God who not only knows about pain but shares in it and is affected by our own. By looking at Jesus, we realize we have such a God. He took onto Himself the limitations of time and space and family and pain and sorrow."

It's comforting to know that we have a God who understands our suffering, our temptations, and we can be confident that, if nothing else, He will hold us tightly in His loving arms because He understands. Just as He understands our temptations and pain and meets our needs accordingly, another lesson we learn about the comfort that comes because He suffered, is that we can likewise minister to others because of the struggles we have had.

God has blessed us greatly by the struggles we have experienced. Who better to hold someone else's hand through the experience of a death of a parent, than someone who has experienced it themselves? Who better to offer encouragement for someone who has lost a loved one to cancer, or who has had cancer themselves?

If you were abused as a child, you can be that shoulder for those abused today. If you know alcoholism, you can be strength for your brothers and sisters who struggle with it today.

If you know what it's like to be the child of a divorce, be that friend to someone who needs it now. If you've been divorced, you know that pain. Help someone else through it as well.

Certainly, Jesus suffering was not just cold fact in the ears of His children. We really find comfort in His suffering when we consider the words, "I thirst." But we find other valuable insights from the last words on the cross.

In His statement, "It is finished," we can find peace in Jesus' accomplishment. This second of the last three "words" from the cross can bring us peace, but before it can, we have to understand what it is that Jesus did finish. Lots of people offer lots of suggestions, some of which

we might agree with, some of which we might not. Most agree, however on at least a couple of things and one thing in particular. First, most agree that it meant that, in a very real sense, Jesus' suffering was finally over. In our lives, there's a certain level of relief that all of us experience when suffering comes to an end. When we overcome even something as simple as a common cold, we really feel relieved. Or, more seriously, when a loved one who has suffered and finally goes to be with the Lord, we find relief in even that. In the same manner, the experiences that Jesus had just been through, namely, the beating, the spitting, the hanging on the cross, and even the temptations of everyday life that He successfully fought off, finally ended. "It is finished" is an appropriate response to this.

However, another reason for saying "It is finished," and the most important one for us, was the main reason He came to earth and died on the cross in the first place. Namely, He accomplished the one thing we couldn't. The word translated from the Greek that means "It is finished," can also be translated to mean "Paid in full."

Consider going to a store where you have something in lay away. If you pay that balance off, you fully expect the cashier to hand the item over to you. You don't expect them to bill you again. It's been paid for. In the same way, our sins were paid for. You can't un-pay for your sins. There is no return policy. God bought you with His blood two thousand years ago and you're His. That means every one of our sins is forgiven. When Jesus said, "It is finished," he didn't mean "to be continued." It is paid, in full!

However, the opposite is taught in some churches today. We're told that if we just stop sinning, God will love us. If we just start living like Jesus, God will like us. If we just read the bible a little more, pray a little more, tell others a little more, and sin a little less, maybe, just maybe, we might earn a spot in heaven. If we really feel like we've disappointed God and we want to fix it, we can't. Jesus already did. We can't earn God's love. So, let's stop trying.

Not only can we find comfort in His suffering and peace in His accomplishment, but we also find hope in His destination. The story goes that a small boy was taken to the pet store to look for a new puppy. When he got there and saw all the choices before him, one puppy caught his eye. Its little tail wagged furiously. At that moment he knew which one he wanted so he turned to his dad and said, "I want that one! The one with the happy ending"!

And don't we all want the happy ending? Jesus had proclaimed the happy ending for Himself when He said those words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He knew exactly where He was going. Then, He breathed His last breath, and immediately went to the waiting arms of His Father. This truth can give us hope for two reasons.

First, it reminds us that we too have a home that is not this world with a Father who is not of this world. Jesus said, "I go and prepare a place for...me." No, He said, "I go and prepare a place for YOU. Who is "you"? That is US!

His final word on the cross also gives us hope by taking our eyes off of loss that comes at death and places it firmly on our future with Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul said it well in his letter to the Corinthians, "*O death, where is your victory, o death, where is your sting?*" The small price to pay at death is nothing in comparison to the glory that awaits us on the other side of the river.

Or as Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 4:17 "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

Whether it is the pain of divorce, cancer, unemployment or the loss of something that means a lot to us, we will all experience pain in this life. But instead of taking our eyes off Christ in those times of distress, we can remember His timeless last words from the cross. Instead of despair, we can find comfort, peace, and hope at just the right time. □