

Series: The Seven Sayings of the Cross, Part 8

Title: “It Is Finished”

Text: Luke 22:44-46

In Jesus’ seventh saying from the cross, He said, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit” (Luke 23:46). His final words provide us with hope in life and death. They furnish us with truth that can prepare us for the best of times and the worst of times. It is critical that we understand their meaning. Believers must be well equipped with truth for living and dying. One has said, “However we may avoid the question of eternity amidst the noisy carnival of life, sooner or later the casket demands our attention. In all of human experience, there is no more important question: *do you know for certain what will happen to you after you die?*”¹ The cross gives us answers for such questions. By examining Jesus’ final words, we can discern several blessings believers have in life and death.

COMMUNION WITH THE CREATOR

In Jesus’ final saying from Calvary, He addressed the Lord with the title “Father.” His use of the term is interesting when one considers how Jesus addressed God in His other sayings. In his first saying, He said, “*Father*, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). In His fourth and middle saying, He said, “*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Notice Jesus used the more personal title “Father” in His first and last sayings. He implemented the more generic title “God” in His middle saying. The significance of this should not be lost on us. Jesus intentionally used the more-intimate name “Father” at both the beginning and end of His crucifixion. In addition, He intentionally used the more common title “God” while He was paying for sin. Why? When Jesus paid for sin, He experienced separation from God on our behalf. At the moment in which He cried out, “*“Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni,*” he was alienated from God, so it was not appropriate for Him to call God “Father.” But it was appropriate for Him to use the name “Father” before and after He had paid for sin.

These things have application for us. The title “Father” was used of the Lord on only fifteen occasions in the Old Testament. However, the term appeared in reference to God over one-hundred and fifty times in the gospels. Because of Jesus’ ministry on behalf of sin, men and women can have greater confidence in calling out to God as their Heavenly Father.

Jesus Himself gave straightforward instruction on this matter. He taught His disciples to use the title when praying, saying, “Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy” (Matthew 6:9). In addition, He flatly told the Twelve to regard God as their Father, saying, “Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Matthew 23:9).

Jesus’ teaching in Mathew 23:9 should not be taken too literally. He did not mean to imply that one cannot refer to his or her dad as “dad.” His intent was to warn against an unhealthy relationship between a disciple and a religious leader. One should

¹ Gurusy, J.M. Finding Certainty In Our Spiritual Experience. *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, February 2019. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 25.

not revere any teacher or rabbi as “Father,” since one should have ultimate allegiance to his or her Heavenly Father. The overall emphasis of Jesus’ teaching was on the loving nature of God. Our Creator is not a far-off, austere, and aloof being. He is eternally righteous and just, but He is loving and kind as well. He desires to relate to His people. Consequently, it is right for them to refer to Him as “Father.”

The term Jesus used on the cross was the Aramaic word *Abba*. The word was easy to say. In fact, it was often the first one a baby uttered. Even for modern ears, the phonetics of the word evoke thoughts of affection. The title represented strong feelings of familial fondness.

As used by Jesus on the cross, the title for “Father” demonstrated a sense of contentment and confidence before God.² From our own human experience, we know how the mere mention of the name “Father” exudes a sense of love and dependence. I can remember using the title on rare occasions as a child. When I did use it, my aim was normally to express a greater degree of regard for my dad. Sometimes, I used it when I had a particular need. Normal terms of address sometimes didn’t seem to express urgency, so I cried out, “Father!”

Jesus’ use of “Father” in His final words was significant. It gave evidence that He had fully and effectually paid for sin. He had indeed experienced dark, dire alienation from God, but He had emerged victorious. Because He was without sin, He was fully able to absorb sin’s wrath on behalf of humanity. The price having been paid, He was restored to His previous standing with the Heavenly Father. At peace with God, He was able to affectionately entrust His Spirit to God in death. One has said, “... on the cross, Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his father’s arms.”³

There is another application in Jesus’ use of the title “Father.” Think of the pain and misery Jesus had experienced. He had suffered cruel beatings, mockery, and punishment. Death was near. It was imminent. In a matter of seconds, He would breath His last breath. Yet, in all of these things, He had confidence to address God as “Father.” Our Lord demonstrated that believers can have courage in the face of suffering, knowing that their Heavenly Father cares for them. One has said:

What we have reference to particularly is the fact that communion with God may be enjoyed independently of place and circumstances. The Savior was on the Cross, surrounded by a taunting crowd, His body suffering intense agony; nevertheless, He was in fellowship with the Father! This is one of the sweetest truths brought out by our text. It is our privilege to enjoy communion with God at all times, irrespective of outward circumstances or conditions.⁴

FAITH IN THE FATHER

Jesus’ final saying was a fulfillment of prophecy. In Psalm 31:5, a well-known Messianic psalm, the psalmist said, “Into your hand I entrust my spirit; you have

² Pink, 127.

³ Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke*. (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), [CD-Rom].

⁴ Pink, 137.

redeemed me, Lord, God of truth” (Psalm 31:5). Through His citation of Psalm 31, Jesus made one last claim of divinity. He revealed that He was the Son of God. However, Jesus’ final words also exhibited His trust in the Lord. His words exhibited a sense of childlike dependency. In saying, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit,” He demonstrated His trust in God with His life and death.

According to rabbinical tradition, Psalm 31:5 was often prayed at nighttime prayers. Parents often recited the words as they tucked their children into bed, much in the same way as English speaking parents once led children to pray, “Now I lay me down to sleep....” Jewish mothers often prayed with their children at bedtime, saying, “Into your hand I entrust my spirit” (Psalm 31:5).

The Greek word for “entrust” in Luke 23:46 was one that was commonly implemented in reference to one committing something to another for safekeeping.⁵ It was a compound word that literally meant “to put near.”⁶ It was often used in reference to a valuable being entrusted to a responsible party.⁷ Paul used the term to speak of the way he entrusted Timothy with leadership in the church (1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:2). The meaning of the word from the cross is significant. In the midst of His suffering and death, Jesus trusted in the Lord. His faith was in His Heavenly Father.

For believers, Christ’s trust in the Father is something to be emulated. We know this is true because of things we find in the New Testament. From reading the book of Acts, it is clear that the early church was aware of Jesus’ final words. It is also clear that they saw within Jesus’ words an example to be followed. These things are seen through the account of the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54-60).

Stephen was one of the first deacons in the Christian church. He was well known for being a man of faith (Acts 6:5). Through Him, the Lord did mighty things (Acts 7:8). The man was a great witness for the Lord. In time, Jews from a synagogue in Jerusalem began to oppose him (Acts 7:9). They undoubtedly didn’t like the way he was leading many away from Judaism, so they concocted lies against him (Acts 6:11).

Eventually, Stephen was dragged before the Sanhedrin, the same council that had been complicit in condemning Jesus to death (Matthew 26:59). Hearing the ridicule and unjust lies were hurled against him, Steven stood up and gave a defense. His defense, however, wasn’t designed to justify himself. He aimed to vindicate the gospel message. In doing so, he provided a sweeping overview of God’s plan of redemption, starting with the story of Abraham (Acts 7:1-8) and continuing with stories concerning the Exodus (Acts 7:9-36), the wilderness wanderings (Acts 7:37-43), and the construction of the tabernacle (Acts 7:44-50). After summarizing God’s faithfulness to Israel, Stephen offered a stinging rebuke, saying, “You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your ancestors did, you do also” (Acts 7:51).

The people became enraged at Stephen’s sermon. They dragged him out from the presence of the Sanhedrin to stone him. As the stones pummeled his body,

⁵ Zodhiates, [CD-Rom].

⁶ Zodhiates, [CD-Rom].

⁷ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 171.

Stephen prayed. Acts 7:59 says, “While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’”

Did you notice the content of Stephen’s prayer? It was a near word-for-word recitation of Jesus’ prayer from the cross. The deacon had surely heard of Jesus’ final saying from Calvary. He regarded it as a model to be followed. Consequently, during the dark hour of death, he prayed the words of Jesus himself. He put His faith in the Heavenly Father.

These things reveal that the seventh saying of the cross has meaning for us. Like Stephen, we can follow in Stephen’s footsteps, committing ourselves to the Heavenly Father during dark moments of distress and despair. If the early church regarded Jesus’ faith in the Father as worth following, we should too. In fact, the New Testament uses the Greek word translated “entrust” from Luke 23:46 to encourage us in this regard. In 1 Peter 4:19, we read, “So then, let those who suffer according to God’s will *entrust* themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.”

