The death of death

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[0:00] Let us turn now to our studies in the Gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 23. We want to look this morning at the verses 46 to 49.

We'll just read Luke chapter 23 and verse 46. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.
And having said that, he gave up the ghost. We come this morning to the end of our vigil around the cross of Calvary.
And we come very obviously from the text to that point in the proceedings of that first Good Friday where Jesus dies.
The death of Jesus is of course at the very heart of our faith. And it seems to me that that's one of the things that is most convincing about the truth of Christianity.
[1:20] That the faith that enlivens so many and transforms their lives centres around the death of the man Christ Jesus.

And so it's a most important event for us to consider. I do think that even the circumstances of this last week are evidence to us that to consider the death of Jesus is most important for all of us and for our society in these days.
I think in the past week we have seen the press in its approach to the BSE difficulties that we are all under.
And undoubtedly these are great difficulties that are political and economic and health implications that are very serious and that need to be taken seriously. But it seems to me that the press has certainly made quite a lot of use of the fear of death that few are willing to convey.
But it's there under the surface and is very real in our society in these days. A fear that we try to keep under wraps.
[2:59] But it's there. And the Bible teaches very clearly that it is only an understanding and a belief in the truth of the death of Jesus that can really deal with the fear of death that is so common in man.

And in our congregation today there are bound to be people who fear death. You might not admit it to any other person.
You might not admit it to yourself. But it's there. And it may be there whether you are young or old.
And the death of Christ, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ has the answer and the cure for such a fear. Two things about the death of Jesus that I would like us to consider this morning.
I'd like us first of all to look at the manner of his death and that's really what we have in verse 46. His death is described to us. Particularly the words that Jesus spoke at the very moment of his death is told us.
[4:37] And that's most significant. And then Luke records for us various reactions to the death of Jesus. And it seems to me that these also are important if we are going to find this morning that the death of Jesus can help us with our fear of death.

Or with the fear of death that we may discover in others. So first of all we look at the manner of Christ's death.
And we look therefore particularly at verse 46 and particularly at the words that Jesus himself spoke. And you may remember that we've been finding as we've had our vigil around the cross of Jesus over recent Sunday mornings.
We've been finding that the words that Jesus spoke from the cross and Luke records quite a number of them for us. And this is the last one. And we've been finding that they are most significant.

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And so this last word of Jesus immediately before he dies Jesus says in a loud voice Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.
[5:56] There are really two things about that word that we need to investigate that we need to notice and they will help us to understand what the manner of Jesus' death was.

The first thing that I think is significant that we need to see is that these words were the words of Hassan to his father. Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.
At the point of his death Jesus revealed complete confidence in God as his father.
and I think when we notice that we have to notice that this is a great contrast to the circumstances of Jesus' suffering that we were looking at just a fortnight ago if you remember.
We were looking at Jesus during these three hours of darkness on the cross and we were noticing the bewilderment and the sense of evil that Jesus was experiencing in these three hours of great suffering.
[7:20] And we saw that again there was one of the words that came from that darkness. It seems that it came towards the very end of that darkness and indeed not long before the words that are before us this morning.

Maybe just moments before the words that are before us this morning. It was the word that we read in Matthew's account of the crucifixion. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
It was in no way a word of confidence. It was in no way a word of peace and understanding of what was happening.
It was a word of bewilderment. It was a word of great agony as Jesus cried, why? Not even the ability in his consciousness to call God his Father.
So much of the consciousness of the safety and the security that he had in his Father seemed to be lost. That is, the consciousness of it was lost.
[8:28] And he can only cry, my God, my God, why? that in between that word and the word that we're looking at this morning, there came another word from Jesus.

There came more than one, but there came this word. The word, it is finished. that speaks of the consciousness that Jesus had about having to do a work for God in his sufferings and in his days.
And the consciousness that was now given to him in his human nature by the God who was in charge of it all, that that work is finished, it is complete.
And that's the reason that now at the point of death, as the final aspect of the word is about to be entered into, the final aspect of finishing the work and going down through the sufferings to death itself.
Jesus is filled with the awareness and the assurance that he is indeed completing the work that God had given him to do.
[10:01] And that enables them to go down into that day with quietness and confidence and peacefulness with trust, with absolute trust in the goodness and the blessing of his Father.

So that he says at the point of death, Father, I know I'm in your hands and I know you're my Father and I know you're pleased with the work that I've been able to do in your name.
The work of taking the suffering and the pride and the judgment due to my people. And you've enabled me just in these last moments before my day.
You've enabled me to see that the work is finished, that you're pleased with it. And you've brought back to me that consciousness that I am in your hands, safe and secure.
Oh, Christ might have been able to say, I was always in your hands. But for the sake of the suffering that I had to endure, there were these terrible times in the darkness when I wasn't even aware that I was in your hands.
[11:30] But now you've brought me back at this last point of the work to know that I'm in your will and that it's a good will.

