

The Cross...A Study in Emotional Maturity

(Based on the Seven Last Words of Jesus)

BY

SAMUEL M. SHOEMAKER

Rector of Calvary Church, New York

WE ARE HERE to watch with Jesus Christ as He hangs upon His Cross. These three hours, the darkest that history ever saw, have become a time which the world wants to remember. Millions of others today are doing what we are doing, praying and worshipping in churches called by His Name, waiting to find meanings new and old in His Cross. For these dark hours have been turned into brightness by two things: first, the way in which Jesus met His Cross; and second, the Resurrection which was God's great vindication of Him, and the great Christian sign that death is but the gate to Life Eternal.

The Cross is the most fruitful tree that was ever planted in the ground of our earth. As if it were literally alive, it goes on giving off fruitful meaning and truth age after age. It is not the grimness of it that draws us to it, and not mainly the courage of it; but the deep-seated instinct in us all that somehow here the mystery of life is more nearly unlocked than anywhere else, the belief that if Jesus was victorious here, there can no trial nor temptation nor any darkness seize upon the life and heart of man above which he may not rise victorious in the same strength as kept our Lord upon His Cross.

Today I would come at this great, profound mystery from a little different angle—not so much hoping that these addresses will throw any fresh light upon the Cross, but rather that the Cross may itself throw some fresh light upon one of the deepest problems of our time. That problem is the search for emotional maturity and stability. Our age is chiefly characterized by emotional immaturity and instability. Anyone close to the hearts of people today knows how many of them are sick or nearly sick in their minds, afraid, uncertain, insecure, unhappy, inadequate for life. Some of this belongs to the contingent existence which we all share as human beings: some of it has been intensified by the conditions of our modern world. It is not only that many cannot manage normal living at all, and pitch over the edge into mental sickness, thereby needing not our scorn nor criticism but our greatest patience and understanding; but that few of us, however 'normal' we may think ourselves to be, are free from this modern sickness of soul. We all need help with it.

Jesus Christ our Lord is always wanting to give us help. From His Cross He is holding out to us redemption, salvation and new life. That redemption is from eternal death, and changes all the future for us. But it begins by changing the present, too. What He offers us goes to work in us at once, and begins making of life a wholly different thing. Jesus was always and consistently Himself. He was never more Himself than He was upon His Cross. If we study His words today as windows into a life characterized, not only by unique divinity which puts Him far beyond us, but also by complete humanity which puts Him directly beside us, and see in His words the revelation of an emotionally mature and stable and secure Person, perhaps His words will bring fresh hope and meaning to us.

The First Word — Compassion

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

ST. LUKE 23:34.

HE COULD NOT have said a greater word to begin to heal the breach between God and the human race, which was the deep purpose of the Cross. He lifted up to His Father in prayer those who were crucifying Him, those who stood behind them and ordered them to do it, and all of us before Him and after Him who sin partly in wilfulness and partly in ignorance of what we are doing. He took the kindlier attitude, as if it were all ignorance, which perhaps it is, as He sees it with His selfless mind and heart.

There are three elements in these words which may be taken to stand for emotional maturity.

The first is compassion. Caught in the web of circumstance, in which web other people are often factors, we frequently respond with fighting and bitterness. Most people who are harsh and hard on others are really condemning themselves in others. A desperately unhappy man has gone from business to business, and from wife to wife, always seeking the success and security he wants, saying he lives only for praise, power and money. He has worn out his welcome with everyone, because he has worn out his welcome with himself. There is nowhere to turn but God; but as yet he will not down his pride and seek God. He is the opposite of this vast compassion—this view of people that sees them first of all as pitiful, pathetic, that loves them because love is the first and perhaps the last thing that can ever reach them. Justice must be dealt with, too, at some time, and sin: but the first impulse in emotional healthiness toward others is compassion. It is following our Lord when He says, "Forgive them—have mercy on them." We cannot love people with anything but a selfish love that seeks something for itself, unless we can find His great compassion that loves them not only for their sakes, but somehow for Christ's sake as well. Compassion—let us seek and pray for that. It is the outward look, not the inward—the look away from self, not at self. It was for others He prayed first—not for Himself, even in the mounting agony.

And the second is understanding. I think He took in the whole sweep of life when He said this: its creation, its redemption, its purpose. These vast considerations must go to work upon our smallest emotions else our smallest emotions will be outside the Great Plan. He believed passionately in the Great Plan. When the object of life is to fashion souls for Life Eternal, one is less concerned whether there are hard spots in it than whether it glorifies God,—less interested in having an easy time and peace of mind than in doing obediently the will of God,—less concerned with what happens to us than with doing what God wants us to do. Christ had a belief about life as a whole, deriving from His belief in God. There is a "Christian view of life" that He imparts to those who become His disciples, which

provides the understanding of the terms and conditions, the aims and methods, of life. We are meant to see our little vicissitudes, our failures and successes, as related to this total view of life. The word "understanding" is not to be taken only in the sense of greater compassion, but of greater perception of the purpose of life. Without some basic frame-work, there can be no emotional stability or normality. Jesus understood the mystery of life. He imparts that understanding by faith to us—not all of it, but as much as we need to know. He could say, "Father, forgive them . . ." because He saw His own pain and struggle, and the blind sin of His tormentors, upon a vast canvas, the painter of which was God.

