

The Seventh Word From The Cross.

Text: Luke 23:46

Suggested Hymns:

82 Pt.7, 48, 52, 292, 54

1) The Manner Of Jesus' Death

2) The Seventh Word From The Cross

3) What These Words Teach Us

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Seventh Word from the Cross, Luke 23:46, ***“And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’” Having said this, He breathed His last.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We return today to Calvary's mountain. Where else could or would we be found? On this day we dwell in the Holy of Holies of our religion.

As in the Old Testament the Temple was divided into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, into which the latter place the high priest alone was permitted to pass, and that only once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement, so Good Friday ushers us of the New Testament into the contemplation of that which constitutes the Holy of Holies, the most solemn and sacred theme, the heart and core of our Christian faith, namely, the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross for our salvation.

Today we consider the seventh and last word which Jesus spoke upon the cross. ***“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’”*** May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Manner Of Jesus' Death

If there are moments on earth more solemn and affecting than any other, they are the moments in which time and eternity meet and the soul is about to exchange the one for the other.

What sentiments, then, ought to be ours as we contemplate the moments in which our Redeemer bows His head and expires? The end of His lowly and painful journey through life, from the cradle to the cross, had now come.

His mission, as we contemplated last Sunday, was ended. The conflict was over, the victory was won. All that heaven had decreed, and all that Jesus had come to do was finished, as He Himself proclaimed.

What now? Again Jesus moves His lips. And what does He say? A mournful farewell? A plaintive exclamation? Not so.

Let us observe that, when Jesus bowed His head in death, it was not the natural and enforced result of His crucifixion, not the necessary end of His suffering.

The thieves at His side had not yet died, nor did they die until the death-blow was given to them. That any one crucified should die in the manner that Jesus did was extraordinary.

Even Pilate marvelled that Jesus was already dead when Joseph of Arimathea came to ask for the body.¹ Usually death by crucifixion was very slow, a long-drawn-out torture.

All ancient authorities agree that, when healthy persons were crucified, they invariably survived at least twelve hours. Rarely their sufferings terminated after only forty-eight hours. There are even some cases on record where crucified victims lingered in torture from three to six days before death graciously put an end to it.

Jesus, however, died six hours after being nailed to the cross. It was remarkable, extraordinary, that He died so early. Moreover, He died not as men usually die, especially after long and terrible suffering.

Death in such cases comes gradually, slowly breaking down the props of life and snapping its cords asunder. Little by little the limbs grow cold and rigid, the features set, the eyes dim and glassy, the voice thickens, the tongue becomes paralysed, and the breath leaves the body almost without a struggle, while the feeble heart flutters into the stillness of death.

But our Saviour did not meet the King of Terrors in that way. We read that Jesus “*cried out with a loud voice,*” with the strength and emphasis of one who does not die from weakness and exhaustion.

In other words, Jesus showed by the very manner of His death that He was not compelled to die, but that He willingly, and of His own accord, submitted to death. Near that cross stood the Grim Reaper anxious to grasp, to gather in, this Man in the agonies of suffering.

But he dared not approach until Jesus permitted him. “*Now you may come.*” Death did not meet Jesus, but He met death. Death had no power over Jesus who is the Prince of Life.

As Jesus had once said, “*I lay down My life that I may take it again.*”¹⁸ *No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*² That cry uttered with a loud voice proves it.

Voluntarily, of His own free choice, Jesus gave up His Spirit, thus leaving us even in His death a grand testimony of His God-ship. A King in life, and He remained a King in death. No wonder that even rationalists like Rousseau, deeply impressed by this feature, admitted: “*Jesus Christ died like a god.*”

2. The Seventh Word From The Cross

Now to come to an analysis of the last word of Jesus. Last words, spoken on the very threshold of eternity, are generally memorable words, and the more so, the more honoured and beloved the person is who utters them.

“*Father,*” our dying Saviour begins. The first sentence we have recorded in the Bible from His lips on earth was “*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?*”³

“*Our Father who art in heaven*” was the first sentence of the prayer He taught His disciples. “*In My Father’s house are many mansions,*” was His teaching.⁴ “*Abba, Father,*” was His earnest plea in the agony of the Garden, “*Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.*”⁵

“*Father,*” was the first word that passed over His lips when He was nailed to the cross, and it was His last. All His thoughts and deeds, His desires and efforts, were towards His Father and the glorifying of His Father’s name.

To accomplish His Father's will was His food;⁶ the love of His Father was His delight and bliss; and the union with His Father was the summit of all His hopes and desires.

With that conquering cry, "*It is finished,*" Jesus had turned once more to the world. It was His farewell to earth. Then He withdrew Himself and turned His thoughts to His Father alone. To the Father His last word was addressed.

'Into Your hands I commit My spirit.' What a flood of light those few words shed upon that mysterious, yet for every one of us inevitable experience that we call death! What do we know about it? Absolutely nothing, except what God has told us in His Word.

Without the revelation of that divine Word, the realm of death would be to us an unknown land, and all attempts of many to throw light upon it are wildest speculations.

What we know we owe to Jesus who Himself came from heaven, who spoke of what He knew, and testified of what He had seen. And here in this utterance He lifts, as it were, for a moment the veil separating this life from the future, so that a ray of heavenly knowledge filters through to enlighten our minds and cheer our hearts.

3. What These Words Teach Us

What do these words teach us? As we hear them, the idea that most naturally comes to our minds is this, that death was to the speaker nothing else than a transfer of His spirit into a different sphere of existence.

