

THE WORD OF ASSURANCE

Good morning! We're continuing in this series on **The Seven Greatest Words of Love** otherwise known as The seven last words of Jesus on the cross. They weren't the last words of Jesus because he resurrected and talked a lot after that. But these are the last words as he is dying on the cross.

Have you been at the bedside of anyone as they breathed their last? I want to tell you something. Last words are important. Not all the time but a lot of times the last thing somebody says is extremely significant. I remember when my dad was on his bed at home in California moments before he died a few years back. I wasn't there but my mom shared with me the last word of my dad. He was struggling to breathe but he looked peaceful. He was ready. He knew he was going to heaven. He was looking at my mom and was trying to say something. My mom heard his faint voice. He uttered a word like, "Ma—ma" then he breathed his last. We thought he was trying to say "Mahal kita" or "Mahal ko kayo". But my brother said, "I think he was trying to say McDonald's". Maybe that was his last request because he loved McDonald's". Ok, daddy, when we meet you there, we will know.

So, as I said, the last words of a person are really important. That's why we're taking seven weeks to look at the seven last statements of Jesus and what they are all about. To give you a heads up, the last part of this series will be on Good Friday.

The first word we looked at a couple of weeks ago was the Word of Forgiveness. When he was on the cross, the first statement he said was **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** In this second statement which we consider as his second word is the Word of Assurance. It's a word that he says to a thief who was dying on a cross beside him.

As you know, Jesus was led up the hill to Golgotha. He was crucified between two thieves. One of them rejected Jesus. The other actually believed in him on the cross.

Today we're going to look at the conversation between Jesus and that man and I call it **The Word of Assurance**.

So, Jesus is hanging between these two criminals. The Greek word literally means evil doers. They did evil. One of them turns against Jesus. And one of them turns toward Jesus. And he's saved at the last minute, hanging there on the cross.

Nothing is more famous than this criminal who had a deathbed conversion, so to speak. Saved at the last minute. It's an extremely important text of Scripture, because it tells us in this one passage what you must know in order to be saved. It tells us how you can be certain that you're saved so that you don't have any more doubts in your mind. And it tells us when and where you can be saved.

I want you to listen to this message as if your life depends on it. Because it does. I'm going to explain to you as clearly, as simply, as succinctly as I know how what it means to be saved and to with certainty you're going to heaven when you die.

I know many people who've gone to church their entire lives and still aren't sure of that. They have doubts about their salvation. Is God going to love me? Am I going to heaven?

I don't ever want you to have any doubt again about whether you're going to heaven or not. Every single person who's here listening to me or watching online I want you when you finish this message to be absolutely certain, confident with zero doubts that if you were to die tonight or in the next hour you would go straight into the presence of God. I want you to have that assurance.

Now, the first thing that this story of the thief tells us is the five things we must know in order to be saved. This is what you *have to know* in order to get into heaven.

Let's read the text. Luke chapter 23, verses 39 to 43. *"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'" Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'"*

What does Jesus tell us in this passage? What do we learn about salvation? But first, if you're wondering, in the New Testament paradise is synonymous to heaven. This is not to be confused with the Garden of Eden. It's called earthly paradise. The real paradise is in heaven.

So, Jesus promised the evildoer that he would be with Jesus in paradise or heaven. Obviously if Jesus says you're going to heaven, *you're going to heaven*.

Now, let's look at **five things I must know in order to be saved**. Ok, this man is dying next to Jesus. He doesn't know much. Probably had never been to school. He's a street criminal. He's what people would call low life. But he did know some things. And he knew enough to get into heaven. What did he know?

The first thing he knew and the first thing you have to know is, write this down or take a picture.

1. I MUST KNOW I'LL FACE GOD AFTER I DIE

I must know that I'll face God after I die. You've got to know, that when you die you're going to go straight into the presence of God. He knew that. When the first criminal joins in insulting Jesus because the crowd was insulting Jesus, the

second one rebukes the first criminal and the second criminal says, ‘Don’t you fear God even when you’re dying?’