And the third is acceptance. Long before He had known that the Cross was inevitable. He had made His peace with the Cross by giving to it His inward consent. He had said, "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself." Others can kill the body: they cannot touch that inward rebellion or consent with which we face what is humanly speaking inevitable. A special kind of victory belongs to those who take the inevitable and make it voluntary. Some of the most wonderful saints I have known have been great sufferers: great in that they suffered much pain, but great also in that they made their pain a loving sacrifice to Christ Himself, and so found peace in the pain. This is not a dumb resignation which lets the inexorable roll over us: this is a daring leap of obedience and cooperation which transfigures the inexorable and makes of it a triumph. The less we defy and fight against the trials that come into our lives, the more we accept them in faith and pray to God to show us what He means by them, the greater will be our emotional maturity and health. Jesus is here, as everywhere else, our Pioneer. He had so accepted all that was happening, and was so sure of His God, that He was at leisure from Himself, even on the Cross, with time to remember, consider and pray for others.

God help us so to seek through these words into His heart, and so to lay hold upon that which held Him, that we too may find compassion, and understanding, and victorious acceptance, through Him!



The Second Word — Hope

"Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

ST. LUKE 23:43.

THERE WERE two thieves crucified with Jesus. One of them, wild with his pain and ready to lash out against One Who by His own calmness seemed to judge the other two, reviled Jesus for the contrast between His pretensions and His predicament. But the other rebuked his fellow, and asked Jesus to "remember him when He came into His Kingdom." And to him Jesus made the reply, "Verily I say unto thee—(that was His cus-

tomary phrase for emphasis), Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

We frankly do not know whether He meant by Paradise a fixed and long-term intermediate state of the dead, between the time of death and the final resurrection; or whether it was rather the first stage in that growth in the life hereafter in which all of us must believe. Whether He meant one thing or the other, He certainly made it plain that after they had died, this man and He would meet and be together on the other side. Nothing less can be read into the words, fortified by His emphatic “verily”. This was a promise that was a certain assurance, not a wish only.

Today I am seeing in this incident, as it reveals our Lord’s own emotions, the persistence of *hope* in Him. There must have been two sides to this hope which ever held our Lord in a kind of calm enthusiasm. The first was the “sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto life eternal,” which hope He held out to this man. Heaven is very vague and far-off to many of us, though some of us may be nearer than we know to the time when we shall be confronted with the destiny of eternity: but to Him heaven was always the great prospect. I suspect He lived, as a great many of His dear saints that I have known have lived, with heaven ever in His eye—content to be here till the time is fulfilled, yet always straining a little at the moorings because, as St. Paul said, “to depart and be with Christ is far better.” The other great hope that drew Him and drove Him on was the hope of seeing His Kingdom established in this world. If the Lord’s Prayer is the heart of His desire, this petition is the heart of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” He thought this world could be redeemed. He knew, better than we, the difficulties, including the pride of men who say “Lo here! or lo! there,” as if some personality or movement or community had at last brought the Kingdom in full glory. Yet He believed it could and must come. There is a lot of unholy despair in the mental and emotional unhealthiness of our time, much feeling that life is finally a mystery that cannot at all be unravelled, and the world a place which cannot be brought under the sway and dominance of Christ, except in such negligible parts and periods as constitute but a tiny bit of white upon a sea of black. I am sure that Jesus thought the evil and resistance of the world was rather black against a great background of white, because God was there and this was all in His will and final plan.

It is a strange but persistent quality that we find in Jesus, and in His real followers—a combination of realistic appreciation of how terrific evil is, how hard to reach and root out, how recurrent and resourceful; and yet the surge of hope always outlives it, out-dares it. The final mood is hope. We can share in this mood of hope. For us, hope is the first step on the way to faith—as wonder is the first step on the way to worship. It is a good thing to cultivate hope, not of the wishful thinking kind, but rather of the kind which after collecting and fermenting within us, bursts forth in steady action designed to realize the hope we hold. There is an obligation at all times to consider the facts, and these include the resistance which we meet at all times in the ‘world’. Hope forms a kind of skin of protection about our deepest, purest, highest desires: it covers them against too soon and too frequent exposure to the storms of cynicism and disillusionment.

It is a little less mature than full faith, but it sometimes has in it the courage of strong desire. Hope is a great quality in those whose emotions are normal, as the absence of it is a marked characteristic of those who are emotionally unwell or sub-normal. Let people's minds and emotions fasten always upon dark thoughts, discouraging considerations, the tragic factors in life, and you will see a face drawn with despair sometimes slowly go blank with unreason. Hope is a medicine we dare not stop taking, if we would keep our emotions normal.

For another thing: hope looks to the future. It dreams of the future. It does not look backward. One cannot escape the belief that in our time the doctors of psychology have done us both a service and a disservice: a service when they made us look back into our past, and see that "we are a part of all that we have met," and that mistakes made then have their effect now, and that some things today can only be interpreted and dealt with as we go back to their origins: but a disservice when this is made to mean that the ferreting out of the old facts, and explanation of how the present conditions came about, or the rehearsing of the whole story to a doctor, will be sufficient to cure the condition. Dr. Karen Horney warns against this, saying of a patient, "Whether or not he is aware of doing so, he hopes to solve the particular problem by turning to its historical origin. The analyst must hold him back from this escape into the past and encourage him to examine first what is involved . . . to become familiar with the peculiarity itself." We must not, then, use the future as an escape, any more than we do the past: but the past is done, and the future is before us. A large number of people would move towards mental and emotional maturity and health if they would substitute hope for the future, for regret concerning the past.

