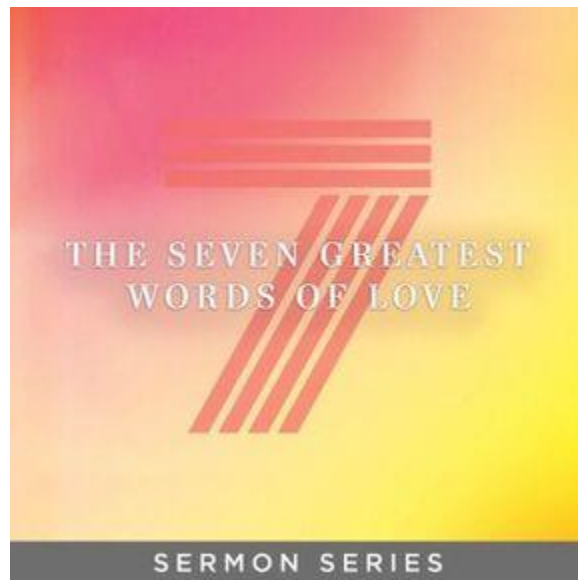


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

HE DID IT ALL FOR YOU, PART 1
Hebrews 12:2

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
March 28 – April 3, 2021

Words of Encouragement Days 213-218



THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Jesus walked this earth teaching about God's LOVE. But do you know what that kind of love really means? Discover anew the meaning behind the last seven words Jesus spoke during his final hours on the cross. These powerful words of Jesus, full meaning and amazing blessing, are His message to us before His resurrection — words of forgiveness, assurance, love, trust, and so much more.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**"In Christ we are set free by the blood of His death.
And so we have forgiveness of sins
because of God's rich grace."
Ephesians 1:7**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 213

"One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and followed Him. A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. He called them at once, and they also followed Him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men." Mark 1:16-20

CALLED BY THE KING

THE gospel isn't advice: It is the good news that you do not need to, and in fact cannot, earn your way to God; Jesus has already paid the price for you, and it is a gift that you receive by sheer grace—through God's thoroughly unmerited favor. If you seize that gift and keep holding on to it, then Jesus' call won't draw you into fanaticism or moderation. Instead, you will be passionate to make Jesus your absolute goal and priority, and to set your course around Him; yet when you meet someone with a different set of priorities or a different faith, you won't assume they are inferior to you, but rather you will actually look for ways to serve them. Why is this so? Because the gospel is not about choosing to follow advice, it is about being called to follow a King. This King is not just someone with the power and authority to tell you what needs to be done—but The King with the power and authority to do what needs to be done, and then to offer it to you as good news.

Where in scripture do we see that kind of authority? Jesus' baptism was attended to by supernatural signs that announced His divine authority. After that occasion, we read about how Simon, Andrew, James, and John followed

Jesus without delay—so His call itself had authority. Mark continues to build on this theme:

"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." (Mark 1:21–22)

Mark is the first in writing the gospels to use the term authority. The word 'authority' literally means "out of the original stuff", and it comes from the same root as the word "author." Mark used it to mean that Jesus taught about life with original rather than derived authority. What would your life look and feel like if you fully surrendered to the authority of this perfect King? What would your work life look like? Love life? Family life? Financial life? Social life?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, Thank You that you are the final Authority over all life. Thank you for giving Your people authority to rule on earth. Help me to understand the hope of my calling, and teach me to exercise this authority in my life, my city, and my nation. Thank You for becoming my intercessor and breaking Satan's headship over my life (Isaiah 53:12). Help me to pray and seek justice on the earth on behalf of others. I thank You for giving Your people authority to actually subdue powers and principalities (Ephesians 3:10). I choose to reign with You and walk in Your authority. I am called to declare Your authority and rule the earth with You (Revelation 1:6). Through steadfast authority in prayer, I can enforce Your victory on earth (Romans 16:20, Colossians 2:13-15) and fight for the nations (Psalm 2:7). 'Praise be to the Lord, my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.' (Ps. 144:1). In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 214

"When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that He was back home. Soon the house where He was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While He was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above His head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, 'My child, your sins are forgiven.'" Mark 2:1-5

DEEPER HEALING

WHEN Jesus walked on earth, He saw much more than people. In today's passage, for instance, Jesus knew something the man did not know—that he had a much bigger problem than his physical condition. As Jesus dealt with his physical condition, Jesus was also saying to him, "I understand your problems and have seen your suffering. I am going to heal your physical condition, but I have good news. I have come first to heal the sin that has separated you from God and restore you to a right relationship with Him."

