



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Last Words of Jesus – Part 1

Guest(s): Stu Epperson, Jr.

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. What were the last words Jesus spoke before He died on the cross? Well, most of us could probably name one or two, but how about all seven? On today's edition of Family Talk, Dr. James Dobson sits down with Stu Epperson, Jr., founder of the Truth Network to explore what Jesus was communicating in those final sacred moments. Stu Epperson Jr. Comes from a remarkable legacy of Christian broadcasting. His father, Stuart Epperson Sr., co-founded Salem Communications and was named one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals by *Time Magazine*. Following in those footsteps, Stu Jr. Founded the Truth Network in 2000, which now broadcasts Bible-based teaching across North Carolina, Virginia, Iowa, and Utah. He's also the author of the book, *The Last Words of Jesus: First Steps to a Richer Life*. And on today's Family Talk broadcast, he and Dr. Dobson will dig into the profound meaning behind what Jesus said from the cross.

Dr. James Dobson: Stu Epperson, who's the founder and president of the Truth Network. He has, I think it's 12 radio stations. In how many states?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: We are in four states right now.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And growing.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: And growing, just trying to reach folks with the Good News.

Dr. James Dobson: One of them or several of them are in Central Iowa and Salt Lake City, and of course in North Carolina. And Stu also is a coach and mentor for others playing the game of basketball. You're about 6'4", aren't you?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Well, I'm 6'6". Same height as my dad. But I tell everyone I'm 6'6", 240 pounds, mostly muscle. But then everyone smiles at that part.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I've known your dad for a long time too. He is one of the founders of the Salem Network. Salem Communications, I believe they call themselves. And that's the largest Christian conglomeration I think in the world. And I have worked with them for many, many years. I just watched that network grow. I

remember telling Ed Atsinger one time, "Don't bet the farm. We need you." They were buying all these additional stations. But anyway, you've got good stock. You come out of a fine family and I love your mom too. She is a Bible scholar. And I'm telling you, she has memorized most of the Bible, hasn't she?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: She's been quoting the verses from the Bible for years. And it's really an impact on my life, an impact on my ministry to this day. Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: Stu is married to Julie and they have four kids: Hope, Grace, Joy, and Faith. All four girls.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: And I got a book for you. I don't think you need it but...

Stu Epperson, Jr.: I need all your books at this point.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I'm really glad to have you here. And in addition to everything else you're doing, including basketball, you have written a book called *The Last Words of Jesus*. It was published by Worthy and the subtitle is *First Steps to a Richer Life*. I'm telling you this book will inspire and it will be a blessing to our listeners. I'm so glad to have you talk about this because you actually have built the entire book around the last seven things that Jesus said on the cross and what the meaning is. What a great topic. How'd you come up with that?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Well, I was studying it myself and I discovered that I knew very little about the topic. And it was right about Easter time. And I was leading a men's Bible study called "Wednesdays in the Word." And I thought, what did Jesus say as He died on the cross? Where are those saints found? What did He mean by those sayings? How many are found in each gospel? All those questions were popping up in my mind and my heart, and so I started studying it. And I couldn't believe how little I knew about that. I probably got a C minus if you tested me then. And so I just started to really pour my heart into it and I started to share with our men. And these words of Christ started working on me very personally, very deeply in my heart.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. When a person is dying, every word he says is significant because he doesn't waste words. When you're in the final hours of your life, what you say is very, very significant. And that's true certainly for the last seven things that Christ said on the cross. And it's all through the Old Testament, isn't it? The things He said are listed practically in Psalms 22 and Psalms 31.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Psalm 31 and Isaiah has a lot of them. They're all throughout the Old Testament, the prophecies going way back. And what was fascinating for me, and at the end of each chapter, I wanted to find all these Scriptures that related to what Jesus said in both the old and the New Testament prophetically. And so I tried to find every last one of them, and I put them at the end of each chapter. A pastor or

