

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Maundy Thursday, March 31, 1994, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

**LUKE 23:46 & PSALM 31:5**

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ When He had said this, He breathed His last.”

“Into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

**THE SEVENTH WORD FROM THE CROSS**

**The Word of Committal**

Generally, people die as they live. It was certainly like that with our Lord. I remember reading some years ago of a man who had started from nothing and, by dint of hard work and careful planning, had built up a very successful restaurant business. When at last he lay on his deathbed, his family gathered around to catch his last words, and in a whisper, he said this, “Slice the ham thin.” Now, there was nothing inherently wicked about such a final word; it simply revealed the consuming passion of his life and what he lived for — to make money.

Dr. Edwin McNeill Poteat, the famous Methodist preacher of forty years ago, used to tell about the home-going of his saintly father, who was also a distinguished minister of the Gospel. When the old man realized that he was nearing his end, he called Edwin to his bedside and told him of his impending departure. Then he requested of his son that he conduct his funeral services. “I realize,” he said, “that I am giving you a rather difficult assignment. “But,” he added, “if you will conduct the services *this* time, I promise never to ask you to do it again!” I like that. So long had this old Christian gentleman lived in fellowship with his Lord that he could face even death with a twinkle in his eye. Thus, he died as he lived, in joyful confidence that our heavenly Father does all things well.

A pastor and his children stood by the bedside of their wife and mother, and as she was about to cross the river to enter that land that is fairer than day, one of them said, “Mother taught us how to live. Now she will teach us how to die.” An old Puritan once said that as a Christian he prayed that the Lord would enable him to die well. To an infinite degree Jesus taught us how to live well. And in the same manner He also taught us how to die well.

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

We have discovered that while He hung upon the Cross, seven times our Lord’s lips moved in speech. Seven is the number of completeness or perfection. At Calvary, then, as everywhere, the Savior displayed His perfections. Seven is also the number of rest after a work has been finished and completed. In six days God created the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested, contemplating with utter satisfaction what He had accomplished and calling it “very good.” So here with Christ: A work had been given Him to do, and that work was now successfully completed. Just as the sixth day brought the work of creation to completion, so the sixth utterance of the Savior was “It is finished.” And just as the seventh day

was the day of rest and satisfaction, so the seventh word of our Savior brings Him to the place of rest—the Father’s hands— “Into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

For more than twelve hours Christ had been in the hands of His enemies. In Matthew 17:22-23 He forewarned His disciples when He said, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men; and they will kill Him... “And in the Garden of Gethsemane He said, “The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Matthew 26:45).

Our Lord could easily have avoided arrest. With the death ray of God’s judgment, He could have struck down those who came to capture Him. But this He did not do. The hour when He would make His final sacrifice was about to strike. He was to be the Lamb led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). And sinful men gave full vent to their hatred as they hounded Him to His death.

But now all that is over. Man has done his worst. The Cross has been endured; His appointed work finished. Voluntarily the Savior had delivered Himself into the hands of sinners, and now voluntarily He delivers His spirit into the hands of His Father. What a blessed contrast! Never again will He be in the hands of men. Never again will He be at the mercy of the wicked. Never again will He suffer shame. He commits Himself into His Father’s hands, and the Father will now take perfect care of Him. Indeed, three days later He will raise Him from the dead! And forty days after that, the Father will exalt Him far above all rule and authority (Ephesians 1:21). And now today He sits on His heavenly throne (Rev. 3:21) till His enemies be made a footstool for His feet (Acts 2:35 and Hebrews 1:13). For one day the tables will be turned. Christ will return; and to the ones who once said, “Away with Him! Crucify Him!” (John 19:15), He will then say, “Depart from Me... into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

As Jesus was dying He quoted from the Thirty-First Psalm: “Into Your hands I commit My spirit.” This was an evening hymn for family worship. And in every devout Jewish home, long before little children could ever read, they would be taught a bedtime prayer from this beautiful Psalm, even as we teach *our* children bedtime prayers —

“Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;  
If I should die before I wake,  
Take me to heaven for Jesus’ sake.”

