

The last words from the cross

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[0 : 00] Now to God's word and to that portion of it read earlier the gospel according to Luke chapter 23 and verse 46.

Then Jesus had cried with a loud voice. He said, Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit. And having said that, he gave up the ghost. Especially these words, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Calvary is precious to real Christian faith. There are many reasons that it should be precious. One of them is that Calvary, as it's depicted for us in the gospels, is a very instructive place for faith.

[1 : 09] And faith will often visit Calvary for that reason alone, that there it will be instructed in the things of the Spirit.

And there it will be instructed in the amazing grace of God and the tender, self-abandoning love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not strange that Calvary should be precious to faith. For Calvary has a large place in the very rise of saving faith.

It is to Calvary that the Holy Ghost conducts the soul that comes under his convicting power of sin. And it is at Calvary that God gives peace to the sinner who finds peace.

[2 : 16] At Calvary, faith takes its rise. And through Calvary, faith finds its progress.

It will never be beyond the need of visiting the place where its Savior laid down his life.

The events of Calvary, every event that took place there and is recorded for us by the Spirit of God, has its own instruction to impart to the Christian believer.

But not only the events of Calvary, but the words of Calvary also. We can learn much from the facts which are portrayed to us about the bearing and the manner of the Savior as he suffered the just in the room of the unjust.

But we can learn even more from his own words on the cross. These words give us an insight into his own mind and his own heart, his own experience as he suffered there.

[3 : 50] It is true that Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

It is also true that as a sheep before a shearer is done, so he opened not his mouth. He opened not his mouth in any way in self-defense or in complaint.

And yet one of the things for which the believer is always thankful and grateful is that his lips were not sealed completely.

Even when they took him and nailed him to the tree, there was no complaint and no word of resistance. But there was a word.

And through the hours of his suffering, and even we believe from the midst of the darkness of his felt desertion, he had something to say.

[5 : 04] And every one of the words that he did say is, I believe, peculiarly precious to the Christian believer.

The sayings, the words which he uttered from the cross have become known as the seven sayings of the cross. There were seven moments when this one who came to reveal the will of God and to fulfill the will of God for our salvation.

There were seven occasions when he broke the silence. Seven is the letter that's used very frequently in Scripture.

to describe or to announce perfection. And the revelation which he gave of himself, even in the midst of his sufferings, was a perfect revelation.

He said all that God would have us know. And when he had finished, there was nothing to add. I want us to look at the last words.

[6 : 26] They, I think, should attract our attention especially. It's common with us all, among all men everywhere, I suppose, that the words of those who are passing from time into eternity are listened to with peculiar and particular attention.

And it's only right that it should be so. And if the words of the dying are listened to, the words of those who die in peace with God, the words of those who die, and we know that they are good men and just men and righteous men, God's people, they are always worth having.

The church has been helped and blessed and strengthened, often, with the messages of God's people as they pass into God's presence.

Just a few years ago, after the death of one of our own ministers, his family were able to tell of how for the last two hours of his life on earth, he was able to speak to them of heaven open to him and of what he could see there.

And he was able, in the light of that, to leave them wonderfully precious instruction from the word of God. We have many infallible proofs of our faith.

[8 : 17] And the Lord sometimes uses the passing of believers to leave further proofs of the reality and the power of his grace with the believer, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

I remember when I was a, or shortly after I was a student here, one of the elders in this congregation called on the minister. And the minister visited him in hospital between the morning and the evening services and came back and told us from the pulpit how that elder had witnessed of the glory that he was about to enter into and of the truth of the gospel that the minister had preached to him.

But if the words of saints as the Lord takes them home are precious and worth listening to, how much more, my friend, how much more worthy of attention the words of the one who opened up the way for all the saints.

And I want us to look at the words first of all as a prayer, a prayer of commendation, self-commendation into the hands of God.

Lord, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. What a lesson, my friend, that is there for you and for me, for all of us.

[9 : 53] There is never a time when it would be inappropriate for any one of us to commit our spirit into the hands of God.

God. And I think we can learn from the Lord Jesus that we can only do it in the article of death when it has been our custom to do it in the midst of life.

That the Savior should die with prayer. That is not surprising.

For the Savior lived with prayer. It's one of the notable things about the Lord Jesus. He was eminent in every way.

But he was eminent in his prayer life. Every crisis of his public ministry we find Jesus of Nazareth in prayer and in communion with his Father.

[11 : 06] For his baptism when he goes to choose his disciples in the Mount of Transfiguration when death is drawing near. There was the agony in Gethsemane and he will close his whole ministry as he opened it in communion with the Father he loved.

all his words from the cross were not words of prayer. Some of them were words of assurance and consolation.

