

Luke 23:44-49 (1984 NIV)
Jesus' Last Saying, Our Lasting Reassurance

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour,
 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.
 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.
 47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."
 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.
 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Introduction

In our text today, Jesus' last words with His last breath in v. 46—"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"—give us a lasting reassurance.

His last saying on the Cross reassures us that ...

I. God is near—we are to sense intimacy with Him, not to be intimidated by circumstances.

If you look at Luke 23:47-49, you get a picture of the people who were there when Jesus died. In v. 47, we read that the centurion was there. He was probably the one overseeing the whole crucifixion. Though he finally acknowledged that Jesus was a "righteous man", he could not undo anything—Jesus had died on the Cross.

Next, we see the crowd of people gathered at the execution site in v. 48. Perhaps, many were curious about this man who was charged for falsely claiming to be "king of the Jews". Though they finally "beat their breasts" at seeing the great agony of Jesus, they could not undo anything—Jesus had died on the Cross.

But what happened to the friends and followers of Jesus at this time? Verse 49 says that "all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things".

Indeed, the ones who were nearest to Jesus when He breathed His last were not those who had known and followed Him. Rather, they were those who were His executioners and those who were curious onlookers.

Those who were supposedly His friends and followers were a distance away. Perhaps, they feared for their lives. Perhaps, they were greatly disappointed

that Jesus seemed so helpless in defending Himself, much less to fight for them as their expected Messiah. The Lord died on the Cross with friends and followers keeping a distance away from Him. What a sad picture of being abandoned at one's darkest moments.

Even nature seemed to share in this grief of abandonment. In v. 44, we are told that the land was darkened from the 6th to the 9th hours for the sun stopped shining. In today's time, it means there is no sunlight from 12.00 noon to 3.00 pm. What was the meaning of this? I believe God was clothing the day with the colour of grief (i.e. black) at a time when the day was supposed to be at its brightest and hottest.

And v. 45 adds that the curtain of the temple (the one that separated the Holy of Holies from the outside) was torn in two. The Holy of Holies was that place in the temple where only the High Priest could enter once a year on the Day of Atonement to pray and sacrifice on behalf of the people before God's presence. Hence, the tearing of the curtain here is often taken to mean that the death of Jesus Christ has granted us direct access to God's presence because Jesus Christ, our High Priest, had offered Himself as the atonement sacrifice on our behalf once and for all. But if the darkness at that time was an indication of grief, then the tearing of the temple's curtain might signify grief as well. After all, the Jews would tear their garments in their times of grief and mourning.

Indeed, the pain and suffering of Christ on the Cross was real and great. It was no easy way to die. God the Father sent the Son through extreme agony to die for sinful mankind. But that doesn't mean that the Father was unfeeling and indifferent to the suffering of His Son on the Cross. In fact, the great darkness and the tearing of the temple's curtain were His ways of showing His grief over the Son's suffering and death on the Cross. When the Son went through His darkest moments, God the Father was not unfeeling and uncaring towards Him. He shared the pain of the Son by grieving at the suffering He had to go through for sinful humanity.

With His last breath, Jesus cried to God and called Him "Father" in v. 46. The term "Father" is the equivalent of the Aramaic word "Abba". It is a term of intimacy, not distance. It is akin to what a young child would call his father—"daddy". Hence, when Jesus died on the Cross calling God "Father" or "Abba" or "Daddy", it implies that God was close to Him and intimate with Him at His death. While people might have distanced and dissociated themselves from Jesus at His last breath, God was near to Him. Jesus' last cry of "Father" on the Cross signifies that He did not die as one far away from God, but as one close to God. The Son sensed the Father's nearness. And the Father grieved at the Son's suffering on the Cross.

Someone once asked me, "You have answered the call of God to full-time Christian ministry. Have you ever backslidden at any phase in your Christian life?" What do you think my answer was?

The answer was, “Of course!” In fact, just one year after my conversion, I was strayed away. I felt uneasy with God, Bible, prayer, and church. But then, at a time when my whole being of mind, body, and spirit was so far away from God, my father had a stroke. He went into a coma. I found myself turning to God in prayer again. My father died without regaining consciousness.

My last words to him were, “Pa, if you can hear me and want to believe in Jesus Christ, you can say this to Him in your heart, ‘Jesus, I want you to forgive me. I now believe in you as my personal Lord and Saviour, and ask you to come into my life.’”

I wasn’t sure if my father heard these words, and if he did, whether he understood and acted on them. But these were my last words to him before I left the ICU and never saw him alive again.

At the passing away of my father, I decided I wanted to return to God and to arrange for a Christian funeral. So I asked one of my Christian friends if she could ask her pastor to help. Her pastor came and we spoke. He asked, “Is your father a Christian?”

“I have not heard him professed faith in Jesus Christ when he was alive,” I replied.

“Why then do you want a Christian funeral?” the pastor asked again.

“Because I am a Christian,” I answered.

The pastor queried, “Why then have you not asked your church pastor to help?”