And so I say, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Jesus, at the very last, was restored to that clear consciousness of the Father's will that he had for the greater part of his ministry in this world.
That was always the way that he explained why he was here, why he was doing the sort of things that he did. It was because he was in the Father's will, in the Father's hand, doing the Father's business.
Didn't he make that clear to his own earthly family when he was only 12 years old? And when, for the first time, publicly at least, there is given evidence that he is different, that he is different from any other who has ever lived in this world, and that he may work from time to time and in a

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surprising way that cannot really be explained if we merely use this world's reasoning.
And Jesus, at 12, explains it to his parents, did you not know, did you not know, that I must be about my Father's business?
[13:22] Every moment of my life, I have to commit myself to my Father, I have to do his work. It's not up to me to decide how things should be done, it's up to my Father.

and of course as we pause there for a moment, we who follow in the footsteps of Christ, we who profess him as our Lord and our Saviour, there are echoes there for us in the way we approach our lives, and we also are going to find time when we'll be tested, when we'll be tested by the opinions of the world, why are you doing that?
Why have you made that decision in your life? Surely if you want to get on in this world, it's not the best decision to make. And the answer, hopefully, in true Christian humility has to be, but I have to be about my Father's business.
I can't just make my decisions about what I will do and what I will not do, what I will make my priorities and what I will make lesser priorities. I can't make these decisions merely on the basis of the world's opinions or the world's reasoning about things.
I'm in the hands of my Father who is in heaven and I must be about his business. That's the way that Jesus lived.
[15:15] And as his death drew nearer and as he began to teach his disciples much later on in his ministry, towards the end of the three years of his public ministry, so a long time after he was at the age of twelve, when he was nearer the age of thirty, he explained the whole of his life to his disciples and he explained the death that was soon going to come to him.

In these terms, the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.
The Son of Man came not to be served, not to be in the pace of control so that everybody had to run to him, but he came in the place of service, to serve, to serve his people and supremely to serve his Father who is in heaven.
And that's the reason, the final reason why he will give his life as a ransom for many, because it's his Father's will.
And he's the Son of that Father and he came to do the Father's will. And now at the last, that assurance and the comfort that that brought to Christ throughout his ministry, it's there with him at the last, Father, into thy hand I commit my death.
[16:50] and what you see that teaches us is that Jesus died as a saviour die. Jesus died as the one who perfectly takes the place of his people and takes that place voluntarily.

His death is different from the death that all of us will die in that it was a voluntary death. He was in charge of it as he served his father.
Indeed, the words that Matthew uses in describing the death of Jesus are words that most literally translated would say he dismissed his spirit.
He dismissed his spirit and went down to death. Luke's wording that is translated for us, he gave up the ghost, is the same as Matthew's words for his death and it's more to do with the passive obedience of Jesus in his death.
He breathed out his spirit. But still that voluntariness is there and of course again after all the agonies and the weakening suffering of these hours on the cross we're told that that dismissing of his spirit was associated with a loud voice.
[18:32] One who was in command as he gives himself to his father and he dismisses his spirit.

He went voluntarily into it because the work was finished and what would seem to the world to be a path of defeat was actually a path of victory.
That's what the death of Jesus teaches us. Jesus took death something that none of us are able to do.
One day death will take us. That in Jesus it was absolutely other.
He took death. He took it and he used it as a pathway for victory.
[19:48] He took it and he conquered it. And now he is able to tell all who are united to him by faith when you go to death you will go the same way.

Oh yes death will take you but for you also it will be a pathway to victory.
If your trust is in me if you are clinging to me by faith the victory that I gained in death I gain for my people I gain for all who will trust in me and for you also it will be that pathway that's what we read

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so often at the times of Christian funerals in 1st Corinthians chapter 15 death is swallowed up in victory.
The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. That's the problem with death. That's why we fear it because it's related to sin and to the law.
And if we go down into death still with our sin and dealt with, still with our sin unforgiven and cleansed, then we also go down into death under the condemnation of the law.
[21:31] And the law is condemning us because we are still in our sin. If we go down into death in that way and death has that terrible sting claiming us for judgment because the law demands righteousness and we don't have it.

that if we have come to Christ, if we have found the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour, if we have been convinced that he can deal with our sin and therefore deal with the death that we deserve, then 1 Corinthians 15 goes on, yes it says the sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law, death.
Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has commanded the law for us.
He's obeyed the law and he's paid the penalty of the law. He has taken our sin for us down in today and it's gone.
and the sting is taken out of it like we might take a wasp sting out of our arm with tweezers and it's gone and death for God's people is the pathway of victory.
[23:15] Richard Sibb says through Christ death is become friendly to me.