Yet how shall this be done? No one can wave his hand, and leave behind him the waste, the wandering, the wickedness of the years that are flown, and fetch up smiling with his face towards the future. We feel the past conditions the future: what assurance have we that it will not be a continuity of the same futile business? And this brings us right back to Jesus and the thief. For on his own cross, that one thief let his life turn about. His eyes went from the sight of his friend crucified with him, from the crowd standing below, from the horror of his own situation, to this other Man Who hung there between them. Something drew him that way. He spoke out and asked for a favour. But it is not hard to see he asked for pardon when he asked for place: Jesus so heard and understood him. The man repented when he turned to Jesus: his prayer was his repentance. The criminality of his past had left him with no more hope for the future than the confusions of our past have left us. There was literally no hope nor health in him. But there was offered to him something which put a foundation under his flicker of hope, that came from just seeing Jesus: and that foundation was forgiveness. We cannot banish our past by an effort: it must be banished for us by pardon—pardon which wipes it out, puts it as far from us as the east is from the west. Pardon has its condition, and that is penitence. If instead of brooding upon our failures, we will isolate the roots of our own responsibility, and call them our sin, and

bring them to Christ, and ask Him for forgiveness, a new force will enter the situation that was never there before. The reason why the Christian religion is so endlessly joyful is that there is literally no end to God's forgiveness, if we are but penitent and mean to obey His will henceforth. Psychology knows no forgiveness, only the outworking of inexorable law. But Christianity knows it. There is, I dare say, no real hope for you and me, except in the fact that God is as ready to forgive us as Christ was to forgive that penitent thief. Would God that, as we hear this story, a surge of hope might rise up in our hearts, flowing from Christ's forgiveness, and making all things new!



The Third Word — Responsibility

"Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!"

ST. JOHN 19:26, 27.

THE CROSS was the great crisis in Jesus' life. There were many others, but this was the supreme crisis. If He went to Jerusalem, He would walk right into the teeth of such opposition as would do away with Him—He knew that. Every prudential consideration, whether of His own safety, or of the future of His work, would have moved Him to avoid Jerusalem, for Jerusalem meant a verdict and a show-down. Yet He felt driven and impelled by divine compulsion to go. As late as last night, He might have avoided it all, which explains the struggle of Gethsemane. There in the garden He fought it all out in advance. It was the one method appropriate to His purpose. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me." But what a lifting up! What shame, what pain, what confession of failure, what cutting short of a mighty work!

We are studying His Cross today from the point of view of emotional maturity and normality. There are some things men were not intended to stand: war is one of them, and crucifixion is another. These are so abnormal in the demand which they put upon people, that it seems men might be excused no matter what they do. Yet these extreme situations are the very things that put to the test one's emotional maturity. Perhaps we do not know how much or how little emotional maturity we have until we face some terrible test that goes way beyond life's normal crises. That is what Jesus faced in the Cross. He met it, we believe, with complete emotional maturity.

One of the things emotional maturity means is being sufficiently at leisure from oneself to do the responsible thing under the circumstances. When St. Paul found himself in prison, instead of moping about his fate, he went to writing letters to the various churches about the Mediterranean, which have become part of the immortal Christian literature; and he also went to converting the soldiers to whom he was chained. I suspect he said to himself one day, "These men are chained to me, as I am chained to

them”: and then began his witness to them about a man named Jesus Who died on a Cross, and rose again the third day, and Who had completely changed heaven and earth for St. Paul himself. He went right on living his own life in Christ, spite of bonds and afflictions. In this he was like his Lord, Who went right on living His own life on the Cross.

It is well known that St. John was His closest friend in the apostolic company. We do not know whether St. Joseph had died, but it appears that His Mother Mary was dependent upon Jesus. Perhaps He had planned to talk it all out with them before-hand, and then events had moved so fast He could not do it. The Cross, with all the tragedy of it, had brought together two people He wanted to talk with about each other. There they stood at the foot of the Cross. He knew He could trust St. John to do the very best for her whom He most loved in the world, even if it meant a life-long care and sacrifice. He knew that there could be no greater kindness to His mother than to leave her in the care of His best friend, unless it was to let her know that she, too, was to take care of *him*. So we have the two brief words, “Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!” “And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

Responsibility is one of the marks of emotional maturity and health. Well people do not shrink from the normal amount of it, nor from some added amounts at times. They do not “go up in the air” when they find themselves faced with something they are not quite prepared for, but meet it calmly as best they can. The retreat from responsibility may be a first sign of emotional sickness; and there is no more tragic mark of the truly emotionally sick person than his inability to discharge even the common responsibilities of living. The climb backward from emotional disturbance to emotional tranquillity and health is begun by the acceptance of such small responsibilities as one can discharge, increasing them bit by bit till equilibrium is regained. We sometimes have to help people who are emotionally disturbed to make their decisions, for nothing seems so mountainous and insuperable as the slightest decision that must be made. The greater their self-absorption in their own troubles, the harder it is to make a decision or accept a task. It is a temptation to them, and sometimes to us, to go on making decisions for them which keep them dependent and immature emotionally. We shall be better friends if we help them to assume responsibility for their own lives, and for the tasks which normally fall to them, just as rapidly as they are able to do it.