To the thief he said today thou will be with me in paradise. Some of them were words of concern for Mary the one who had borne him into this world and from whom his human nature was taken.

Of Mary he said to John son behold thy mother and to Mary he said woman behold thy son. Even in the midst of his agony and his suffering he had a concern for her.

But the very first word of the cross was a word of prayer. It was a word of intercessory prayer.

[12 : 28] Father forgive them. My friend that first word from the cross tells us very plainly what the cross is all about.

The cross is there as an atonement for sin. It's there to be operative for God with man and to enable God to be just and the justifier of the ungodly who believes in Jesus.

The cross is there in order that God can forgive and that his forgiveness will be consonant with his holiness and his righteousness. And the very first word from the cross teaches us that.

He prays for those who crucify him. And just as the first word was a prayer so is the last word.

Isn't prayer an appropriate thing with which to begin anything we have to do? And my friend when we have done all prayer is also appropriate.

[13 : 39] for what we do needs the blessing of God as we do it. And what we do needs the blessing of God when we have done all.

prayer is not and it's not by chance that the Savior can begin his final act of suffering and atonement begin and end it with prayer for the whole course and channel of his life was Godward. if ever there was a man who prayed always with all prayer that man was the man Christ Jesus. And prayer is appropriate for Christ's people. if the Savior himself felt the need to hold up his communion and to maintain his communion with the Father through prayer and the fellowship which prayer involves my friend how much more do the followers of the Savior yourself and myself. I think that it's perhaps one of the saddest reflections on present day Christian profession that we are not as our forefathers were men and women of prayer and the Savior teaches us how much we need prayer.

[15 : 29] Prayer is appropriate. You can't do anything but it will be appropriate to pray. Do anything in this service of God. Can you start off any one day in your life my friend without first of all committing that day to God and can you end any day in your life without also bringing it before him and doing what Jesus never needed to do in prayer seeking his pardon and cleansing for all that has been wrong and has been sinful.

One would expect that if there is any time or any place where man would pray it would be the time and place of death and yet it is not always so.

Few die with prayer who have not previously lived with prayer. My friend the moment of death is not the moment to begin to know God in prayer.

many of us have learned that from being with those who were not people of prayer in the moments of death.

I haven't been with very many people when they passed into eternity just with one or two. So many now die in hospitals that it's scarcely part of a minister's pastoral life as it once was that he saw much of his people in the article of death.

[17 : 26] Although the deaths I have seen have been few, I have seen deaths where there was no prayer. And I think we'll learn the lesson there that scripture inculcates that unless men and women learn to pray in life there's no guarantee that they will pray in death.

How is it with yourself? Is prayer part of your life? It's natural to you as breathing. It was that with the Lord Jesus. It wasn't a strange alien thing for him.

How difficult for the soul that has to begin praying and doesn't know how to start. Well, the Savior prayed. My friend, if you're not in the habit of prayer, let me say this to you.

Let me bring you a word from the scripture today. Get to know God and get to know him in Christ and get to know then what the fellowship of prayer is.

Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace or there will be no more peace in time or in eternity, in life or in death.

[18 : 47] And what peace there is, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. The prayer of trust. He trusted in God.

They had mocked him with the fact just a moment before, and his trust held through to the end. He trusted him still.

Trust shines out of it. So does dependence. He was the son of God. Ah, yes, and he is also the son of man.

And we learn in his suffering and death how truly he was the son of man. He is the creator and yet he is a creature.

And he knows what creaturely dependence is. And he brings his dependence in his most dependent moment of all.

[19 : 47] He brings it to the one place, to the Father. Into thy hands I commend my spirit. And what assurance there is here too.

His trust is full orb'd his faith, his knowledge of God the Father strong. The very first recorded words of the Lord Jesus recorded of him when he was only twelve years of age carried the same word.

Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business. And he went about the Father's business to this very moment and he is still about the Father's business.

And he can still hold of the name and all that it means. And he says, Father, into thy hands hands.

I commend to die, my friend, in that spirit. To die wherein Christ himself you can look up and by the Holy Ghost call him Abba Father.

[21 : 11] That will be one of the most precious experiences of the believing soul. Prayer of commendation.

And then I want to go on and notice this. There is a prayer of quotation. When the Lord Jesus wants to commit himself to the Father, he goes to scripture.

We sang the psalm from which he takes the words of this prayer. Psalm 31 and verse 5. The final prayer, as many of his prayers were, the final prayer of the Redeemer of God's elect, was formed and informed by the Word of God.

Isn't that instructive to our faith? That the Word incarnate goes to the Word inspired.