Sometimes I get a catch in my throat when I think back to our children’s childhood days, and in vision see them kneeling at their bedside and praying:

“Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,  
Bless Thy little lamb tonight;  
Through the darkness be Thou near me,  
Keep me safe till morning light.”

“Into Your hands I commit My spirit.” All His life, from childhood on, Jesus knew this

verse, for He too had first heard these words as a little boy as His mother taught Him His evening prayers. Did He always use it as a prayer at night with which to close His eyes in sleep? Probably so. And now as He closes His eyes in death, the beautiful words are repeated for the last time.

But I would have you notice how the words of the Psalm read, and how, in our Lord's use of those words, we have an addition and an omission. The Psalm reads: "Into Your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, Oh Lord, the God of truth." You see, whereas the Psalmist had addressed God as "Lord, God of truth," Jesus called Him by the much more intimate title: "Father." Then the omission: "For You have redeemed me." Jesus did not say that, for the very good reason that He, the Sinless One, had no need of redemption. On the contrary, He was the One Who was dying as the Redeemer of His people!

I think that **the most beautiful thing about this seventh and last word from the Cross is that in it we see our Savior restored to perfect communion with His Father.** As at the beginning, so now at the end of those agonizing hours on the Cross, He addresses God as "Father." For a few awful hours that blessed fellowship had been broken as Jesus became sin for us, and the Father had to turn away, because He cannot dwell in the presence of sin. And so, from the Savior's lips was evoked that terrible cry: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" But now the struggle is over; He has paid the price of sin; He has borne the dreadful punishment; the darkness is past, and the victory has been won. His ravished body still hangs on the Cross, but His spirit is committed to the care of the One Who holds "the whole world in His hands." The Savior is once more in blessed communion with His Father.

"Father." How often was this word upon the Savior's lips. His first recorded utterance, spoken to Mary and Joseph in Luke 2:49, was: "Did you not know that I must be busy with My Father's affairs?" (Jerusalem Bible) In His Sermon on the Mount He speaks of the Father 17 times, while in His message to His disciples in the Upper Room on the evening before His Passion (John 14-16), the word "Father" is found no less than 45 times. In the following chapter (John 17), which contains what is known as Christ's great high priestly prayer, He speaks to and of the Father 6 times more. And now, the last time He speaks before breathing His last, He says again, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

And, brothers and sisters, how glorious it is to know that His Father is *our* Father if we have received Jesus as our personal Savior. How unspeakably precious that I can look up to the great and living God and say, "Father" — "*my* Father!" What comfort is contained in this title. What assurance it conveys! — to know that He loves me as He loves Christ Himself (John 17:23). And because He loves me, He cares for me and will supply all my needs (Philippians 4:19). He will see that no harm will ever destroy me, and He will cause all things to work together for my good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Notice, if you will, how the four Evangelists record the manner in which our Lord died. Mark and Luke (Mark 15:37 and Luke 23:46) simply state that "He breathed His last." The Greek verb used in each case simply means "to become out of breath," or "out of spirit," or to "expire." The NIV correctly renders the Greek by saying "He breathed His last." So, they record only that He died.

But the words employed by John and Matthew (John 19:30 and Matthew 27:50) imply much more. John in his account emphasizes the fact that Jesus “gave up” His spirit, and the Greek verb means to “hand over” or “deliver.” It means to deliver something that someone is to keep or take care of. Jesus used another form of this word when He told the Parable of the Talents — “For the Kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them” (Matthew 25:14). This man delivered his property to his servants so that they could take care of it.

John contrasts the action of Jesus with that of His enemies. They had “delivered” His body to the Roman soldiers to crucify Him. But now, the work of redemption completed, Jesus “delivers” His spirit back to the Father. Our Lord had used what His Father had supplied in order to redeem sinners, and now Jesus “hands over” that which He has accomplished, His atoning death upon the Cross, so that the Father might “keep” and “take care of” it and use it for the salvation of all those down the centuries who would believe in our Lord.

Now that all things have been accomplished, it is as if Jesus says to His spirit: “I permit you to depart; you may go now.” That is the force of Matthew’s words — “He gave up His spirit.” He died as a King. He was in complete control to the very end.