anyone leading a small group could study and go to exactly what He said, each saying, and then find every cross reference. Where did this come from? Because Jesus Christ, He quoted the Word of God, and that didn't change when He went to that cross to bear the sins of the world.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, to our listeners who are new to Christianity, you may not understand that the entire Old Testament makes one statement. It says He's coming. And the entire New Testament says He's here. And these words link the two together because what He was telling us on the cross there goes back to what the prophets and King David and the others have said through 2000 years of time. I think it's really neat, Stu, that this book has a forward written by Dr. David Jeremiah. And that's really quite an honor that a man like that who's obviously asked to write many, many forwards, wrote for you. And I read it this morning. It's really good.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Well, thank you. He was very gracious. All the endorsers. What's neat is as I've talked to ... And you and I talked even before the show, Dr. Dobson, these words of Christ have had an impact on a lot of people. And Dr. Jeremiah's forward, he goes a little bit in depth. I mean, it's not just, "Hey, my friend Stu wrote a book, go get it." He starts going into the words. I actually was instructed and encouraged by his forward, and that's where I was going to ask you, of those words from Christ from the cross, which one has touched you or maybe blessed your life as you think about it. I'd love to hear from you and talk about that.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's a tough question because all of them have significance and significance for us and for me, but I think maybe the one that stands out for me, of course the most important is at the end where He says it's finished because what He really meant there is that He provided a remedy for the disease of sin. It was like a doctor writing a prescription. And when He was in His last moments on the cross, He said, "It is finished." Meaning the prescription's finished. All you have to do is receive it. All you have to do is take it. And if you don't, there is no cure for the disease. But going back to one of His earlier phrases that has great meaning for me, I talk to a lot of people who are in trouble, who are going through real difficulties. Some of them are dying, some of them are very ill.

Some of their kids are ill. Some of them are widows who've lost their husbands, and some of them are men whose businesses have gone bankrupt. Everybody, there's almost no one who does not have a whole string of stuff in their life. That's just the way life is. And what do they all say? Almost every one of them, if they're honest with you, will ask a question. Why? Why? Why did You do this, Lord? Why would You take my three year old daughter to Heaven? We loved her. We needed her. You put Your blessings on her. We prayed for her before she was born and she came down with this disease and went through all this trauma and is now in Heaven has been taken away. Why? Why indeed. There is no answer for that question. God will not be accountable to man. Job asked that question.

And boy, I'm telling you, you read that book of Job and you realize how eloquent his questions were. They were beautiful. And when he was all finished, the Lord Jehovah said to him, "Who are you to ask Me those questions?" He will not answer those questions on this earth. He will on the other side. You may or may not begin to understand what He's doing, but what I appreciate about Jesus' words was that He asked the why question too. Imagine that the Christ who spoke a word and the whole universe was spun into space and He is asking God, "Why has thou forsaken me?" That speaks to me. Now I've just written half your book.

Stu Epperson, Jr.:

I should have talked to you more before I wrote the book because that is extremely insightful. In fact, this moment Christ is ... We do a lot within the book. There's pitch black in the middle of the day and He's hanging there in the darkness and He comes out of that darkness with that question and this question has theologians with tons more degrees than I've ever seen stupefied at why is God asking God why? And like you mentioned, the book of Job. If the book of Job didn't have why questions, it'd be like two chapters because it's not just Job, it's his wife, it's all of his buddies asking, "Why do this? Why did you not honor God enough? Why did you not do this? What was wrong with? Why, why, why, why?" Yet here you have at the pinnacle moment in history, the redemption of lost souls, you have the lamb of God going into the darkness, into the cross is an altar and He is laying his life down and He is bearing the ultimate father wound.

I've heard you for years, Dr. Dobson, minister to me on the radio about father wounds and dealing with those father wounds that only God, the father can deal. And here Jesus Christ, His family by and large has rejected Him and forsaken Him. So many of His followers that said, "Hosanna, blesses you who comes the name of the Lord" at Palm Sunday, their wheels up gone. Everyone's forsaken Him except for very few. And now He says, "My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken Me?"

Dr. James Dobson:

For those listening to us who've had reason to pray that agonizing prayer, why, God, why, remember, one of the last conversations between Jesus and God Himself involved that question. Accept it, open your hands. You will not probably figure it out, but it's okay because He's in control and He is blessing you even when you don't realize it.

Stu Epperson, Jr.:

Well, when he's bearing the pain in that moment, it's almost like all of the evil, the darkness, the pain, the shame of people that have come on this program and talked about their pain in God's healing, all of that bottled up into one nuclear warhead, the wrath of God upon sinners aimed at the friend of sinners. So Jesus Christ is bearing that sin, that darkness stuff I'd never even say personally to someone or even on the radio, even close friends wouldn't even share some of this stuff. Jesus Christ can honestly look through us with the tears and the blood flowing down His eyes and say, "I feel your pain." And He's bearing that pain and that shame to set us free, to heal us, to bring us out of the bungee of sin. Isn't that something?