“I was in church for only about a year and have not been back since. I don’t think the pastor there remembers who I am. But now, I want to return to God and His church,” I said with much regret.

The pastor paused and then said, “Praise the Lord. Yes, I am willing to help. But I cannot comfort you or your loved ones by saying that your father is a child of God and now saved in heaven. What I can do is to tell people that you are a child of God, and they too can become children of God by believing in Jesus Christ. Is that okay with you?”

I agreed. And so he came the night after for a wake service and also on the day of cremation. At the wake service, he came not alone but with the church choir as well—all dressed up in white robes! I was indeed touched by God’s love through these people.

Through my bereavement, I sensed the Lord’s provision and presence very powerfully—His love and comfort was so real. In fact, in the midst

of my loss and grief, I sensed joy because it seemed that God was saying to me, “Welcome back—this is where you belong.”

It was as if I was laying down two stones. One is a tombstone saying, “Dead to Straying.” The other is a milestone saying, “A Fresh Journey with God.” Indeed, this was one of the major turning points in my faith life!

Besides confessing to you that I was once a backslidden Christian, I have something more to tell you. It is this—at a time when my whole being of mind, body, and spirit had strayed so far away from God, I discovered that God was still near to me. Indeed, God is still near even in our wayward or worst times.

We may feel alone, forsaken, and forgotten. But we are not. In our difficult times, God picks us up and holds us close.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” This last saying of Jesus reassures us that God is near to us even in our lowest times, just as He was with Jesus on the Cross. In such times, do not despair of hope or be disappointed with God. Rather, draw close to God and call Him “Father”. He desires intimacy with you and not distance from you. He feels your pain and grieves with you. Share your heart out with Him in your fear, anger, confusion, disappointment, and anxiety. Seek to see and hear what God is doing and speaking in your situation. Don’t close yourself up on Him. This time may be your season to draw close and be near to the Father. Come to Him.

God is near us even in our darkest moments. This promise is for us today. And with this promise comes this challenge ...

II. God is trustworthy—we are to release into His hands, not retreat into our fears.

Jesus said in v. 46, “... into your hands I commit my spirit.” The word “commit” signifies that Jesus did not have His life taken away by mistake or by force or by accident. Rather, He handed His life (His earthly existence) over to the Father. In handing His earthly existence to the Father, Jesus had actually entrusted Himself unto the Father. At a time when He had to agonize so much alone, and at a time when people near or far seemingly would not stand with Him, Jesus chose to trust in God, and release Himself into the Father’s hands. Indeed, Jesus died not because He was forced by men, but He was faithful to God right to the end.

Of His own free will, Jesus delivered Himself into the hands of His enemies. And for 12 hours, He suffered in their hands. They gave full expression of their hostility against Him by torturing Him. Eventually, they crucified Him.

Indeed, Jesus suffered greatly when He volunteered Himself into the hands of sinners. But Jesus did not stop there. Just before He breathed His last, He

committed Himself into God's hands. He committed Himself out of the hands of sinners, and into the hands of God.

What are you going through today? Whose hands do you entrust yourselves into? What does it mean when we say that God is trustworthy today? It doesn't mean that we will not suffer pain or loss or death. But it does mean that we entrust ourselves and our circumstances into God's hands. We release ourselves and our circumstances into God's hands, and retreat no more into our fears. It means time to take action and to move forward. No more stagnating and no more backtracking. In God's hands and with His hands holding us, we look ahead and move on.

Are doubts holding you back? Are fears intimidating you? Are painful memories or experiences paralyzing you? God is trustworthy and in control. Release and rest in His hands—that's the call of challenge to you today.

Jesus committed the most precious part of Himself to the Father. He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus knew that when He had breathed His last, it would not be the end of Him. Rather, He would be with the Father because He had committed His spirit to the Father.

All of you here have loved ones and good friends. Where would they be when they leave this world? Into the grave, or into nothingness, or into the dark unknown, or into the hands of God?

God may be using you to point them to Jesus Christ so that they too may believe in Him one day, and say these words when their time comes, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." This is the season for doing this. No need to wait till our loved ones and good friends are sick, troubled, or old. This spiritual security is not just for people who are sick, dying, or aged. So, share Jesus Christ in words and works with others even when they are still young and in the pink of health.

The most precious thing belonging to each of us is our spirit. It is more precious than our homes, our businesses, our careers, our bank accounts, our cars, and all our other earthly possessions. We want our earthly possessions to be well taken care of by committing them into trustworthy hands. More importantly, we want that eternal part of us—our spirit—to be safe and secure by committing it into trustworthy hands—i.e. the hands of God.

Conclusion

Just before He breathed His last on the Cross, Jesus Christ cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." This last saying of Jesus has given us a lasting reassurance.

- We are reassured that God is near—so seek to sense intimacy with Him, not to be intimidated by circumstances.

- We are also reassured that God is trustworthy—so seek to release into His hands, not retreat into our fears.

Indeed, Jesus Christ defeated death in dying. His final cry has ushered in our finest moment of spiritual victory and security. Praise the Lord!