You see, Jesus’ death and resurrection were not subject to the will of man. He said Himself, “No one takes My life from Me; I lay it down of My own accord” (John 10:18). You remember how Pilate said to Him, “Don’t You realize that I have power either to free You, or to crucify You?” But Jesus answered, “You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:10-11). The most kingly figure in Pilate’s Judgment Hall, and on the hill of Calvary, was Jesus. His enemies thought they had Him at their mercy, when in reality, He had them at His mercy. So, when His mission to earth was fully accomplished, Matthew says that He simply “dismissed” His spirit.

When Jesus committed His spirit into His Father’s hands, it meant that He had fully accomplished what He came to earth to do. All that needed to be done had *been* done by the only One Who could do it. His spirit, dismissed from His dead body, represents the price that He had paid to redeem sinners. In His word of committal, therefore, the Son is saying to the Father, “I have finished the work You gave me to do. My mission is accomplished, and I am placing the work I have completed back into Your hands. From henceforth the Holy Spirit will convict people of their sin and lead them to put their trust in Me and in My finished work for them on the Cross.” Did you ever notice that Christ first paid the price of our redemption, and *then* He died. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” You see, with the sinner it is death first and the judgment. But with our Savior, the order was reversed. He endured the judgment of God against our sins, and then He died.

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

“Commit” means “to deposit with another for safekeeping.” It is a banking term. Jesus “deposited” His spirit in His Father’s hands. The noun derived from the verb was the word used to make a bank deposit. The figure of speech is that of depositing one’s treasure in a bank for safekeeping. Therefore, when Jesus “committed” His spirit to God, it was for the purpose that the

Father would keep it safe until the Resurrection.

And that is why “neither death nor life” (Romans 8:38) need have any fear for the Christian. As Paul faced martyrdom at Rome, he did so with courage and godly assurance. Writing to his young protegee Timothy, he said, “For I know the One in Whom I have placed my trust and am convinced that He is able to guard that which I have placed on deposit with Him until the day of His return” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Isaac Watts wrote a beautiful paraphrase on this verse, which we will sing in a few moments —

“I know that safe with Him remains,  
Protected by His power,  
What I’ve committed to His trust  
Till the decisive hour.

Then will He own His servant’s name  
Before His Father’s face,  
And in the new Jerusalem  
Appoint my soul a place.”

Here is a message of vital importance to every born-again believer. Suppose you deposit \$100,000 in a savings account in a reputable bank. To begin with, it is fully insured by the F.D.I.C. You cannot possibly lose it. It is lodged there for safekeeping until the day when you decide to withdraw it. That bank is a symbol of economic stability and security for the whole community. Wouldn’t it be the height of foolishness for you to place your \$100,000 in the bank and then pace back and forth in front of the bank’s vault, guarding it, armed only with a sling shot? The business of guarding it belongs to the banker. You have trusted him, and your money is as safe as his character is sure.

In like manner, when we place our soul on deposit with God, it is there for safekeeping until that day when we shall appear before Him. Although you should live an upright moral life, in keeping with your profession, it should not be for the purpose of keeping your soul safe. It is not safe because of your trustworthiness, but because of His. He is completely able to guard what you have placed on deposit with Him. Did not our Lord Himself say, concerning those who believe in Him, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).

It does not matter what happens to the body of the Christian whose trust has been placed in Christ for salvation. Man may kill the body, but he cannot harm the soul. Some arsonist may burn down my house, but that will not destroy my bank deposit. So it is with our earthly “house.” The Word of God assures us that “if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

“How strange this fear of death is!” George MacDonald once exclaimed to a friend; “Yet we are never frightened by a sunset!” As with Jesus, so with ourselves and all believers down

through the centuries, death will be a glorious sunset to be followed by the dawning of a more glorious day in that land of light and love where Jesus awaits us, and where eyes are never wet with the tears of separation.

So, as our blessed Lord entrusted His spirit to the Father, so let us commit and entrust our souls to Him. Then, whether we live or die, we shall be forever with the Lord.

**AMEN.**