He’s basically saying, Don’t you realize the seriousness of your situation? Man, you’re about to meet God. You are seconds away from eternity. Do you not realize this? Do you not fear God even when you’re dying?

You know, the reason why so many people ignore God and live unholy lives is they think death is just the end. They think, when I die, it’s over. That’s it. There’s no more problems.

It’s not. Death is not the end of anything. Death is the beginning. It’s the beginning of eternity. Last night, I watched a documentary by Lee Strobel, entitled “The Case for Heaven”. It’s based on his book with the same title. He’s the same guy who wrote “The Case for Christ”, “The Case for Easter”, etc. It’s free on Amazon Prime video. I suggest you watch it. He tries to prove there is life after death, there is heaven, there is hell, we have a soul, the reality of near-death experiences and so forth.

Folks, you’re going to spend far more years in eternity than you’re going to spend on this planet. You get maybe a hundred years at the most on this planet. You’re going to spend trillions of years in eternity. Death is not the end of your life. It’s the beginning of your eternal life, the rest of your life in one of two places, heaven or hell. So this is not the end here.

One day you’re going to stand face to face to God. And you’re going to give an account to God of everything in your life. The Bible says this over and over and over. There’s going to be a judgment day. There’s going to be an accounting day of my life.

Look at this verse. Hebrews 9:27, “*People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*” That is one appointment you cannot cancel ... that is one appointment you will not be late for!

The second thing the guy knew and you've got to know this too.

2. I MUST KNOW THAT I'VE SINNED AGAINST GOD.

I must know that I've sinned against God. In Luke 23:41 the criminal says this: *"...we are getting what our deeds deserve..."* There's a word for that. That's called confession. He's admitting I have sinned. We deserve to die for our evil deeds.

1 John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* This is a promise of God but we've got to confess.

Confession is to agree with God. Yes God you're right. That was wrong. That's all confession means. I admit it. I speak the same about it that you do. That gossip was wrong. That anger was wrong. That pride was wrong.

The Bible doesn't tell us what this guy had done. But it doesn't really matter because James 2:10 says if you commit one sin in one area you're guilty of them all. And the Bible says if you've committed one sin that makes you a "sinner."

How many laws do you have to break to be a lawbreaker? One. How many crimes do you have to commit to be a criminal? One. How many times do you have to be unfaithful to be called an unfaithful person? Once. How many sins do you have to commit to be a sinner? One. So that puts us all in the same boat.

I'm sure you have committed far less than I have. But you're still in the same boat with me. We're all in the same boat. Break one law...you're a law breaker. Commit one crime... you're a criminal. Do one sin ... you're a sinner. If you've got a chain link and it's holding up a bridge, how many links have to break for the bridge to fall? One. Not every link. Just one link and the bridge falls.

God does not judge on a scale one to a hundred. He just doesn't. But let's just use this for illustrative purposes. Let's say we've got a thermometer here from zero degrees to a hundred degrees. We're going to make a hundred to be absolute

perfection in your life. You've never done anything wrong. You are more than a saint. You're a super saint. A hundred – you've never done anything wrong in your life.

And let's say zero is absolute incarnate evil. Let's play a little game here. Let's name some people in history and rate them. Hitler? We'll give him a zero. Absolute incarnate evil. Killed six million Jews in the holocaust. Hitler gets a zero. Absolute evil. How about Mother Teresa? Mother Teresa cared for people. She does good. She cares for the sick. She cares for the dying. I'm going to give Mother Teresa maybe an 80. Maybe even a 90. But even Mother Teresa would admit that she was a sinner. That she wasn't perfect. That sometimes she got impatient. Sometimes she got angry. She didn't always have faith. Sometimes she doubted. But let's give her an 80, let's give her a 90.