If you find Jesus's response offensive, please at least consider this: If someone says to you, "The main problem in your life is not what's happened to you, not what people have done to you; your main problem is the way you've responded to that"—you may actually find those words to be empowering. Why? Because you can't do very much about what has happened to you or about what other people are doing—but you can do something about yourself. When the Bible talks about sin, it is not just referring to the bad things we do. It is not just referring to our lying or lust or whatever the case may be—the sin it addresses is when we ignore God in the world He has made; it is referring to our rebellion against Him by living without reference to Him. It is

acknowledging our saying, "I will decide exactly how I live my life." And Jesus says that is our main problem.

As Jesus confronted the paralytic's main problem, He helped him to go deeper. Jesus said to him, "By coming to me and asking for only your body to be healed, you are not going deep enough. You have underestimated the depths of your longings, the longings of your heart." Everyone who is paralyzed naturally desires with every fiber of their being to walk, and surely this man would have been resting all of his hopes on the possibility of walking again. In his heart, he was almost surely saying, "If only I could walk again, then I would be set for life. I would never be unhappy. I would never complain. If only I could walk, then everything would be right."

To this, Jesus said, "My son, you are mistaken." That may sound harsh, but it is profoundly true. Jesus said, "If all I do is heal your body, you may feel you will never be unhappy again, but wait two months, four months—the euphoria won't last. The roots of discontent of the human heart go deep."

Why was forgiveness the paralytic's deepest need? Why is it our deepest need? What other "needs" do we feel are deeper than our need for forgiveness?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, Thank You for Your forgiveness and for healing my deepest hurts. Today I ask You to forgive me of all the negative and harmful words I have spoken about myself. I do not want to abuse myself in such a way again. Transform my thoughts and show me how to understand how marvelously You made me (Psalm 139, Ephesians 2:10). Change my habits so I use my tongue to speak hope and favor upon my life (Proverbs 18:21) and let that spill over into the way I speak to and about others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 215

"As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let's cross to the other side of the lake.' So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, 'Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?'

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Silence! Be still!' Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, 'Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

The disciples were absolutely terrified. 'Who is this man?' they asked each other. 'Even the wind and waves obey him!' Mark 4:35-41

MORE THAN YOU EXPECTED

SOMETIMES when we talk with Jesus about something, He allows things to happen that we don't understand. He does not always do things according to our plan or in a way that makes sense to us. But if Jesus is God, then He is great enough to have some reason to allow us to go through things we can't understand. His power is unbounded, and so are His wisdom and His love. Nature is indifferent to you, but Jesus is filled with untamable love for you. For an example, consider Jesus' disciples. If the disciples had really known Jesus loved them, if they had really understood that He is both powerful and loving, they should not have been scared. They, however, started with the premise that if Jesus loved them, He would not allow difficult things to happen in their lives. This, as we know, is not the case. The truth is God does love us even when challenges happen in our lives. It is also true that because He is God—He knows the reason He

allows the challenge. He has much more knowledge about our lives than we do!

God is both great enough and powerful enough to handle the range of emotions we share with Him while suffering and great enough and powerful enough to have reasons that we cannot understand. Noted missionary and author Elisabeth Elliot put it beautifully in two brief sentences: "God is God, and since He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere else but in His will, and that will is necessarily infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to."

If you're at the mercy of the storm, its power is unmanageable and it doesn't love you. The only place you're safe is in the will of God. And because He is God and you are not, the will of God is necessarily, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond your largest notions about what He is doing. Is He safe? Of course He's not safe. Who said anything about being safe? But He's good. He's the King. How can we have peace in Christ during circumstances that are prone to create anxiety and/or despair? Turn to Jesus who is waiting to provide the help you need.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Almighty God, I bless You for giving me life, and praise You for Your abundant mercy and grace I experience each day. Thank You for Your faithfulness even though I am not always faithful to You. (Lamentations 3:23) Lord Jesus, I ask You to give me complete, full-body peace in my mind, body, soul, and spirit. (Philippians 4:8-9) Heal and remove everything that is causing stress, grief, and sorrow in my life. Guide my path through life and make even my enemies to be at peace with me. (Psalm 23:3; 5:8) Let Your peace reign in my home, family, relationships, place of work, business or school, and everything I touch. (Philippians 4:7) Send you angels of peace to go ahead of me when I go out and to stay by my side when I return. (Psalm 91:11-12) In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 216

Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked.

Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.” Mark 10:23-27

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

THE Kingdom of God. You may have heard pastors preach about it all your life or maybe you've just recently heard about it. Either way, one thing is certain, Jesus makes it clear in today's reading that there are many things in life that could keep each one of us from entering it. In the encounter from today's reading, Jesus said that we are all broken and in need of a Savior—but money has particular power to blind us to it. In fact, it has so much power to deceive us of our true spiritual state that we need a gracious, miraculous intervention from God to see it. It's impossible without God, without a miracle. Without grace.

Consider how Jesus counseled the young man in today's passage. Yes, this man needed counseling, although on the outside, he looked completely pulled together. He was rich, he was young, and he was probably good-looking—it's hard to be rich and young and not be good-looking, isn't it?! But he didn't have it all together. If he had, he would never have come to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Any devout Jew would have known the answer to this question. The rabbis were always posing this question in their writings and their teachings. And their answer was always the same; there were no differing schools of thought on this one. The answer was “Obey the statutes of God and avoid all sin.” The

young man would have known this answer. Why then was he asking Jesus?

Jesus's perceptive statement “One thing you lack” allows us to capture the gist of the young man's struggle. The man was saying, “You know what, I've done everything right: I've been successful economically, successful socially, successful morally, successful religiously. I've heard you're a good rabbi, and I'm wondering if there's something I've missed, something I'm overlooking. I sense that something is lacking.” Of course, he was missing something, because anyone who counts on what they are doing to gain eternal life will find that, in spite of everything they've accomplished, there's an emptiness, an insecurity, a doubt. Something is bound to be missing. How can anyone ever know whether they are good enough? They must turn to Jesus, accept His sacrifice for their sins, and acknowledge there is one other way but to believe in Him as Lord of their life.

What about you? Have you turned to Jesus and asked Him to become Lord of Your life? Have you committed Your life to following His ways? If not, what's holding you back? If so, how can you pursue a successful career and not succumb to the trap wealth creates? What are some ways the gospel has changed—or could change—your attitude about money?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I pray I am a good steward of all that You provide for me. Help me to not depend upon money but only on You, Jehovah Jireh, my Provider. Help me to not allow money to destroy my relationships through tension and disagreements. If I have made financial mistakes, or if my spending or debts are out of control, I pray for financial breakthrough in my life right now! Open a way where there seems to be no way and show me what to do to bring my spending back into balance. If I have been faithful with my finances, grow my finances and continue to grant me wisdom to manage Your blessings righteously. Open my eyes today to job opportunities and profitable business ventures that would please you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 217

“While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and thanked God for it and broke it. Then He gave it to His followers and said, ‘Take it; this is My body.’ Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to the followers, and they all drank from the cup. Then Jesus said, ‘This is My blood which is the new agreement that God makes with His people. This blood is poured out for many. I tell you the truth, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine again until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’” Mark 14:22-25

COMMUNION AND COMMUNITY

AN Old Covenant and a New Covenant. God the Father established the Old Covenant. His children broke it, so Jesus came to establish a New Covenant. Remember what Jesus said when He took the cup:

"Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," He said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:23–25)

Jesus's words tell us that as a result of His substitutionary sacrifice, there is now a new covenant between God and us. The foundation of this relationship was established by Jesus' own blood: "My blood of the covenant." When He announced that He would not drink again of the vine until He does so anew in the kingdom of God, Jesus promises that He is unconditionally committed to us: "I am going to bring you into the Father's arms. I'm going to bring you to the feast of the King." Jesus often compares God's kingdom to sitting at a large feast. In Matthew 8, Jesus says, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast . . . in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus promises that we will be at this kingdom feast with Him.