Christians are called to trust their Heavenly Father through the various circumstances, crises, and challenges of life. Though pressure may beckon them to despair, they should make a habit of entrusting themselves to the Lord. At times this requires prayers for help. More than one believer has felt exasperation to the point that it was necessary to pray like the desperate father in Mark’s gospel — “I do believe! Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Regardless, the example of Jesus, the story of Stephen, and the instruction of Peter all reveal that faith is necessary for facing life’s demands. May we learn to trust our Lord more and more.

SUBMISSION TO THE SOVEREIGN GOD

Each gospel writer — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — provided a number of details regarding the crucifixion. Their accounts differed in some regards. No contradictions were made, but the authors shared from different perspectives. Some left out details that others highlighted. There is one detail, however, that each gospel mentions. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all emphasized the way in which Jesus willingly surrendered His life.

Each gospel writer highlighted Jesus’ voluntary subjection to the cross. Matthew did so in Matthew 27:50. He said, “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and *gave up* his spirit.” Mark said, “Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last” (Mark 15:37). Luke highlighted these realities by saying, “...he breathed his last” (Luke 23:46). Mention to breathing pointed to the act of dying. John described Jesus’ death by saying, “...bowing his head, *he gave up* his spirit” (John 19:30). In all of the passages mentioned above, Jesus was depicted as willingly laying down His life. Ultimately, His death was not at the hands of men. He died on His own terms. He gave Himself up voluntarily for the sins of humanity.

It is interesting to note that all four of the gospel writers drew attention to the way in which Jesus gave up His life. Great weight seems to be placed on the fact that Jesus retained control of His death. One has commented on the meaning of these things, saying, “Jesus’ death occurred because He willed it.”⁸ Another has said, “Even

⁸ Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), [CD-Rom].

in his death Jesus was in control. He was not killed. He did not die. Rather he voluntarily gave up his life to death. Jesus was Master even in his death.”⁹

Because of these things, Jesus’ death was different than any other death in human history. He willingly gave His life. He willed Himself to death, but His death was not a suicide. It was a grand surrender to the will of the Father so that the eternal plan of salvation might be accomplished. One has said, “He died by an act of His own volition! Who but a divine person could have done this?”¹⁰

There is great theological and practical truth found in all of this. Jesus’ submission to death proved that the Lord was in control of His program of redemption. The cross was not a knee-jerk response to Satan’s schemes. Christ was ordained to give Himself for sin before time began (Revelation 13:8).

In addition, Jesus’ mode of dying exhibited a submission to the will of the Father. Though He could have summoned a battalion of angels to secure His freedom (Matthew 26:53), He willingly fulfilled what the Lord had willed for Him. In John’s gospel, Jesus expressed His commitment to God’s will, saying, “This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (John 10:17-18).

Jesus dutifully submitted Himself to the sovereignty of God. His surrender was seen in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, ““My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). It was seen on the cross when He cried, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit” (Luke 23:46). The author of Hebrews commented on such things by depicting the Messiah as saying, “See, I have come to do your will” (Hebrews 10:9).

Luke’s narrative places emphasis on the reality of these things. He introduced Jesus’ final words by saying Jesus “...called out with a loud voice” (Luke 23:46). The original language of the text indicates Jesus shouted. Considering the nature of crucifixion, it is remarkable that our Lord was able to utter such a cry. Normally, victims of crucifixion died by suffocation. The hanging posture on the cross made it impossible for one to breath. After hours of fighting to stay upright, one eventually slumped, slouched, and succumbed to death.

In fighting for breath, a crucified individual normally wouldn’t have been able to shout. The scene was different with Jesus, moments before His death, He was able to let out a bellowing cry. All of this underscored the fact that He was in control of His death. The intensity of His cry also emphasized His hearty surrender to the sovereignty of God.

Jesus’ surrender is a model for us. In an age in which so much is made of personal dreams, life goals, and ambitious plans, may we look to the cross, remembering the way of the Master. Like Jesus, may we live abandoned to the will of our Heavenly Father. Scripture says, “Many plans are in a person’s heart, but the

⁹ Stein, Robert H. *Luke. Vol. 24. The New American Commentary.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), [CD-Rom].

¹⁰ Pink, 136.