And he didn't just do it here. It's a constant feature of his life. David, long ago, long before this song words that showed a wonderful love to the Word of God.

[22 : 27] Oh, how love I thy law, he said. Oh, how love I thy law, it is my study all the day. It was the chief focus of his learning and of his searching.

thing. And here is another one. David, great, David's greater son. And he evidently loved the Word of God too, the written Word.

He lived by it. I don't need to remind you. Remember how he repelled Satan in the wilderness temptation? And we're all subject to temptation, haven't we?

Do you use the Word of God? And you'll only use it if you know it. This one loved the Word, and this one took the Word, and he hid it in his heart.

Thy Word have I hidden in my heart. And he could call on the Word, and use it in a wonderfully practical way.

[23 : 36] all his quotations in the temptation were taken from the book of Deuteronomy. And this is not the only time on the cross that he uses scripture.

He uses it clearly, at least in one other, in one other of these words from the cross. Perhaps he uses it in almost every one of them.

perhaps, for example, the words, the only word that goes anywhere near complained. I thirst.

God, I believe myself, and not all commentators would believe that. I believe that that is a word taken from the book of Psalms. And certainly we know that when he was in the darkest experience of all, an experience into which we cannot enter.

When he cried out of the darkness of desertion and desolation, he laid hold of another psalm. How precious the book of Psalms must have been to the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 48] Are they precious to yourself, my friend? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Scripture informed his mind, and it helped his heart because his heart laid hold of it.

It was bearing him up in the midst of his trials and his sufferings. My friend, that's one of the things that scripture will do. And you and I have the same scriptures in our hands.

Before he gives us finally the means of grace, Christ himself proves them. Proves them in his own experience, his human experience, even in the experience of death, he proves that God's word is a stronghold and that in the midst of darkness it brings light.

He goes in his suffering to the only real font of wisdom that's available to this world the living word of the living God.

My friend, do you store up scripture in your mind and in your heart? Does it inform and instruct your life every day?

[26 : 14] It's only when it's so used and so known that it will form and inform your last moments on earth.

This word, our Savior, tells us the word of God is a word not only to live by and to live with, it's a word on which to die also.

what a practical way he was using it, taking it, the most original mind the world has ever known, the clearest intellect, undarkened by sin, the one of whom it is said that never man spake like this man, and yet even such a mind and such a man can go to the scripture and find there that which will be the perfect help and give perfect expression to his feeling and his need.

How wonderful the scriptures are. It's a prayer of commendation, it was a prayer of quotation, and do you notice something before we leave that? It was a quotation and he added something to it and he subtracted something from it.

He added to it the word Father, the word that David could not use, the word that was introduced into the church of Christ on earth by this son, the son himself.

[28 : 01] And then he subtracted from it the words, the quotation, the words that David had had to add. Into thy hands, Jehovah, I commend my spirit, said David, for thou, Jehovah, hast redeemed me.

But this one needed no redeemer because he is the redeemer, the only redeemer. of shorter carnicism puts it beautifully. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of God's elect.

It is not the father, it is not the spirit, it is the son. And that should make the words all the more precious to us. The redeemer, the only redeemer, makes them his own here.

He has no need to add, for thou hast redeemed. He's alone here. There is none to help. He walks the wine press alone.

And my friend, because he is not just man, but because he is God, he can do that. He can go through the furnace of the wrath of God, and emerge from it.

[29 : 33] It's a prayer of instruction too. How it should instruct us in this that it is his spirit, human soul, that he wants to commend into the hands of the father.

Men had done all that they could. to destroy and to break up and to leave a bruised and wrecked thing, the body of his humility.

And yet his concern is not about that vehicle of his suffering at all. He will leave that also in the father's hands.

and the father will use men, righteous men, just men, men like Joseph of Arimathea, and bring them out into the light as witnesses of Christ to care for his body.

But his body is not his care, his soul is. And my friend, that is not true of many people today.

[30 : 43] Most people today, very many, pay a great deal of attention still as to what will happen to their bodies even after death.

Don't know how often people have asked me the question, where would you like to be buried when you die? Strange question, but people ask me. And nobody has ever asked me, where will your soul be when you die?

people will spend money to leave wills, and they'll lay aside money to have the dust laid in some particular place or in some particular way, and they'll give not a thought to where the soul will be. Are you like that this morning? Well, the dust of his humanity did not enter into the prayer of the Redeemer, but his human soul did.

For the soul lives on through the experience of death. That was the stress of his own teaching. This is the man who said, what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his soul?

[32 : 05] fear not him that can destroy the body, but fear him, fear not, and then fear, a fear which is justified, fear not him who can destroy the body.