With these simple gestures of holding up the bread and the wine, with the simple words "This is My body . . . this is My blood," Jesus declares that all the earlier deliverances, the earlier sacrifices, the lambs at Passover, were pointing to

Himself. Just as the first Passover was observed the night before God redeemed the Israelites from slavery through the blood of the lambs, this Passover meal was eaten the night before God redeemed the world from sin and death through the blood of Jesus.

What will you do in your heart and mind to prepare to sincerely take what Jesus is offering?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I bow before You in humility. Examine my heart today, and show me anything that is not pleasing to You. Reveal any secret pride, any unconfessed sin, any rebellion or unforgiveness that may be hindering my relationship with You. I know that I am Your beloved child, having received You into my heart and life and having accepted Your death as penalty for my sins. The price You paid covered me for all time, and my desire is to live for You.

During communion, as I take the bread representing Your life that was broken for me, I remember and celebrate Your faithfulness to me and to all who will receive You. I cannot begin to fathom Your agonizing suffering as You were crucified. And yet, You took that pain for me. You died for me! Thank You, Jesus. Thank You for Your extravagant love and unmerited favor. Thank You that Your death gave me life—abundant life now, and eternal life forever. As You instructed Your disciples, I, too, receive the bread in remembrance of You.

In the same way, when I take the cup representing Your blood poured out from a splintered cross, I realize that You were the supreme sacrifice for all my sin: past, present, and future. Because of Your blood shed for me, and Your body broken for me, I can be free from the power and penalty of sin. Thank You for Your victory over death. You took the death that I deserved. You took my punishment. Your pain was indeed my gain. And today I remember and celebrate the precious gift of life You gave me through the blood that You spilled. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 218

“Then the high priest stood up before the others and asked Jesus, ‘Well, aren’t You going to answer these charges? What do You have to say for Yourself?’ But Jesus was silent and made no reply. Then the high priest asked Him, ‘Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’

Jesus said, ‘I Am. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, ‘Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard His blasphemy. What is your verdict?’

‘Guilty!’ they all cried. ‘He deserves to die!’

Then some of them began to spit at Him, and they blindfolded Him and beat Him with their fists. ‘Prophecy to us,’ they jeered. And the guards slapped Him as they took Him away.’” Mark 14:60-65

THE CRUCIFIED KING

WHEN the high priest asked Jesus, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am.” By replying as He did, Jesus stated: “I will come to earth in the very glory of God and judge the entire world.” It’s an astounding statement. It’s a claim to deity.

Of all the things Jesus could have said—and there are so many texts, themes, images, metaphors, and passages of the Hebrew Scriptures He could have used to tell the high priest who He was—He specifically said He is the judge. By His choice of words, Jesus deliberately forced us to see the paradox. There was an enormous reversal and He, the Judge over the entire world, was now being judged by the world. He should have been in the judgment seat, and we should be the one in chains. Everything is turned upside down.

And as soon as Jesus claims to be this Judge, as soon as He claims deity, the response is explosive. Mark writes:

“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned Him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at Him; they blindfolded Him, struck Him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took Him and beat Him. (Mark 14:62–65)

The high priest ripped apart his own garments, a sign of the greatest possible outrage, horror, and grief, and then the whole trial deteriorated. In fact, it was no longer a trial; it became a riot. The jurors and judges began to spit on Jesus and beat Him. In the middle of the trial, they went absolutely berserk. He was instantly convicted of blasphemy and condemned as worthy of death.

While you and I cannot literally spit in Jesus’ face, we can still mock and reject Him. Or we can honor Him with our lives. The choice is one each of us makes. In what ways are you and I prone to reject Jesus as God? In what ways can we bring Him praise?

TODAY’S PRAYER

Father, You are mighty and know my circumstances. At times I come to You, soaring above my circumstances or full of praise from a mountaintop experience. At times, I come to You worn and weary from the hard times I have or am walking through. During those times, I come to You seeking Your shelter, where I know I can find security and rest in Your shadow. (Psalm 91:1-2) My challenging circumstances are no match for Your great power. Thank You that You are my safe place. Thank You that I am always welcome beneath Your wings. Thank You for being a Fortress I can trust. Father, I know You can save me from these trials. I will wait patiently for You to help me while You work things out for my good. You have always been faithful to me, and today, I choose to rest in Your faithfulness. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve