

Famous Last Words: Into Your Hands

Luke 23:44-49

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

I prayed it just about every night growing up.

“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”

That prayer has taken a lot of heat down through the years. *“Why would you leave a child thinking that he/she might die through the night?”* I can honestly say that the thought of impending death never crossed my mind.

That prayer has since been revised to spin it a bit more positively.

“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Guard me Jesus through the night, and wake me with the morning light.”

I have always been thankful that my parents and I closed out every day with prayer. I figure Jesus did much the same thing with his parents.

To that end they probably prayed something that very closely resembled Psalm 31. The Jews of Christ day were quick to recite that Psalm in a prayerful way at the close of every day.

Moms and dads would help their children to do the same. Clearly it was something Christ recited. You might say that Psalm 31 was, in a very real way, Christ’s, *“Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep.”*

Let’s hear a portion of that great Psalm, *“You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.”* (Psalm 31:3-5)

Without a doubt Jesus lived out that prayer every day of his life. It was his prayer as a young boy and it was his prayer upon his death.

Without fail, Jesus sought to place his life squarely in the hands of God.

Ever Faithful

As we have made our way through the Seven Last Words of Jesus, all of which were spoken from the cross, we have wondered at spots if Jesus had given up.

We even wondered if Jesus felt as though God had forsaken him.

Christ's third word is pretty telling. Quoting from Psalm 22 Jesus asks, "*My God, My God why have you forsaken me?*" Reading the Psalm in its entirety we know differently. Jesus still believed.

All through Jesus remained faithful in spite of the agony of the cross. Jesus remained faithful to his dying breath.

As we read from scripture, Jesus cried out in a loud voice right before his death, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*"

He was essentially praying Psalm 31, that prayer he had prayed his entire life at the conclusion of every day.

Now Jesus was praying that Psalm at the close of his life here on earth.

This last "*last word*" of Christ from the cross is one of total surrender. In life AND death, Jesus was fully given over to God and God's purposes for his life.

In the end, Jesus did not let the anguish of the cross interrupt the relationship he had with his Heavenly Father. Christ's every desire was to place himself in the hand of God. In that Jesus knew God's divine purposes would prevail.

His was not a cry of desperation, but a cry of triumph and sweet release. There was absolutely no question about Christ's faithfulness in God's provision for his life.

A Man Deeply Committed to God

When all is said and done, it must be said that Jesus was a man committed to God.

As Jesus lived so he died. Christ's life was not taken from him he had already given his life to God.

All through Jesus had lived trusting in God's care and provision. No matter what came his way, Jesus knew he could trust God, his Heavenly Father, with his life.

Jesus had an unfailing trust in the goodness of God. Because he lived each day completely surrendered to God, Jesus was well-assured God would take care of him.

That sort of surrender was the way he lived AND died.

"Father, into your hand I commit my spirit." That's the way it was for Jesus in life **AND** death.

Jesus knew that hand of God was always upon him. He was convinced of that and lived accordingly, even to his dying breath.

Challenged to Be Like Christ

So as we hear this last word today we are challenged to be like Christ.

At every point Jesus was perfectly communioned with God, deeply committed, and fully surrendered. It didn't really matter what he faced, Jesus rested in the hand of God.

There was nothing cautious or tentative about that commitment. Jesus was all in. There was no *"toe in the water,"* when it came to Christ's relationship with his Heavenly Father, and all to the glory of God.

I like the words of the old song, *"All I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to thee. To God be the glory for the great things he has done."*

You and I would do well to live with the same sort of surrender as did Jesus.

In the sometimes agonizing struggles of life, we would do well to place ourselves in the hand of God.

Trusting God to see us through will not only help us face whatever comes our way, but will help us emerge triumphant.

Undoubtedly, God strengthened Christ to endure the cross, while making it possible for him to emerge triumphant. We will be talking about that next week on Easter.

Jesus lived, died, AND rose again, all with his faith squarely intact.

What Are You Facing?

What are you facing? While it may not be as excruciating as the cross, it certainly might feel that way. And in the mix of that, are you putting your life in the hand of God?

Life is best lived hand in hand with God. It is best lived wholly surrendered to him. That's particularly true when the days are more than we can bear and the nights leave us anything but rested.

Desperation leaves us at a crossroads, of sorts. We will either give ourselves to the Lord or pull away and try to go it alone. The latter puts us in jeopardy of becoming defeated, if not embittered every time.

Putting ourselves in the hand of God gives us a fighting chance to overcome. Nothing or no one can help us overcome like our Heavenly Father.

Make no mistake about it surrender is not just for desperate times, but good times as well. As with Jesus surrender is for the whole of life.

While our desperation can oftentimes leave us with nowhere else to turn, good times can leave us turning to other things.

Instead of holding fast to God, we are more apt to stray. We figure we are more than capable to go it alone.

Again, we'd do well to do as Jesus did and give ourselves to the Lord, regardless of what we face.

Let Go and Let God Poster

It sounds almost clichéd, "*Let go and let God.*"

We've all repeated it. We have even tried to live it out.

Letting go helps us to step away from our striving and puts us to turning whatever it is over to God. After all, God is infinitely more powerful, infinitely more capable than we could ever be.

There is nothing like being in the hand of God. When I put myself in God's hands I can't tell you how much more freeing life is. How much more assured I am. How much more peaceful I am.

Letting God do his thing in my life puts me at the very place he wants me to be.

I am confident he wants the very same thing for you.

A Lot of Handholding

We did a lot of hand holding over Spring Break. We were blessed to be with all four of our grandchildren. We held hands on the beach, on long walks, and while walking across the street.

I noticed the older kids were open to taking our hands—well sometimes. Of course, we were insistent while walking across the street.

Young Margaret, on the other hand, who is just 15 months old, would take our hand and hold it all day long, if given the chance.

Young Margaret is quite content to live in the love and security of putting her hand in ours.

The older kids are a lot like us. They are apt to go their own way, even to the point of crossing the street at an inopportune time.

A faith that puts us squarely in the care of Almighty God is always best. Taking life into our own hands is risky business.

What's Your Prayer?

What's your prayer at the end of the day? What sort of prayer are you praying as the day begins? What are you praying as you move through the day?

Do those prayers go something like the prayer Jesus prayed from Psalm 31 or do you find yourself pre-occupied with other things?

How you answer, better yet, how you pray in this regard, goes a long way toward how you're able to meet the challenges of life.

"Father, into your hand I commit my spirit" should be our prayer as well.