We have here, then, once again from His infallible divine lips the assurance that the soul of man is immortal, that it is not annihilated by death, does not become extinct like a candle that is blown out, that the grave is not its goal, but that it continues to exist, and goes on in its life and activity.

Now we know that, when the believer dies, it is not, as one expressed it as his final utterance, a leap into the dark, a blind groping in a fog, or an uncertain plunge over the precipice that lands us into nothingness or even worse. Oh, may God preserve us from such gloomy, haunting conception as that!

No, our Lord's Word teaches us the cheering doctrine that the passing away of a believer in Jesus is a blessed going home to the Father, to His house with its many mansions.

Nor, according to these words, is death a sleep of oblivion and forgetfulness, as some would teach us, nor a migration of the soul through numerous changes and varying states, as heathen of old speculated, speculation which modern errorists have revived and redressed.

These words, as plainly and clearly as language can express it, tell us that the soul of a child of God is safe in the care and in the keeping of the heavenly Father's almighty and loving hands, where it awaits the resurrection day, when its body will be raised in a glorified state and will be reunited with it.

Oh, can we ever thank God sufficiently for the wonderful instruction, the light and cheer and hope that Good Friday gives us in respect to that final experience, that death is but the gateway, the vestibule, that leads us to a brighter abode?

Moreover, let us not fail to note, continuing our meditation on this last word from the cross, the precious example Jesus gives us as to how we should meet death.

That we must meet it; from that there is absolutely no exception and no escape. Some of us are still in the prime of life, others even in the first fresh bloom of youth. But as the hymnist wrote, "*swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,*"⁷ and soon for each of us life's curfew will toll the knell of a parting day.

And when death's bony hand is heard knocking at our door, it will be no child's play. Very rightly death has been called the King of Terrors. It entered the world as a curse; and since we are all sinners, it presses its claims against us.

Aside from the physical pain and exhaustion, aside from the natural shrinking from the dread and gruesome ordeal which makes this body the victim of decomposition and the food of worms; aside from the severing of tender cords of affection from loved ones left behind, that which makes death so dreadful and momentous is that man's soul is ushered before the tribunal of a holy and righteous Judge.

In view of that, how may we depart in calmness and hope, walk through the dark valley that leads to those scenes? The answer: *If like Jesus Christ we can commit our spirit into the hands of our heavenly Father.*

And when can we do that? We note from that last word that Jesus met death with God's Word on His lips. It was taken from Psalm 31:5 where David said, ⁵ ***Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.*** Jesus omitted the latter part of David's words, for He did not need to be redeemed. He Himself was the sinless Redeemer.

But it shows that, as through His entire life that Word had been His constant companion and source of strength and comfort, so now also in the hour of death.

What an example for our instruction and imitation! How it teaches us to use our Bible most diligently, to meditate upon, and constantly live, in that Word!

The child of God who by daily and devout use of God's Word has become intimately acquainted with it and lives in its spirit will have in that trying hour of death the power to sustain and keep him.

Note, too, that Jesus died with a prayer upon His lips. As His entire life was a most intimate, constant communion with God, so in His death. And how many of God's saints have pillowed their heads in peace upon that very prayer our Lord spoke!

When John Huss was led to execution, on his head a paper cap, scrawled over with pictures of devils, to whom his soul had been consigned by his enemies, he again and again cried, *"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,"* and so continued till the smoke of the funeral pile choked his voice.

As Martin Luther lay on his death-bed, his friend Dr. Jonas asked him: *"Reverend Father, do you die with a firm conviction of the faith you have taught."* Luther, in a distinct voice, replied: *"Yes,"* and soon after, repeating these words of the Lord three times, he breathed his last.

Likewise Polycarp, Charles the Great, Jerome of Prague, Melancthon, and many others. May we meet death in this way when it comes! Indelibly may these words of this today's meditation be inscribed upon our minds and hearts! The hymnist wrote, *"Who dieth thus, dies well."*⁸

Our text concludes with the words, *Having said this, He breathed His last.* That brings us to our final Good Friday thought.

Why did Jesus give up His Spirit? Jesus who at the grave of Lazarus, at the coffin of the young man of Nain, at the death-couch of the daughter of Jairus, manifested that He was Lord of death, who never committed a single sin, why is it that the wages of sin, which is death, should have been meted out to Him?

Jesus died, as we pointed out, voluntarily. For what? To give us an example of a heroic departure from this world? Merely to confirm His doctrine? Certainly not!

As Good Friday Christians you know why.

We repeat it as we look in our last Passion meditation up to that cross, with that divine head now sunk low in death upon His bosom: “⁵*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*”⁹

And “*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*”¹⁰

And “[God] *made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.*”¹¹

That death is our life. That departure is our salvation, our hope, our peace, in time and eternity.

With gratitude, and with devoted love, may we say:¹² —

Thanks from my heart I offer,
O Jesus, dearest friend,
For all that Thou didst suffer,
Thy pity without end.
O grant that I may ever
To Thy truth faithful be;
When soul and body sever
May I be found in Thee. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 15:44

² John 10:17–18

³ Luke 2:49

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- ⁴ John 14:2
 - ⁵ Mark 14:36
 - ⁶ John 4:34
 - ⁷ Hymn 543
 - ⁸ Hymn 52 v 8
 - ⁹ Isaiah 53:5
 - ¹⁰ John 1:29
 - ¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - ¹² Hymn 52 v 6