Now let's get serious. Rolly Estabillo. Let's give him a 15. He's trying hard but he keeps stumbling over his own shoelaces. So maybe I'd get a 15. Okay?

How about Charlie. I'm just going to be gracious and say how about 45 for you. You're probably at least twice as good as me. I don't doubt that. The point is some people are better than others. But nobody is perfect. Does that make sense?

Here's the problem. Heaven is a perfect place. So there's not a snowball's chance in hell that I'm going to get into heaven because I'm not perfect. And you're not either. You will never deserve heaven. You couldn't do enough good in your life to deserve heaven.

So God had to figure out a way to make you perfect in his eyes. Because if God let imperfect people into heaven, heaven would not be perfect anymore. It wouldn't be heaven. It would be filled with jealousy and gossip and ego and pride and impatience and heaven would be just like earth. That would be hell.

I'm glad I don't have to live on earth forever. Really. There's too much sadness, sickness, sorrow, sin, suffering in this world. It's a broken planet because

of sin. I'm glad I don't have to live on earth forever. I don't want to live on earth forever. I want to live in a perfect place forever.

The problem is sooner or later I have to go. So I need a plan. And God had to come up with a plan to make me perfect in his eyes. And to make you perfect in his eyes. That's called salvation. There is no way you or anybody else on the planet earth will ever deserve heaven. None of us deserve it because it's perfect and none of us are perfect.

So the thief says this. He says, "*We deserve to die.*" We deserve to die. Now, notice the next verse on the screen. It's a very famous verse. You know this verse. "*The wages of sin is death, [That's the bad news. Here's the good news...] but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 6:23)

Circle the word "wages" and circle the word "gift." I hope you know the difference between wages and gift. Let's say your employer came into your office, wherever you work. When you get your paycheck, he says, I have a really great gift for you. You're going to love this gift. You're going to like me for this gift. And he hands it to you. And it's your paycheck. And you're going, "Buddy! This is no gift. I earned this paycheck. I earned these wages. I deserve this. You're not doing any good thing for me. I deserve this. These are my wages. They're not a gift." A gift is something you couldn't afford. You don't deserve. You didn't ask for it. It was just a gift. It's a gracious gift to you. Gifts are undeserved. You don't deserve heaven. I don't deserve heaven. I didn't earn it and I never will. It is a gift of God.

So the first thing, he knows they're going to face God after they die. He says, don't you fear God? You're going to meet him in just a minute. And I know that I've sinned against God. I deserve to die for my evil deeds.

Then there's a third thing that this guy knew. And it's the third thing you have to know in order to be saved...

3. I MUST KNOW THAT JESUS WAS MORE THAN A MAN.

I must know that Jesus was more than a man. Notice the third thing the thief says. He's uneducated but he knows the important stuff. And what he knows in Luke 23:41 is this, *"But this man has done nothing wrong."*

Question: Has anybody ever said that about you? No. Or me. Do you know if it's ever been said about anybody? No. Because you can't say that about a mere human being. You can't say about any human being he's never done anything wrong. You just can't say it. Because humans are frail and we make mistakes and we have failings and sins.

So when this guy says, He's never done anything wrong, he's saying this guy's not a mere man. This is not a human we're dying next to. He's more than a human.

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 7:20, *"Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins."* Bingo! That's it. Nobody has never done anything wrong. So he's saying this guy is an unusual man. He's more than a man.

Here's what happens on the cross. 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* That's what you call the great exchange. That's what you call salvation. Jesus says I have never sinned but I'll take your sin. I've never done anything wrong but I'll take everything you've done wrong. I'll take your rap. I'll pay the price. I'll pay the ticket. I'll serve the time. Because somebody's got to pay for your wrongdoing. Either you pay for it or somebody else. The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* That's how much God loves you.

That's why Jesus is the Savior of the world. And this guy knew it. I know I'm going to face God after I die. I know that I've sinned against God. I know that

Jesus is more than a man. And number four, the fourth thing this guy knew. And you've got to know this too.

