

Luke 23:46-49  
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*The Seven Last Words of Christ Series*

“Father, into Your Hands I Commend My Spirit”

Three weeks ago in our focus on Jesus' statement, "I am thirsty," I mentioned that one of the motivations for Jesus' comment was to provide moisture for his throat to proclaim his last two statements. With a parched mouth, Jesus couldn't cry with a “loud” voice. Remembering from John's gospel that someone provided Jesus with vinegar from a sponge on a stick, we now realize that Jesus could speak clearly and with volume. John also recorded that Jesus knew his mission was accomplished. Now Luke provides *his* rendering of Jesus' last statement. Luke had already recorded two other statements of Jesus from the cross. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" and "Today, you shall be with me in Paradise" are found only in Luke's account. Luke is the sole source of today's statement as well.

Six hours after being nailed to the cross, facing severe execution as the vilest of criminals, Jesus spoke with a loud voice. "I am thirsty" wasn't spoken loudly; *parched* words have little volume.

But now, with a moistened throat, albeit from vinegar, Jesus spoke loudly. For him to speak with increased volume signified that Jesus wanted to be *heard*. His final words were important. We have no trouble remembering the last words someone said to us. It is not uncommon for me to hear someone say, "The last thing he/she said to me was . . ." Because of the finality of death, we tend to remember with ease those last words.

Psychiatrists tell us that we can remember everything that has ever happened to us, but certain instances are recalled more easily than others. I may not be able to tell you the content of a conversation I had yesterday, but I can remember the last words said to me from good friends before they died. Jesus knew that his words would be remembered. He knew the importance of his witness, *even* on the cross. He wanted to be able finish the race with a surge, much like a runner might sprint the last 100 yards of a mile run.

Everyone that day had read the accusation that hung above Jesus' head. In three languages, so everyone would know the charge, Pilate had written, "This is the King of the Jews." It was a *public* execution with a *public* charge for all to see. Now Jesus wanted the *public* to hear his last words as he left this world. His mission was accomplished; he had fulfilled the Master's plan. The battle had been fought.

His first words from the cross began with a prayer; he began his request with the word "Father." Roughly six hours later, after experiencing the myriad of emotions, he again called on his Father. Jesus had suffered immensely. The physical pain was tortuous; the emotional pain of abandonment and betrayal which resulted from the fleeing of his closest associates was devastating; the spiritual pain voiced in his cry "My God why have you forsaken me?" was agonizing. Yet still, Jesus had the confidence to call on God as his Father.

For many hours, Jesus had been in the hands of sinners. Matthew 26:45 records Jesus as telling his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the *hands* of sinners." The *hands* of sinners took hold of him and bound him. The *hands* of sinners beat him. The *hands* of sinners stripped him. The *hands* of sinners put a crown of thorns upon his head. The *hands*

of sinners nailed him to a cross. (Warren W. Wiersbe. *The Cross of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 1997. pp. 116-117) The *hands* of sinners gambled for the clothes that Jesus wore.

But now, after hanging on the cross for six hours, Jesus prayed, "Father, into your *hands*, I commend my spirit." He had spent enough time in the *hands* of his detractors. Now, it was time for his spirit to be placed in *God's* hands. *God's* hands had created the world out of nothing, placed the planets and stars in the sky with intricate delicacy. *God's* hands had created all the plants and animals; indeed God had created all living things. Finally, *God's* hands had formed humanity out of the dust of the ground. Jesus was well aware of the comfort found in *God's* hands. *God's* created order was being redeemed through Jesus' death on the cross. Although *human* hands had not handled *God's* Son properly, Jesus' spirit was now being commended into *God's* hands.

Jesus' body was dying. The weight of his body was held in place by the nails which pierced his hands. These were the hands which had touched the scars of the lepers; now they were forever scarred. These were the hands that had dried tears; now nailed to the cross, he shed tears. These were the hands that broke bread to celebrate Passover, but the angel of death had not *passed* over him. These were the hands that had *lifted* little children, and now as *God's* child, he was being *lifted* by *God's* hands.

His body was bleeding; his air was fleeting. His lungs were filling with fluid, yet his spirit was moving on. Jesus, though facing physical death, knew that *God* would receive his spirit. He had promised the penitent thief, "Today, you shall be with me in Paradise." Now, after six hours of crucifixion, the weary walk to Calvary, the scourging by the soldiers, the trial by Pilate, the cross-examination by Herod, the arrest in the garden, the betrayal of Judas, the agony of Gethsemane, the final meal with his closest friends in the upper room, three full years of ministry, and thirty-three years of living on this terrestrial ball, Jesus was commending his Spirit to his heavenly Father.