In the last analysis, the body is not important, although it comes under the redeeming work of Christ and will be raised up. But Jesus said, fear not him that can destroy the body, but rather fear him that can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Body and soul both involved in everlasting destruction. salvation. And this is the one who sets his seal on that teaching and on the vital importance of soul salvation in his last word on this side of death.

Into thy hands I command my spirit. The spirits of scripture shall return to God who gave it.

And Jesus sets his seal here on the immortality of the soul. If a man dies, says Job, shall he live again?

[33 : 41] And today we live in an age when materialism and unbelief and ungodliness would say no, when a man dies he won't live again. But when a man dies, death involves only the separation of soul from body.

The soul we believe in self-consciousness lives on through death. Then my friend, it returns to God. And it returns to God either in and for eternal blessing or it returns to God in and for everlasting destruction.

It's a solemn thing to have in your personality as part of you an immortal soul which death will not quench.

what are you doing about it? Finally, this is a prayer of action. It's a prayer in which he not only speaks but acts.

For as he prayed, says this text, he gave up the ghost. Have you ever noticed that none of the gospels, none of the evangelists, use the word die of the death of Christ.

[35 : 06] When they are actually recording it, they always say, either he yielded up the ghost or he gave up the ghost.

The words are slightly different but they mean essentially the same thing. The apostle of course in the epistles talks of the death of Christ as it was a real death.

And yet the evangelists stress what this prayer brings out, his own activity in death. His death is uniquely different from ours or the death of any other person in this, that with every other human, death lays hold of them and they are a victim.

And death sunders soul from body. That's what death is, the separation of the soul from body. with Jesus it is different. It's as though he, the eternal son of God, takes his body, his human body in one hand and his human soul in the other and he sunders them and death reigns in its human nature. Ah yes, but it reigns under limitation for body and soul are still united in his divine passion.

[36 : 37] Nevertheless, he experiences his death. Now, it's as he prays, though he seems to have done this. He called out in a loud voice and I think the words he called then were it is finished, recorded in the gospel of John.

And then, it seems very calmly and confidently, he uttered this prayer, Father, into thy hands, I commend or I commit my spirit.

And he bowed the head and yielded up the ghost. What peace, even in the midst of the wrenching strife and suffering of his death, what peace there is in the passion of the Savior.

and death can be like that. It's his own act. I have power, he says, to lay it down and I have power to take it again.

And the power to lay it down seems to have been just as great in its necessity as the power to take it up again. And you see where he's leaving his soul, spirit.

[38 : 00] Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. It's in John chapter 10 when he's speaking as the great shepherd of the sheep that Jesus mentions that hand or these hands as the ultimate place of safety and security.

My sheep, he said, this great shepherd. My sheep, hear my voice and they follow me and I give unto them what authority, I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish and no man shall pluck them out of my hand.

The father that gave them me, listen to this now, the father that gave them me is greater than all. Yes, greater than all. The father.

The father that gave them me is greater than all and no man and no thing and no power and no devil, no man is able to pluck them out of my father's hand.

hand. And just as the shepherd knew that the sheep would be safe there, so he knew that he himself, in the dependent part of his nature, even in the article of death, would also be safe.

[39 : 37] My friend, let me ask you, have you committed yourself and your soul and all that you are into this hand? Have you?

The only people who truly commit themselves into the hand of God are those who commit themselves first of all into the hand of Christ.

those who hear and those who follow, to them, he gives eternal life and they shall never perish.

They're in his hand, and his hand is in the father's hand, and ultimately it's the same hand. The apostle Paul writing to Timothy uses the very same word, commit, or commend, or deposit.

And he uses it not in the hour of death, he uses it in the midst of our strenuous life. He says, I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able, heirs the same word again, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

[41 : 19] My friend, this prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a prayer to leave off using until the end of life.

It's a prayer for you for this morning. It's a prayer for you for every day. Follow the pattern of his example. Make yourself acquainted with the reality of which it speaks.

and then that death you too will be able to use it as many of the saints of God have done. The very first martyr in the Christian church used it, Stephen, pardoned his life first of all upon Jesus, for he was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

And then his death was pardoned and that of Christ too. As far as trust and assurance and committal to Christ were concerned, for it was he who also saw heaven opened, and he said, I see

the Son of Man standing.

It's the only place in the New Testament as far as I know where the risen Christ is spoken of, not as seated, but as standing. I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of the throne of God.

[42 : 51] And he called, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. These are the words, the words we've been looking at, the words of our Savior.

My final thought is this, my friend. They were words. that were his in the act that supremely makes him a Savior.

For he laid down his life and was obedient unto death in order that sinners like you and me might not die, but live.

the SPRP, and