

## Seven Last Words Part 7

It's the day we ironically call Good Friday. The day Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for us and for our sins. As you know we have been looking at the seven last words of Jesus from the cross during Lent and this evening we examine the final word from the cross. Luke alone gives us this final word, often referred to as the cry of submission. **“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” Luke 23:46**

Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, the one who is fully God and fully man taught us how to live and now, in his final word from the cross, he teaches us how to die. Three things we learn from Jesus in this final word. He completes his mission and with his final breath affirms his full and complete confidence in the faithfulness of his Heavenly Father. He looks at death and without fear commits himself to the Father. **Jesus trusts in the unfailing character of God.**

However, the cynic in me responds, “Of course he does. He is Jesus, the Son of God. Of course he isn't afraid to die. Of course he isn't afraid of what's “out there.” He's Jesus. So he just quietly bows his head and respectfully, confidently says, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’” But I'm not sure that is what's happening. Lest we make this all too settled, too scripted, consider again the context. Jesus has been tortured and left hanging on a Roman cross, dying this slow, agonizing death for hours. Matthew's gospel tells us that just moments before Jesus had cried out in utter despair, **“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46.** That is not the sound of confidence or trust. Bearing our sins and the punishment for our sin in his own body, he is forsaken, abandoned. This is the sound of hopelessness. I know, I argue with myself that Jesus would never actually be hopeless. He couldn't be without hope and yet, in one very real sense, in this one very real moment, as the bearer of my sins and my punishment, for him there was no hope. In one very real sense in this one very real moment he was hopeless because there could be no reprieve, no call from the governor, no appeal or last minute stay of execution. There was no hope to escape death because Jesus had been born for this moment, born to die to redeem us from sin.

Frederick Buechner wrote, **“The miracle was to be that there would be no miracle. He was to be spared nothing.” ...Frederick Buechner** Trusting in the unfailing character of God, but will the Father who seems to have forsaken him receive him now?

We are told it was with a loud voice Jesus cried, “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**” With a loud voice. That’s not quiet acquiescence, that is bold faith shouting into the face of death and the darkness that surrounded him. That is Jesus trusting in the unfailing character of God in spite of what appears to be God’s absence. This is Jesus trusting God’s faithfulness when from the vantage point of the cross there is little evidence to suggest it. “My God why have you forsaken me” turns into, “Father, I know you are here, in spite of evidence to the contrary and I commit my spirit into your hands.” Hours before Jesus told the disciples they would scatter and leave him alone, but he said, “Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.” John 16:32. In spite of it all, he would trust and rely upon the character of the Father.

This is hope and trust and faith hurled against the darkness. This is not Jesus following a script. This is real life and death. This is Jesus in the mid-day darkness of Good Friday, staring into the uncertainty of death for us and I think with the same intensity of his question, “why have you forsaken me?” comes Jesus’ loud affirmation, “I still trust you! I still believe in you! You have not forsaken me and I commit my spirit to you.”

Jesus teaches us how to live and how to die. He bore the hopelessness of death on the cross so we could face life and death with hope. Through Christ we have hope that even if we die, yet shall we live. In the face of pain, in the darkness, facing death, we have hope. When God seems distant or absent, we have hope. When we feel forsaken, we still have hope – hope in the unfailing character of a faithful, loving, Heavenly Father who will never leave us or forsake us!

**Jesus rests in the sovereignty of God.** Into your hands I commit my spirit. Consider the fact that when Jesus said those words, he was essentially saying, “Father, I commit everything I am and everything I have to you.” There was nothing else to commit. He owned nothing, no house, no property. He said he didn’t even have a place to lay his head. He committed the care of his mother to John. There was no one else to provide for, nothing else to hand over to another. He didn’t even have any clothes. The soldiers had taken his garment and no doubt any other personal items and divided it among themselves. Jesus committed all he was and all he had to the Father.

Working on this message interfered with my regular worrying time this week. As I fretted and stressed over situations, wondering what I was to do, I felt the Holy Spirit nudging

me, “Can you commit that into the hands of the Father? Can you trust him with everything you have and everything you are?” That’s what Jesus did on the cross. And not just on the cross, that’s what Jesus did everyday of his life. Trusting the Father. Resting in the sovereignty of God and God’s purposes. That’s what he had done his whole life. He did what he saw the father doing, he said what he heard the father saying. He was submitted to the will and plan and purpose of the Father. That’s why he could rest in him even in the agony of the garden of Gethsemane. **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” Luke 22:42** Jesus trusted in and rested in the sovereign plan and timing and purpose of God. That’s why he could rest in that sovereignty even on the cross. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. I rest it all in you.”