And having said this, Luke recorded, he breathed his last. Although fully divine, Jesus was also fully human. When he stopped breathing, he died a physical death. His heart stopped beating; his lungs stopped inflating; his organs shut down. The King of the Jews told those still present on that Judean hillside just outside the city gate of Jerusalem that he was moving into *God's* hands. They had done all they could do to him. He had endured and persevered to the end. And now, he was committing his Spirit into *God's* hands.

Jesus wasn't worried about what was going to happen next. He had committed his spirit into *God's* hands. His prayer was sounded with comfort, hope, and assurance.

Many parents teach their preschoolers an age-old favorite prayer to be offered at bed-time:

*"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep  
When I wake for another day, I pray the Lord to guide my ways."*

In first-century Palestine, when little boys and girls were being put to bed, they were taught to say, "Into your hands I commend my spirit." As Paul Harvey would say, "and now you know the rest of the story." When his time came to die--far away from his childhood and its routines--Jesus used the same words he had repeated often when the time had come to go to bed and there to sleep.

"Father," he said, "into your hands I commend my spirit." The words of this brief prayer of the Jewish child come from Psalm 31:5. On the lips of Jesus, they are particularly appropriate. It seems that Psalm 31 was written by a person who lived the greater part of his life in pain. As he grew older, in addition to the pain, there were threats to his life from cruel enemies who slandered and reviled him. In his despair, pain, and fear, he fled to the presence of *God* for protection and for deliverance from his enemies. In the presence of *God*, he affirmed his faith in divine protection; he cast aside his fear of death itself; he was confident that *God* would arrange his escape from it. This psalm was originally, then, the expression of one person's spiritual pilgrimage. But when other people read it, it seemed to them to be an expression of *their* experiences as well.

All this was well-known to the writer of Luke's Gospel. Throughout his Gospel, he portrayed Jesus as a person to whom prayer was both necessary and natural. According to Luke, the first remark

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of Jesus from the cross was a prayer--a prayer of forgiveness. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," was taken also from a Psalm, Psalm 22. According to Luke, this last remark was a prayer as well--one Jesus had learned as a child. The childhood prayer is enlarged only by the word "Father"--which may have been the way it was taught in the carpenter's home in Nazareth. In any case, it is consistent with the way in which he taught his disciples to think about God.

And Luke may have been concerned as well with the contrast between the attitude of the man responsible for the psalm and the attitude of Jesus when he used these words from the psalm. The psalmist committed his *life* to God. He did so in the confidence that as a result he would escape death. By contrast, Jesus committed his *dying* to God, just as naturally as he had all of his living. He did so not to escape death, but to die as he had lived--with his trust in God. Jesus committed his dying to God in expectation of life *after* death. Jesus committed his dying to God in confidence that what he had taught others he would shortly experience himself.

Jesus taught us in his dying how to live: in complete trust; in expectation of life beyond death; in total commitment to the Lord of life.

At night, can you say, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit?" As a child, there was safety in knowing that a parent was there. You didn't have to wonder if anything bad would happen if you closed your eyes. But after becoming an adult, those times changed didn't they? You hear the old house creak, or the dog bark unexpectedly, and you wonder what is happening. Yet in reality, God wants us to say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

For some, the journey has gotten too tough; the road is rocky; the traveled path has proven treacherous. God wants us to say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

You may be faced with decisions, wondering which way to turn. You worry about your family, because someone may not be making the best decision. You wrestle with what to do or say or whether to do or say anything. In our restlessness, God wants us to say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Fear at times may seem overwhelming. The unknown *haunts* you, and you allow it to rob you of joy. In our fearfulness, God wants us to say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Jesus endured and persevered to the end. He had not only committed his life to God while *living*, he committed his life to God in *dying*. He even committed his dying to God.

How are you affected by his words? How easy is it for you to commend your very spirit to God, even in the darkest of times, even when you don't have the strength to continue, even when you are tired and fatigued? Although our only record of Jesus ever voicing this prayer was from the cross, I am confident that he said it as a boy. I am also confident that he verbalized it as an adult. That is the way he lived, and that is the way he died.

God wants us to trust confidently with total commitment. The decision is ours; God will be faithful and provide the comfort we need. Will we trust our very spirits to God, even during the most turbulent and hopeless of times? That question of faith has to be answered everyday.