Many of us chafe under our responsibilities. We feel the drudgery of our work, sometimes even of our families. It all seems to hang on us. I wonder if we realize to what a degree our lives hang on our responsibilities? What an empty thing life would be without them—no tasks to be carried through, even when they have become routine or tiresome, no people to be cared for, even when it takes it out of us, and exhausts our supply of emotion and of physical strength—how vain and futile would life be without these very things! How often does our responsibility keep us on the track—like a wonderful old character who once told a friend of mine the only thing that kept her from a nervous break-down was an empty purse—she just couldn’t afford it! In all the things for which we

give thanks, let us not fail to include work and responsibility. I know few restoratives equal to a couple of hours' hard work when one has been centered in himself, out of sorts with the world, and peevish with fate and the universe.

I feel sure that responsibility with Jesus was a habit. From the time when He carried the water or brought in the wood to the home in Nazareth, to the time when He washed the tired and dusty feet of the disciples, and the hour when He took thought for His own mother, He was responsible. You could trust Him. Was it one of the first things that drew people to Him? I do not know—but it is always an attractive quality. But let us go further with this. Gradually there dawned on Him the sense, not that He must be another good man doing His duty: but that He was called to be the one Saviour of the world. When a man is called to any high human office, the sense of pride must soon give way to a terrible sense of responsibility. What must have been the depth of this when the call was the call to Saviourhood! Just think—there was no one to help Him in this—no one else who had even the remotest conception of what it meant. There was nobody to help Him but God. At the Baptism, in the Wilderness, at the Transfiguration, there must have been a series of steps in this realization: but what when finally it was all clear to Him that this was God's expectation of Him—that He should bear in His own body on the tree the sins of all mankind forever, and be the Saviour of the world! The suffering of pain on the Cross must have paled beside the suffering of "becoming sin for us—He Who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Yet He did not shrink from it, not from fear, nor from false modesty, nor from thinking God asked too much. He faced right into it and accepted it. And He became that which God intended Him to become.

Does not this fill us with a new kind of confidence concerning our own responsibilities? They may be small, but they are big to us. When we quaver before them a little, let us remember Jesus, shouldering not the physical Cross only, but the spiritual Cross which was the redemption of mankind: and from Him we shall derive the strength to meet our own responsibilities with that quiet confidence which comes from trust in God, like His trust, and which both evidences and increases the blessing of emotional maturity and health!



The Fourth Word — Prayer

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

ST. MATTHEW 24:46.

ST. MARK 15:34.

EVERY HUMAN BEING goes through at some time a period of despair. The very saints themselves confess to seasons which are sometimes called "the dark night of the soul." The causes of these periods vary all the way

from purely physical reasons, like great fatigue, or careless diet, right on up to the majestic struggle of the human soul with the very powers of darkness. They vary in their intensity, and in their duration, sometimes lasting only a few hours, and sometimes enduring for weeks and even for years. Those who resort to the doubtful solace of drugs, or who take the seemingly easy way out of self-destruction, might do differently if they realized that these periods of depression may need simple medical remedy, or may require some help from a doctor who understands the mind; or that they may not be such a pathological problem at all, but rather a great moral and spiritual struggle which the soul is meant to pass through for its own purification and further enlightenment.

Jesus Christ nowhere appears in the Gospels as anything but an entirely human Person: His divine nature is found in conjunction with a human nature which is not the less human because the divine nature is conjoined with it. There were some forms of evil with which He could have had no traffic, and remain the sinless Son of God: He could have no share whatever in sin, and His own consciousness, as well as the candid record of Scripture, betrays no trace of sin. But there were other forms of evil with which He must have traffic, else He would not be Incarnate God, the brother and friend of mankind. And suffering is one of these. We find no record of physical suffering due to sickness. Weariness we find in Him, but not sickness. But no one could be capable of His degree of sympathy without having himself suffered. We shall never know what pangs went through His youthful mind as increasingly He felt Himself set apart from His fellows for special and unique work. We read the familiar story of the Temptation in the Wilderness, with its frank account of how He was moved to use materialism, magic, and sheer political power in the accomplishment of His aims; and we read of His victory through prayer and the appeal to familiar words of the Old Testament: but nowhere are we told what this cost Him, what agonies of soul and mind He went through in coming to His conclusions. Throughout, we see Him as a quiet, clear-minded Man, easily stirred to compassion and, when He met evil, to indignation: but nothing really is said of the intensity, the frequency, the majesty of His inward conflicts. They must have been there, many a time and oft. I wonder if sometimes, even to His most intimate friends, He appeared a little too perfect quite to understand them, or human life in general? If this impression ever prevailed, it was shattered for good when Jesus gave forth one cry from the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

What was He really feeling? We cannot know, yet we reverently ask. Physical agony can topple the best of people off their base, make them reverse their life-time judgments and even forswear their beliefs; yet great people have surmounted every form of pain, remaining themselves, and sustaining their faith. I cannot believe it was caused by physical agony. Perhaps in this moment He knew, with full intensity, what He had undertaken, to "become sin for us," to identify Himself with all the sin of mankind forever, reaching down, as it were with His great arms, and gathering it all up to bring before God, and asking for His complete pardon. From a thousand places, forms of evil, and centuries of time it grasped

Him, to draw Him down from His mighty work—made Him feel it was too heavy, too plentiful, too black, for even God ever to forgive it all—crushed Him, smothered Him with its frightfulness, so that He felt nearer, for the moment, to the greatness of evil than He felt to the greatness of God. Was it as though He were sinking in the very sea of human sin, aware (as we can never be quite aware) of what it had done to spoil God's white creation, to turn the very universe itself topsy-turvy, insofar as man's freedom was misused, and to pose a problem in redemption that would tax even the love and wisdom of God? We do not know. We *do* know that this was for Jesus, "the dark night of the soul."