every believer here this morning in the face of the fear of death that is abroad in these days has the authority of Christ to say through Christ death is become friendly to me.
there's something else about the word of Christ that tells us a little bit more about the manner of his death. He died as a saviour dies.
But look at his words once again. Father into thy hands I commend my spirit. Now I ask you are these words familiar to you? they are familiar to us because in their metrical version we sang them together before we began the sermon.
They're a quotation from Psalm 31. Jesus as he so often did in his life quoted from the scriptures. He had quoted Psalm 22 maybe Psalm 69 and that cry my God my God why have you forsaken me?
[24:37] and now at the moment of his death he is quoting from Psalm 31 into your hands I commend my spirit. Now they are words of comfort and they are words of confidence in the midst of trouble.

When we read them in the context of the whole of Psalm 31 that's what they're about. Psalm 31 is a psalm that God gave to his people for the days of trouble for the days of difficulty.
and in the central part of that psalm the psalmist talks about the troubles he feels the difficulties he feels in life. As with so many of the psalms they are so down to earth they are so real.
God doesn't expect us to pretend that we're something we're not. God doesn't expect us to pretend that we feel differently from what we do feel.
and I mustn't get off into a bypass but perhaps we should stop there for a minute and ask ourselves do we who are Christians sometimes put pressure on other people to pretend to be something that they're not?
[25:53] Do we by our pious way sometimes hinder our fellow Christians from being open with one another? From being honest?

And we put pressure on people and we expect of them things that we don't really expect of ourselves when we're honest with the way we are inside. And we expect an outward veneer and we end up putting on masks and we end up playing an act as Christians and mostly that's because of our dealings with one another as Christians and we expect too much of each other and we expect more than God expects of us.
Now of course God expects his people to be holy. Don't get me wrong. God never lowers his standards.
But God is full of loving kindness and tender mercies to his people when they are struggling to reach his standards.
And that's the way we have to be with one another. We have to be as honest as the psalms so often encourage us to be. Where we may say to God I know God what I ought to be but this is what I am.

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[27:30] I know that I ought to be a way up there. You deserve it the God who has saved me. The God who has given me so much. The God who has promised me so much.

I ought to be up there in my spiritual condition. But Lord I'm down here. This is where I am.
This is my trouble. This is my problem. This is my difficulty. This is my weakness Lord. That's the way we're encouraged to be in prayer.
And that's the way we need to be more often in our Christian fellowship. That we might bear one another's burdens and love one another in the Lord. And that's what Psalm 31 is about.
That it begins with the words that say in thee O Lord do I put my trust. And it ends with the words O love the Lord all ye saints for the Lord preserveth the faithful and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.
[28:36] Be of good courage and he shall strengthen your heart all ye that hope in the Lord.
Whatever difficulties, whatever problems have to be confessed, I can trust in the Lord and I can be safe in him and he can equip me and all my needs I can take and pour out before him.

Are we doing that? Are we doing that constantly in our Christian lives? or as well as not being honest with our fellow Christians, have we perhaps not been honest with the Lord himself?
And are our prayers too much, have they got too much of a veneer about them? Then we should be telling the Lord what we are and for the strengthening of our faith and our obedience, professing to the Lord that I will trust in you and I will persevere in trusting in you because you alone are the one who can strengthen me.
And that's the sort of psalm that Christ brought to his God and Father at the moment of his days.
Oh, not that there was any sin in Christ, that there was weakness in Christ, there was human fragility in Christ and there was the burden of bearing the sins of his people in Christ and he felt his need and he felt his weakness that he died, not just as a saviour may die, but as a Christian may die trusting in the Lord.
[30:55] for all his weakness, for all his tiredness, for all his exhaustion, he could say, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit and I know that I am safe for time and for eternity.

Now you can only be sure that you will be able to do that at the moment of day if that's what you're doing now.
if that's the way you're living, bringing your spirit and all your needs constantly to God and committing it to him.
Isn't that what Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane? As he agonized with the fears and the problems and the difficulties he had. That he ended his prayer, but not my will but thy will be done.
I commit myself Lord to you and to your will. And let us not make that prayer of Jesus a cliche, but let us make it the center of our living in our relationship with God.
[32:28] To do your will, not my will but your will. I entrust all my difficulties, all my problems, all my gifts, all my abilities.

I commit them to you, Father. If we're doing that in life, then be sure that by God's grace, we'll be able to do it in days.
Jim Elliot, the missionary martyr amongst the outcasts in the early 50s, said this, see that when you come to die, all you have to do is die.
If we're committing all that we are to the Lord now, it will be an easier thing to commit ourselves to the Lord vain.
If you will not commit yourself to the Lord now, it may prove to be an impossible thing to commit yourself to the Lord vain.
[33:52] Amen.

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