Dr. James Dobson: And Stu, that's why I appreciate your book. Let me share another example of it. I don't want to take it away from you because you got so much to say here. But after Jesus had died, the next day or two, the disciples were absolutely bewildered. It made no sense to them at all. They had followed this one that they thought was the Messiah and that He was coming in power and glory and they expected great things from Him. And then they see Him hanging on a cross in agony saying, "My God, my God, why?" You know that their heads were spinning and two of them were walking along on the road to Emmaus and they were trying to make sense out of it all. And they were saying, in my words, "What happened here? We followed this man. We saw Him heal people. We saw Him talk to us about God and about life after death and sin and all the things He said. And now all of a sudden, He's humiliated, hanging naked on a cross. What has happened? Why?" You know they asked why. And Jesus was walking about three feet beside them. He was right there at the time that they were most confused and their eyes were open and their hearts burned within them.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: That really is what makes Christianity so real is it's the only place, the only context, the only reality where our why questions are dealt with head on by Almighty God on that cross, the son of God hanging there in our place and He's dealing with those and He takes that pain. If we're willing to go there, if we're willing to encounter and if we're willing to allow Him in to heal us, to love us, to cover us.

Dr. James Dobson: You mentioned theologians talking about the meaning of that moment when Jesus said, "My God, my God, why?" What have you read?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: I've read a lot of these guys. I tell you what, I've had debates with people. Some of these endorsers, we kind of went toe to toe because they're saying, "Wait a second, are you saying Jesus stop being God at that moment? And what about the Trinity and all of this?" And so I really treaded carefully in the language in here. And I really hope that chapter four is a ... It's the hardest chapter I've ever written. It is the hardest chapter I've ever written. It opens with a harrowing view, a harrowing story about a young man separated from his own father, but I quote a lot of theologians and I really had to get some wisdom from a lot smarter guys than me, but great story. Martin Luther came upon that phrase in his study of the New Testament. He came upon those words, "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani," "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?"

And he stopped and he went into a private room, locked the door, refused bread and water for like a long time. No one's totally clear on how long. And he was prostrate before the Scriptures, before Almighty God wrestling with that verse. And he came out of that silence and that isolation and all he could say was, "God forsaken by God, how can this be?" And so I just kind of like, just let the Word of God speak in that chapter and fundamentally, theologically, there's some depth and there's some profound things. It's the glory of God to conceal a matter, but you know, hey, this is kind of cool. Jesus Christ was forsaken at whatever level so that we could be adopted, we could be united, we could be

received. He was in darkness so we could be in the light. And so this was the great exchange and the height of it and the embodiment and the depth of the atonement was experienced and really reflected in those words.

Dr. James Dobson: That's really good, Stu. It'd be very foolish for me, mortal man who is not a theologian and doesn't claim to be, to say that that conversation does not bother me now. And the reason is because the way I understand it, and this came from others, but that the sin of the entire world from the beginning of Adam and Eve to the final day and the resurrection and everything that will come after was all laid on Christ and God could not look on it. He had to turn away because the penalty for sin was being paid in that moment and there was a separation between Jesus and God because of the job that He was doing to prepare the final prescription and be able to say it is finished. I don't know if that's the way you understand it, but that's my understanding of it.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Isn't it fascinating that this great mystery, this Christ bearing the curse of our sin is shrouded from our eyes. It's pitch black in the middle of day. As one author says, it's midnight at midday. There's no astronomical explanation. There's no eclipse going on. It's the full moon because it's the height of Passover and yet it lights out. And I believe that it's so mysterious and so profound what the high priest who went into behind the veil to lay down the sacrifice for our sin, that God shrouded it from our eyes so we couldn't see because it is so profound and so deep what was going on there. "Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God should die for me." He never ceased to be God, but He bore the curse of sin and to please the Father to bruise Him, Isaiah 53.