Lord's decree will prevail" (Proverbs 19:21). Scripture also says, "...You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

ASSURANCE CONCERNING THE AFTERLIFE

Jesus' final saying from the cross teaches us much about the hereafter. As He stared death in the face, He had confidence concerning what would happen after He died. He knew the immaterial part of His being would be detached from the material part of His being. His spirit would separate from the dead shell of His body and travel into the presence of God. It is for this reason He cried, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Humankind is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). As a result, each man and woman has an immaterial part of their being that is made to relate to God. Many words are used in Scripture to speak of this part of the human constitution — soul, spirit, mind, heart, and more. Debates rage concerning whether or not there is a difference between such dimensions of human nature, but one thing is clear. There is a physical part of man and a non-physical part of man.

The non-physical part of the human constitution is what distinguishes humankind from the animal kingdom. It is also the means by which men and women relate to God. Jesus hinted at these realities when He spoke on the nature of worship by saying, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Paul showed the distinction between the physical body and the human spirit by saying, "...the body without the spirit is dead..." (James 2:26).

When it comes to Jesus, it is apparent He had a real physical body. Paul made this clear in his great Christological hymn found in his letter to the Philippians. Of Jesus, he said, "... he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death" (Philippians 2:7-8). In coming to Earth, Jesus embraced humanity through an event theologians call the incarnation.

While Jesus was on Earth, He had a physical nature and a spiritual nature as any human would; however, He remained fully God. He was one-hundred percent God and one-hundred percent man. Prior to the incarnation, Jesus appeared on Earth through something known as a Christophany — a pre-incarnate appearing of Jesus. An example of such an appearing can be seen in Joshua 5:13-15. Though Jesus appeared to men and women in such ways before His incarnation, He did not have a real, human body as He did with the incarnation.

Even in His post-resurrection appearances, Jesus had some form of a body (Luke 24:39). However, that body was radically different from the one He had during His physical life on Earth. This is seen through the way in which He mysteriously appeared in the presence of His disciples as they met, "...even though the doors were locked" (John 20:26). It seems Jesus' resurrected body was not totally constrained by physical limitations, but it could engage in physical activities like walking (Luke 24:15) and possibly even eating (John 21:12).

All of this teaches us that Jesus had a real physical body prior to the resurrection. Because of the incarnation, He was like us in that He had both an immaterial and material part of His nature. On the cross, the physical part of His

constitution began to die. Knowing that the end was near, and being ready to offer His life for others, Jesus cried out, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

In crying out in such a way, Jesus exhibited a confidence concerning what would happen after His death. He knew His soul would be safe in the arms of God. Though His material nature would perish, His spiritual nature would live on. The death of His physical body would not be His end.

Controversy swirls concerning exactly what happened between Jesus’ death and resurrection. Some envision Him descending to the recesses of hell to wrest a the keys of death from Satan. Peter seems to indicate that Jesus’ soul travelled to some other dimension to make a gospel proclamation to some sort of spirit beings (1 Peter 3:18-19). Such discussions are beyond the scope of this study. For now, it is simply important to note that Jesus had confidence His soul would be safe in the arms of the Father after death.

Earlier at the cross, Jesus had promised the repentant insurrectionist, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The moment the crucified criminal died his soul would be transported into the presence of God. Jesus wanted the penitent thief to be confident of such realities. In praying, “Into your hands I entrust my spirit,” Jesus revealed that He had the same confidence for Himself. He knew His physical death would not keep Him from God. At the moment of death, His spirit would be secure.

All of these things can give us hope and confidence in life. Scripture teaches us that our souls go to God when our physical bodies die. Solomon said, “...the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Paul was well aware of such truth. That’s why he said, “...I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better—but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake” (Philippians 1:23-24).

To have assurance in the face of death, we must develop a confidence in these realities. Whether living or dying, our hope is perpetually in the finished work of Christ. One has beautifully said:

When you eventually die, and each of us will, death for you will not be a horror but the beginning of a beautiful transformation. When you die, your soul will be free of sickness, sorrow and pain. You will dwell in indescribable bliss in the nearer, unclouded presence of your Saviour. Best of all, you will be free of sin and temptation and guilt and pain of body, soul, and mind, and never again be sad or afraid. Truly, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of any man what God has prepared for those who love him.¹¹

¹¹ Fox, Arthur. *The Fear of Death Overcome: Encouragement from John Flavel. The Banner of Truth Magazine, June 2021.* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2021), 19.