Can we rest our life and our circumstances, our worries and cares in the sovereign timing, purpose and will of the Father? Can we trust him with our family, our future, our everything? Can we rest in Him? Rest in the knowledge that all of our days are written in his book. Rest in the knowledge he cares for us so we can cast all of our cares upon him. Rest in the knowledge he is working in us to make us conformable to the image of Christ. Consequently he is at work in all things, in everything that happens to us, in everything we encounter, causing all of these things to work together for our good because we love him and we are called according to his sovereign purpose for our lives. Can you commit it all into the hands of the Father and rest in Him? That’s what Jesus did.

Can you rest in his sovereignty in matters of life and death? Can you rest the death of a loved one in the sovereignty of God? In spite of the questions and doubt and all the mystery, can you rest it all in the sovereignty of God? So many times I’ve stood along side families, my own included and wondered why? How can this happen? Why must this be? And ultimately I find myself crying out as Jesus, “Father, into your hands, into your sovereignty, your higher purpose, I commit this. Not according to my will, but may your will be done.”

**Jesus surrenders himself to the loving hands of the Father.** It’s interesting the use of the word “hands.” Why not “Father to you I commit my spirit.” Why into the father’s hands? For some time now Jesus had been telling the disciples about hands that would be reaching for him. **“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.” Mark 9:31.** In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said to the sleeping disciples, **“Look, the hour is near and the**

**Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Matthew 26:45.** It was the hands of wicked men that bound and beat him. The hands of Roman soldiers that fashioned a crown of thorns to shove down upon his brow. Pilate tried to wash Jesus’ blood from his hands, not wanting to bear the guilt of sentencing an innocent man to death. The hands of men struck him, whipped him and nailed him to a cross. Jesus understood there comes a time in every life when the hands of men or women can no longer help us or hurt us. At the moment of death, Jesus knows to commit his spirit and his life into the only hands worthy of trust, the loving hands of the Father.

There is something warm and tender and trusting about the phrase. I can’t help but think about something everyone of us has done, either as a child or as a parent. As children we all walked to the edge of something and said, “catch me daddy!” as we jumped, full of trust into the hands of a parent. As parents we’ve said, “come on, jump. I’ll catch you.”

Jesus comes to that final moment. With a loud cry he shoves against all the despair and darkness of death and shouts, “Catch me Abba” and with trust in his Father’s unfailing character, resting in the Father’s sovereign purpose, Jesus jumps with abandon into the loving hands and arms of his Heavenly Father. **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”**

And the good news for us, Jesus didn’t jump alone. No, he took us with him. For all of us who have placed our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord, the bible says we are in Christ. We are in him and he is taking us with us. Can you hear him? “Abba, get your hands ready to catch me. Oh, and can you catch my friend as well. I told him today he would be with me in paradise. He’s coming with me.” And the Father says, “Jump, I’ll catch you both.”

Richard Neuhaus wrote, “On the cross the wounded Word is returning from his mission, bringing with him the totality of all that love assumed; in the lead a thief who believed...followed by a ragtag band of tax collectors and sinners and the victims of history beyond numbering, victims who only now know the sacrifice of which their sacrifice was part. Choirs of angels, cherubim and seraphim come out to meet him, to welcome home the Son of God. They stand aghast at the battered, tattered company he is bringing with him. ‘They are all mine,’ he says. ‘They are my brothers and sisters, they are the ones whom I went to seek and to save. I am taking them to the Father. I am taking them home.’”

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And the spirit of all those who have come in repentance and faith.” That’s the leap of faith we take, trusting, resting, believing, surrendering.

On this Good Friday as we remember his sacrifice for us, we come to the Lord's table, to partake of the bread and the cup, the body and blood of Christ. The apostle Paul said as often as we did this, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We testify and affirm again tonight that what Jesus did on the cross for us on that Friday afternoon so long ago still has the power to cleanse us from all sin and make us holy and whole, through Christ our Lord.

You that are going to help us serve, if you would come tonight.

As we receive the bread and the cup, would you focus your heart and mind upon the extraordinary sacrifice of our loving Savior. Consider the mystery of his body broken for you. Think of his blood, spilled from his body that covers your sins, that washes clean your past and your conscience. Think of the stripes upon his back that brings healing and wholeness to your body and life. "Amazing love how can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me."

The tradition of the Good Friday service is to cover the altar area, the cross, the communion table with black, to extinguish the lights or candles and to leave in darkness and in silence. The reason is to recognize and symbolize the death of the one who was and is the Light of the World.

We want to rush to Sunday, to Easter morning, but remember, as the disciples and the women who followed him left the tomb that Friday evening, they left in the bitter silence of grief and loss. They did not understand what he had been telling them about resurrection and they spent the rest of Friday and Saturday into Sunday morning grieving their loss, believing they would never see Jesus again. Remembering the sacrifice of Friday and the silence of Saturday makes the glorious surprise of Sunday morning even greater!

With that in mind, let's leave the sanctuary this evening in quiet. Feel free to visit in the foyer, but let's allow the silence to accompany us as we depart.