Dr. James Dobson: And the veil was rent in twain too.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Yes. Hear these worshipers. Imagine being there that day. There you are with your mom and dad pulling around their lads and they're little girls and boys and they're pulling their little lambs and they're passing by. And what is this awful, ghastly scene? These men brutally, they're unrecognizable. They're hamburger up on this cross and they're hearing all this stuff and they're taking their sacrifice Passover and they're walking right by the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Dr. James Dobson: Praise the Lord. That's all I have to say.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Hearing those words. And that's something. But what you said in that, the next chapter five is a blow by blow account of Christ, I call it a word of passion, of His execution, okay? And it's graphic. In fact, they had to take a few things out before it went to final proof because-

Dr. James Dobson: Of your book.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Yes, sir, because they're like, this is just too over the top. But when you read it, what convicted me is I couldn't remember the last time someone took me

through a blow by blow account of the physical, the pain, the torture Christ experienced from His betrayal to His final breath.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you see *The Passion of the Christ*?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. And so I wanted to do a blow by blow account and I go into ... I use some of Strobel's. I quote all the ... I use some real thing. R.C. Sproul, he says that in his commentary, John, he says that those spikes in His head, the crown of thorns, some of those were 12 inches long. Imagine that thrust into the Savior's head. But what's fascinating is that is laid open. It's daylight when that stuff's going on. For all of us to see, the son of God laid bare in full daylight for the physical suffering.

Dr. James Dobson: And then three hours in the dark.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Three hours in pitch black. None of us can see or could even fathom what was going on in the pitch black. And think about the emotional suffering of the Son of God. Think about how many times, Dr. Dobson, you said, "Man, I would all day long take that injury that Ryan suffered." How many parents have said all day long, "I would take my kids' cancer. All day long, I would step on that IED so that my son over in Iraq wouldn't have to go through that painful thing, right?" Because there's an emotional and that's the depth. I mean, we have no idea the gravity of that, but we do know that there is a depth of pain, and that's why I call it a word of pain, but it's shrouded from eyes.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it your understanding that that conversation or that statement by Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me" occurred in the dark?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: It occurred, I believe from studying this, it occurred as He's coming out of that darkness.

Dr. James Dobson: So He's been there for three hours alone in that agony.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh my goodness.

Stu Epperson, Jr.: So it's an exclamation. It's the only words we have.

Dr. James Dobson: And He paid that price for me?

Stu Epperson, Jr.: It's the only words we have to describe that darkness and to describe the price paid, which was far greater. You look at how He was just brutally tortured. And these executioners were well-oiled trained machines to extract the maximum amount of pain. They knew what veins not to cut. They knew what not to get so that this crucifixion victim would suffer to the eth degree and yet the pain Christ suffered. The deep spiritual pain is far greater. No comparison.

Dr. James Dobson: We're out of time. We're just going to have to pick this up next time, but there's seven phrases, seven things that Jesus said on the cross. We dealt with one of them sort of today, but let's pick up with number one next time.

Roger Marsh: The last words of a dying man do carry extraordinary weight. And when that final man is the Son of God, every syllable changes everything. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a rich conversation Dr. Dobson had with Stu Epperson, Jr. about the profound meaning behind Christ's final words from the cross. If you'd like to hear today's program again or to share it with someone preparing their heart for Easter this coming Sunday, visit jdfi.net. Once you're there, you'll also find information about Stu Epperson's book, *The Last Words of Jesus: First Steps to a Richer Life*. And speaking of Easter, this Sunday is one of the most significant days on the Christian calendar. We want to help you and your family make the most of it. So we've gathered a collection of Easter resources right here on our website to help you reflect on the resurrection and what it means for your life today.

Whether you're preparing for a family gathering, leading a discussion at church, or simply looking for a way to go deeper in your own faith this week, these resources are designed to meet you right where you are. To access them, just visit jdfi.net. We are so grateful for those who partner with us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Each time you make a donation, you're helping us defend the sanctity of life to champion biblical values in our culture and to point families to the life-changing message of the gospel. Your support makes it possible to strengthen families everywhere with biblical wisdom and truth and every gift regardless of the size truly makes a difference. To make a secure donation, visit jdfi.net. You can also call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Now, if you'd prefer to send your donation through the U.S. Postal Service, our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, or just use those initials JDFI for short. P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. On our next broadcast, Dr. Dobson and Stu Epperson, Jr. will pick up right where they left off, working through the remaining words Jesus spoke from the cross. They'll explore His tender words to His mother, Mary, and the cry that reveals just how fully human and fully divine our Savior truly was. You will not want to miss it, so be sure to join us right here for the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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