How did He handle it? He faced it and did not brush it aside. He did not say that evil was good under a disguise, nor pretend that what He was suffering was not the utmost of mental agony. He did not look about Him for human sympathy, nor did He scream and curse at the injustice which had brought Him where He was. But He did two things:

He found words to vent His grief in the Scripture. He quoted the words with which the 22nd Psalm begins; and if He knew it by heart, as He probably did, He went on to quote the rest of it, quietly and to Himself. It is an antiphon of tribulation and struggling faith, some of its words strikingly appropriate to His situation on the Cross. Surely there was relief in recalling the familiar words, and in the recurrent statements of faith which punctuate them. It is not a Psalm of easy triumph, it is a *de profundis* Psalm, with thin shafts of faith penetrating the darkness. Perhaps in the old serene days He had read that Psalm, and thought how it foreshadowed what would come to Him: perhaps it fortified Him then—and that was why He sought it now. He had His places of refuge and strength, and the Old Testament was one of them. These words both expressed what He was feeling, and reminded Him of the struggle of others, and of the comfort of faith. We, too, in the "dark night," can recall the places of refuge: the Scriptures, the faith of our fathers, the sense of Providence in our own lives, the witness of others who believe. These things anchor us in faith.

And He sought God in prayer. Even His despair at the loss of God, momentarily, was a prayer to God, a prayer which asked, Why? He let Himself be fully human; for we too, want to know why. Why evil? And why evil like this? And why evil coming upon me? The "why" was not answered; but slowly the prayer was answered. Let us see His complete honesty in prayer, not saying more than He felt or meant: it seemed to Him then that God had vanished; and He said so, to God. Sometimes we do not wrestle deeply enough in prayer, lest our deep doubts confound our shallow prayers. We must go through to the bottom of prayer, saying out all we feel to God, and leaving it to Him to resolve the problems for us. True Christian prayer to God may begin very far from complete and trustful faith, begin with questions, misgivings, doubts. God would rather have us honest, as we begin, than confident: if we begin with honesty, He can later give us the confidence. This is highly important in prayer. Sometimes we feel we cannot bring to God anything less than finished faith: yet if our faith were perfect and finished, I suppose we should hardly need prayer! No—the times we need prayer most are the times of doubt and perplexity

and difficulty. If we could not nestle ourselves into the greatness of God, and "complain" to Him (as the Psalmist says in one place) about the things which trouble and confuse us, we should never truly believe in God. The weights upon the soul of Jesus in this hour, the pulls upon His thought and emotion, were the farthest thing from God in all the world. But with a great heave of faith that must have taken unimaginable courage, He drew them all up under the very throne of God, and cried out in agony, "*Why . . . ?*"

We shall never know how many persons, in the grip of fevered sickness, or tempted beyond human endurance to sin, or believing themselves the victim of malign human or superhuman powers, have cried out of the darkness to the God Who was still Himself dark, and in the very crying found Him. It is in these times of the "dark night" that we first learn that faith can travel with us even when we think faith is extinguished, that God may be with us in an hour when we think Him gone, and that we realize that One has gone before us through this "dark night," Who therefore stands beside us when we go through it,—this same Jesus Who maintained His sanity, His health of mind, His emotional stability, even through the pain and shame and utter darkness of the Cross, by prayer to God.



The Fifth Word — Dependence

"I thirst."

ST. JOHN 19:28.

THREE OF THE WORDS from the Cross were addressed to God in prayer, one may have been spoken either to God or to those about Him, and three were spoken to persons within hearing of the Cross. One of these last was a word of frank need which expressed His dependence upon others. It was the word "*I thirst.*" So often as a loved one draws near the other side, one of the little bits of comfort and relief that can be given them is to keep their lips moist. We make them as comfortable as possible. Here Jesus was in increasing physical agony. As wounded soldiers sometimes crave nothing so much as a drink of water, so He suffered terribly from thirst. And He said so, and asked for relief.

The women of Jerusalem prepared a kind of narcotic of herbs and wine that brought a measure of relief to men who were being executed; and some of this had been brought to the foot of the Cross. They put it on a sponge, and the sponge on some kind of rod, and lifted it to His lips. We read that when He had tasted it, He would not drink. Perhaps He believed that, however great His suffering, He must meet it with a clear mind, undulled by any narcotic relief whatever. Perhaps He simply did not like the taste of it, and found that it increased rather than satisfied His thirst. We do not know about this.

What we do see in this incident is the simple way in which Jesus ac-

cepted His own dependence upon others. Fastened to the Cross as He was, He could not go and get that drink for Himself. Do you think He stopped to think for a moment, asking Himself whether this pitiful request would lessen the force and power which the Cross was exerting on those about Him? I doubt if He thought of it. He was thirsty, and there were people about Him who might help Him; and He asked for help. He had a need. He expressed it, and looked to others who might be expected to meet it.

We must see this incident in the light of His whole life, and so understand what is healthy, and what is unhealthy, in this matter of dependence upon others. You would not call Him in general a 'dependent' Person. So far as we know, He started to work as a young Man, and helped to support the family, being the eldest Son: He was a Carpenter by trade. When, at about thirty, He left the home and went out to preach and live His message, we do not know where His income and expenses came from, perhaps from those to whom He ministered and who were grateful, and for whom some contribution to His mission was an added spiritual benefit. Tens of thousands of spiritual prophets and teachers have lived simply from what was given them. In material ways I think He did not fear to cast Himself upon the mercies of men. He was almost surely drawing on His own experience when He said, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." But I still say, you would not call Him a dependent Person. He did not ask other people to make His decisions for Him, though almost surely He called in His apostles, and especially the inner three, to make them with Him. His reliance did not lie so much in Himself, though He trusted His own impulses and high desires: it lay rather in His trust that if He did what God wanted Him to do, God would see Him through. He was always reminding us of our duties towards others: He never reminded us of others' duties towards us—and how much sympathy He would have with the kind of social reform which causes people to shirk their responsibilities, because they feel society will somehow stand behind them and make up for their shortcomings, I leave to your own imagination. I think He envisaged the spread of a Christian company that would draw increasing numbers of people into its fellowship, and those who had need would be cared for by those who could afford to do it. There is, I think, a great moral lapse contained in the wrong kind of lying down upon others, expecting them always to make up for our mistakes, our laziness and our irresponsibility.

And yet Jesus was not afraid, in this instance of need in His own life, to cast Himself utterly on the mercies of other people. There could have been a kind of pride in Him if He had withdrawn within Himself, and said to Himself that He was exposed enough to the cruelty and ridicule and indifference of men: He would not increase it by crying out for water. There is often a deep-seated pride in us which causes us to give to other people the impression that we are coming along better than we really are, because we do not wish to give them the slightest hint we might need them or anything that they could do for us. Especially when people have had rather a rough time of it, either financially or socially, they cling to one rag of self-confidence, that they can manage for themselves and do not

need to turn to anyone for help. This may bring temporarily a perverse kind of satisfaction; but it brings something else when we persist in it—it brings increasing loneliness, it confines us more and more to what we can do with our own powers, it increases our pride, and it often leads to that personal isolation which breeds peculiarity and even neuroticism. So many people in our time who have become emotionally sick have first clipped their human connections, let first one and then another relationship slide (often because they have felt more on the “receiving” than on the “giving” end of it), and retreated within themselves. They may have to be out amongst other people through the working-day, on the street, in the office: but their private life they make and keep very ‘private’ indeed. Increasingly they feel misunderstood, or rejected: they find good excuses for themselves for taking this self-centered but self-destroying course, they see slights and rudeness and indifference where none actually exist—but the whole picture builds up to justifying them for not letting anyone know how lonely they are, how dry and unsatisfying their life is, how desperately they need someone with whom they can talk over the real problems and needs and unhappiness of their lives. “I don’t like to bother other people with my troubles” may be a very good saying for the kind of person who has made a habit of asking others to do for them what they should do for themselves: but it is a very poor saying for those who have such inner and emotional needs as cannot be satisfied by anything but human friendship. They cannot feed upon themselves any longer. They must turn outward if they are not going to pieces within. Let them do exactly what Jesus did, express their need, go out to the people about them, and await the response. Jesus did not say this to anyone in particular. There were people about Him—some His closest friends, some His executioners. He exposed His need to the world outside. Such a thing had perhaps seldom occurred in His life: but now the need which He felt He expressed. It found response in others, who did for Him as much as they could.

Will you, then, take heart and take example from Jesus when He cried out “I thirst,” and decide here and now that you will not keep pent up within you the thirst for human understanding and companionship, the help and guidance that another trained in living may be able to give you, and cry out for the help you need? Will you step out of the circle of self-dependence, realizing that it is not a circle of maturity but of immaturity oftentimes, and throw yourself upon the mercy of others? We get back into the normal stream of life, when we have left it, by relationships, more than by any other one thing in the world, except faith. The step out of the neurotic situation is the step towards God in faith, and the step towards other people in fellowship. One of the truest builders of fellowship with others is the frank admission of our needs when we have them—it is a kind of gigantic honesty with life and the universe itself. And when we, from our little crosses of isolation and separateness from the human family, cry out, “I thirst,” someone will bring us what will satisfy our thirst. Let us try to follow Jesus in all things, and not least in His simple confession of human need.

The Sixth Word — Accomplishment

"It is finished."

ST. JOHN 19:30.

THOSE WORDS are like ladders to our imaginations. Upon the lowest rung we shall interpret them as meaning simply that the time of His release from the suffering of the Cross was drawing near, or was immediately upon Him: the pain was nearly at an end. Upon a higher rung we shall see in them perhaps the expression that His life on earth was nearly at an end. He had come out from heaven to be here with us for a time, and to make the life of God real to the life of man. In one sense, He was much at home in our midst, loving and caring for those about Him: in another sense, it was a kind of exile for Him, and He would soon be going home. Upon a yet higher rung we shall see in them what reverent Christian thought has always seen in them, His expression that His great redemptive mission was accomplished. Man by freedom had committed sin, and sin had estranged man from God. A breach had occurred. Man found himself conscious of God, home-sick for God, yet separated from Him. God was more an echo in the human soul than a living Voice. Man's sin had outraged the holy law of God; and this had caused the same kind of breach between God and man as wrong on the part of a child causes between him and his father. The wrong is there and must somehow be dealt with: but greater than the wrong is the persistent love of the Father. Man could do nothing to bridge this gap: God bridged it Himself by sending Jesus Who lived out the whole will of God in the world, and died to complete man's redemption. Through the Cross, the ways between God and man were opened again. This had been done, it was a fact, and Jesus said, "It is finished."

I want you today to see the profound spiritual and theological meaning of those words; but then I want to go on to see in them something which all of us must have if we are to preserve or regain our emotional maturity—and that is a sense of accomplishment, of achievement. I suppose Jesus had used the same words before, many a time. When He had been cutting wood for the fire, and Joseph asked, "Got it done?" He said, "It is all finished." When He had to learn a long passage from the Old Testament which His teacher had assigned Him, and His mother said, "Have you learned it?", He answered, "It is finished." Perhaps it was a table He was making with Joseph, or perhaps He was working out a parable with His disciples and went away to think more about it Himself, and came back, and they asked Him about it, perhaps He said, "It is finished," and then gave it to them. No one Who left behind Him such exquisite stories to illustrate His truth, and no one Whose mark left upon people was such a blessing to them, bringing healing to their sickness, and clearness to their confusion, could have been anything but a wonderfully creative personality. I do not get the impression ever that He was a Person of feverish activity, nor yet that He was ever idle: rather He was steadily "about His Father's business," with time for flowers and children and a look at sunsets. He had one satisfaction which all men need, and He must have had it very steadily: it is the satisfaction of achievement, of accomplishment.

Think of how short a time it was between the beginning of His public ministry, and the Crucifixion—at most three years, more probably two and a half. Think of the odds against Him. His people were submerged people—they were under the Roman heel, with about as much chance as people in some of the Russian-controlled border-states today. Think of the people He chose, none of them very well educated, or outstanding, to be His close friends and to carry on His work. It all seemed so little—"too little" and perhaps "too late," for vast evils had already overwhelmed men and nations in the past, and what could that little company do? These are the considerations of the emotionally cowardly; and He was emotionally positive and brave. He set His hand to the plow, and He would not turn back. For those brief, incredible years He went from place to place, setting the fire of faith in men's hearts, helping them to live, showing them how love was the law of life, not hate and resentment, calling out a few to be His special emissaries when He was gone. When it came to the end, it looked like a pretty poor showing. His Mother was there, and St. John, and a handful of women. The men were gone—it was all too much for them—the thing was ending in a most frightful disaster—He had let them down fearfully, they were saying. How deceiving appearances can sometimes be! Actually the great redemptive infection of Jesus had entered into the body of the world, never to be withdrawn. Actually this Cross would "lift Him up, and draw all men unto Him." Actually those whom the Cross made cold with unbelief and horror would grow warm again with faith in a few days, when the Resurrection had obliterated all the darkness with a burst of heavenly light. Actually He had done just what He came into the world to do: He had set some men on fire with His faith, He had gotten across to them His Gospel and His message, He had set them on their way to reach out until all mankind should believe what they believed. Who then would have said that, more than nineteen hundred years later, we—all these thousands of miles away—would be seated here seeking every crumb of truth that can fall from His lips, every splinter of meaning that can fall to us from the Cross, knowing that what He said that day was literal and everlasting truth, "It is finished"?

Jesus' mission was not a great worldly success. We must always remember that. His Church has seldom been a great worldly success, and it has perhaps never really failed worse than when it seemed to be a worldly success. This matter of accomplishment, for a Christian, is not quite what it is for some people. So many define accomplishment in outward achievement, in wealth, in prestige, in power over people. Not so Christians. We believe that we have accomplished when we have done that which God gives us to do. It may be a conspicuous job, it may be an obscure one: it may vary at different times. We do not so much need lime-light and acclaim, as we need the quiet sense of God's presence and power with us, saying, when we have done all we could, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But that much we do need, and should have. We shall not have it unless we have actually done what we could, and done it as well as we should. But then we have, and should have, the reward which comes to those who have done what it was given them to do.

Here, then, is another help for us in our effort to reach emotional maturity, coming to us from our Lord on His Cross. Do not all of us know how easy it is to let something slide which ought to be done? Now and then it is a blessed relief that we can do so; but more often it is a sign of something in ourselves that we rightly fear. And do we not all know that, when we feel depressed or discouraged, the very best thing we can do is to turn at once to the duty which needs to be done, tackle it with all the will we have, and drag ourselves from the mire of moodiness or self-pity by the stimulus, mounting in its emotional effect upon us, of doing what we ought to do? Often the mood is lost and left behind when we take up some drab responsibility, do it without enthusiasm for a time, till the enthusiasm begins finding its way back to us along the path of the accomplished duty itself. We often hear people decry work, wish they had less of it; but if we are honest, do we not know that our work is in large part our salvation? Does not God Himself use for our encouragement and instruction the work which we must do daily? And do we not know that, as we escape from reality and retreat into emotional immaturity by evasion of responsibility, so we meet and grapple with reality and make progress towards emotional maturity, as we give ourselves to what God has put it into our hands to do, and do it as unto Him, and not unto men? The words, "It is finished," are surely a window into the life of One who derived satisfaction from accomplishment, and one of whose guiding thoughts was, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."



The Seventh Word — Faith

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

ST. LUKE 23:46.

JESUS' FIRST WORD from the Cross was a prayer for others. His last word was a word between Himself and His Father, and gives the heart of the relationship of the Son to the Father, and therefore of all sons to that same Father. It was not something which none other could say. None other could say, as we think He meant it, "It is finished," as none other could say many a word that Jesus said, such as "I do always those things which please my Father." But this last word from the Cross was such a word as millions of simple Christians have also said, with their latest breath, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." No words could say more as we take our departure from this earth and enter the other world. We leave behind us the body, and all that it stands for of life in this world. It has been our servant—at some times it has unhappily been our master, also. It has gotten us about, and helped us do our work, and been the anchor of the spirit in this world. Now it will be left behind, with all the aches and temptations and pleasures which it has known. Only the spirit is left. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

But this is not alone a thing to say before we die: it is something to say also before we really begin to live. For these words are a perfect prayer of self-surrender to God. Whenever faith becomes active and living—when it becomes a force and not merely an aspiration—it prostrates itself anew before God. In Him is all the wisdom we lack, and the power we need: in Him is the Source of all the kind of life we would live, and we come back to Him to receive power from Him on which to live. Self-surrender is the coupling by which we attach ourselves to Him, so that the life in Him flows into us. Our ultimate end and destiny are complete and perfect union with God in Christ. God is fully ready on His side to create that union now: we come to this readiness by ever greater and greater surrender of ourselves to Him.

Self-surrender to God usually begins in a crisis. We face a situation we cannot bear to face and we flee from it: when we surrender, we tell God that we are willing to face into it. We cling desperately to a relationship or a habit which we love, yet know we must forswear: when we surrender, we say to God that we shall love Him more than that. We cling to the belief that we can get ourselves through some crisis, and believe our pride is our only hope: when we surrender, we let go of that pride and ask God to step in and help us. This means an act, a decision. It is as definite as signing a contract, or pledging your word: it is in fact doing both. I hardly know any Christian who has not had, somewhere along the line, a decisive conflict with self which strove to keep the first place, and had to be overthrown in favor of God. That is the first crisis of self-surrender.

It needs to be renewed again and again. Perhaps it is never quite so hard to do it again, for we know the joys that attend it as well as the cost. But how often do our lives slip out from under the ray of God's power, into the half-light of human effort, self-pleasing, and playing with the thought of compromise and sin? Only by then we know the Father, and we can come back and say to Him again, asking for forgiveness for the time wasted and the opportunities missed, and saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The spiritual life consists in little more than the repetition of this in a thousand thousand times and ways.

How greatly needed is this word by those who adopt the rather widespread modern idea that the really mature person is the person who can live his own life, needs no religious hokus-pokus about a deity, and must learn to stand on his own feet in a universe where "man stands alone." I hear it very often; and it generally comes from the most insecure and worst-adjusted people, who are very busy being agnostic or atheistic rebels in God's world! If only they knew how unhealthy, how doomed to disappointment, is the immature arrogance which often underlies their unbelief! One must be very sympathetic with those who try to look life full and square in the face, and honestly conclude there is no place for God in it. One would recommend to them Cressy Morrison's book, "Man Does Not Stand Alone," and Comte de Nouys' "Human Destiny," so that they may see what two scientists make of the universe. But still, one stands awed, if sad, in the presence of serious, honest unbelief. I am referring here rather to those persons who, having made a bad botch of their lives and

their relationships, then rationalize their failures by plastering up a great sign across the heavens of their universe, "There is no God." We sometimes talk about faith being "wishful thinking": it is not a patch on the doubt which is the "wishful thinking" of those who read their own blank mistakes into the constitution of the universe! I have seen some mature people who had difficulty with believing in God; but for one of them, I have seen a hundred emotional children sporting their unbelief with a kind of defiant gesture of immaturity. If a man must do without God in his universe, he ought to say it with a very grave face: for none but a fool will fail to miss Him if He goes! But these poor children of our time smile and laugh about it, which makes me know they are not thinking but just disobeying!

Emotional maturity means seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. It embraces faith if possible, because without a God this universe is a senseless machine, having no purpose: it is, as Gamaliel Bradford said, "a wilderness of barren horror." It takes serious account of the way in which faith helps to keep people steady, helped men under fire in the war, helps people with long, draining tasks now, helps people who suffer, helps them to go on serving their fellows just because they are needed, and above all, where it is truly found, puts joy and adventure into life that can nowhere else be found. It accepts the fact that, if there be a God, life is not only a greater adventure, but also a greater trust: it has great stakes, all eternity being the great gamble, until faith makes us sure. A mature outlook recognizes the need within ourselves of a strength and assistance which we cannot give to ourselves, and which presumably must come from outside ourselves. These are mature considerations about life, and only grown up people will attend to them, form a reasonable approach to faith.

But faith, in the end, is more than reasonable: it is a leap taken with courage. It is a belief, coupled with action taken on that belief. We believe, and then we act as if we believed. Now that action consists principally in this: that when we hurl ourselves upon the mercy of that Power which sustains this universe, that Power will be made known and felt by us. Into the picture must come somewhere the act of faith that cannot be better nor more fully said than in these very words, "Father, unto thy hands I commend my spirit." It is sometimes a troubled spirit we bring to Him, never quite a right spirit: but it is all the spirit we have, and it is the main part of us. As we do it, the more we do it, the more deeply we do it, the more does assurance come back to us from within the very heart of the universe itself, keeping us through no matter what suffering or trial as it kept Jesus that day long ago on the Cross. He kept in touch with His Father by one thread: it was the thread of faith. We, too, keep in touch with Him by that same thread. By it He holds us to our best, and to His best; keeping us here in the Life of Grace and leading us on to the eternal life in Him, when the shadows flee away. For Him and for us, at all times, under all conditions, at all seasons, for all people, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."