4. I MUST KNOW ONLY GOD'S GRACE CAN SAVE ME

I must know that only God's grace can save me. I'm never going to do it on my own effort. We see this in verse 42. So after he says we deserve to die and this guy has never sinned and he's more than a man. In verse 42 it says, *"Then he said, 'Jesus remember me...'"* Jesus, remember me. In the Greek – *mem naseko*. Jesus remember me. That's all he says. What is implied in *mem naseko*? What is implied when this guy looks at Jesus, and he's sweating and he's dying and he says "Remember me when you come into your kingdom"?

One thing we know that he knows, he can't save himself. He can't get off the cross and he can't go do a bunch of charity work. He can't try to atone for his own sins. He can't make up for all the bad things he's done wrong. There's no way he can repay the people or God or anybody else. He's hanging on the cross. He's in his final moments. He knows he can't save himself. He knows he's made a mess of his life. He's wasted it. This guy has wasted his life. He's got nothing to offer to God.

And hanging there on the cross he doesn't say, Jesus, I'm a lot better than some people. Really. I'm really a lot better than that person over there. So, he doesn't beg. He doesn't bribe. He doesn't bargain. He doesn't barter with God. He's hanging on the cross with no hope. You don't have any either. Without Jesus you have no hope of getting into heaven.

So while he's hanging on the cross in those final moments of his life he throws himself on the grace of God, the mercy of God. And he just says two words: Remember me. Remember me? That's all he's going to say? Remember me? Think about this. That's it? This is the shortest salvation prayer in history. It's two words: remember me. He doesn't say, "I receive you into my life." He just

says, “Remember me.” And Jesus looks at him and says, “I’ve got it! That’s good enough. You’re in. I’ll see you in heaven before the day’s over.”

Hello! That of all cases proves it’s not about words.

This guy was in no sense a theologian. And the sinner’s prayer here may have not satisfied the theologians but it satisfied Jesus. And if it satisfies Jesus, that’s good enough. Okay? So he only says two words – Remember me. Remember me. That’s all he said.

Here is the point I’m trying to make. It’s not the words you say that matter. It’s the direction of your heart. If you have a humble heart and your direction is toward God, it counts.

I read a story about a Bible translator, who worked for Wycliffe Bible translators. It was down past the Chiapas area in Mexico in one of the inner jungles where there were these tribes with these indigenous languages. They don’t speak Spanish in those jungles. He was going into this jungle to translate, first to get their language and create an alphabet and then to translate the book of Mark so that this tribe would have a part of the Bible to read about Jesus. This translator was there for eight years translating the book of Mark into that indigenous language.

During the entire eight years he kept telling everybody about Jesus, telling them about salvation and not a single person responded in the village faithfully. Not a single person accepted Christ. He felt pretty disappointed when he was called back after eight years. It was time for him to take a furlough and he was going back to Texas. So he left having finished the work that he was doing but nobody in that village had come to Christ.

Right before he left there was a middle-aged farm worker named Jose who had a heart attack. They took him to a nearby village and he was recuperating in this very primitive hospital with an oxygen tent over him. Before he left, this

missionary said, “I’m going to go witness one more time to Jose before I leave.” He walked in and Jose was laying there under the oxygen tent and he was coming in and out of a coma. He was really groggy. “I didn’t know if he could understand me or not but I thought I needed to do it.” I looked at him and I said, “Jose, Do you know that God is your Creator?” And Jose as he faded in and out of his coma said, “Si” and he said, “Do you know that Jesus is God’s Son and that God sent him to tell you that he loves you.” And Jose said, “Si.” He said, “Jesus Christ, God’s Son died on the cross for everything you’ve ever done wrong. Do you believe that?” “Si.” “Would you like to put your trust in him? Would you like to open your life to Christ and trust him for your forgiveness of sins?” “Si.” And then he faded back into a coma.

This missionary said, “I don’t even know if the guy heard me or not. If he was just kind of saying it or he was just being polite. He’s on his death bed. I didn’t know. And I left as he was in a coma.”

Nearly a decade later that missionary got a chance to go back to that village and when he went to the village he found a thriving church of 65 people in this little village. He said this is great. Who were the missionaries that came and talked to you about this? They said, “Nobody came and talked to us.” He said, “What happened?” They said, “You remember Jose? He got well. And when he got well he got a Bible and he started the church. And 65 of us have come to Christ because of Jose.”

How much do you have to know and say to get into heaven? Si! You’ve got to be able to say yes to God and no to yourself.

There’s one more thing that he knew, the hief knew, that you’ve got to know in order to get to heaven. It’s this.

5. I MUST KNOW JESUS WILL SAVE ME IF I ASK.

Obviously he wouldn’t have asked if he hadn’t known that Jesus would answer

him. I must know that Jesus will save me if I ask.

Verse 42 he says, **“Remember me... when you come into your Kingdom!”** He believes Jesus is God. The Savior of the world.

Note: It’s interesting to me, the guy’s hanging on the cross; he doesn’t ask Jesus to take away his pain. He doesn’t ask Jesus to take him down from the cross. He doesn’t ask Jesus to heal him right there. Clearly he’s heard about Jesus. He’s heard of the miracles. He’s heard of Jesus raising people from the dead. Obviously Jesus can do whatever he wants to do. He’s God. But he doesn’t ask for relief from pain or relief from the cross. He doesn’t even ask for relief from death.

He says, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Why? Because he recognizes his deeper need is not the pain he’s in but the salvation from sin that he needs.

Acts 16:31 says this: **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”**

Friend, all you need to do is to believe. Now, very quickly let me just share with you **four facts about salvation** according to the Bible.

1. **It is immediate.** He says, **“Today you’ll be with me in paradise.”** Not next week. Not next month. Not next year. Not a thousand years from today. Today you’ll be with me in paradise.
2. **It is certain.** He said, “Truly I tell you” and “you will”. There’s no doubt about it. Jesus says it. It’s true. You will. It’s not “you might. It’s certain.
3. **It is a relationship.** You will be *with me*. That’s salvation. Relationship is being with Jesus. Being with God.
4. **It is permanent.** **You’ll be with me in paradise.** That’s in heaven forever. And ever. Amen!

So in this simple little story of the thief we get the five things you’ve got to know. And we’ve got the four things you can be sure of so you don’t have to ever

doubt your salvation. Finally the question is when. When can I be saved?

Look at these closing verses. 2 Corinthians 6:2, *"I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."* Not next week, not at the end of your life, not after you've thought about it. Today is the day to be saved.

Remember there were two thieves on the cross and there were two responses. One of them insulted Jesus. And the other accepted Jesus. God gives you that right. You can insult Jesus – I don't need the cross. I don't need your death for me. I'm a good person. I'm going to get to heaven on my own merit. You can insult Jesus by saying what you did was not important. What you did was unnecessary because I'm basically a good guy. You're not at a hundred and you're certainly not perfect.

You say, well, you know what? I know it says today, but I'm going to wait a while. I'm not going to decide right now.

Listen to me very closely. Not to decide is to decide. Not to decide is to decide. Not to decide is a decision. It's saying I'm rejecting it. It's right there laid in front of you. Today is the day of salvation. Not to decide is to decide.

Romans 10:13, our last verse. When can I be saved? *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Would God lie? No. Would he break this promise? No. It is guaranteed. Have you settled this issue?

Maybe this is your first time at Fil-Am or maybe you've been coming for years. And you've never settled this issue. Did you know that a thousand years before you were born God knew you were going to hear this message? Did you know that God has been preparing you your entire life for this? This is your day. Today is the day of salvation. Let's bow our heads.