

## ***Father, Into Your Hands... • Luke 23:46***

Arthur Goode died in a Florida electric chair crying. Two millennia ago Jesus Christ died on a Roman cross praying. Inevitably some day we too shall face death and the question is what will you do. There is an old axiom that claims that as one lives so one dies. That the prediction of the way we shall die is to be found in the analysis of the way that we have lived all of life.

Look with me at Luke 23:46, and as you look at the final words of Jesus from Calvary's cross, listen. Listen as he speaks for the last time. Luke records that "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last."

As one lives so one dies. Jesus Christ lived in communion with God, and Jesus Christ died in communion with God. It was Jesus who taught us to say and taught us to pray "Father."

You can page through all of the books of the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi and never once will you ever find there a prayer that begins with the word 'Father.' For in the Old Testament, God was known by many different names and in many different ways, but never was he known as 'Father' until Jesus Christ so introduced us to him.

That very special communion of relationship which Jesus had with God the Father at the time of his death also truly marked all of his life. Jesus was continually in prayer with God his Father. So the New Testament tells us that Jesus arose early in the morning, even before daybreak, so that he could pray. And the New Testament tells us that it was Jesus who stayed up long after all of his disciples and friends had gone to bed so that he could spend, on occasion, the entire night in the communion of prayer with his Father. It was Jesus who

prayed to his Father for wisdom when important decisions had to be made like the selection of his disciples. It was Jesus who prayed to his Father before he broke the bread that he was about to eat. It was Jesus who prayed to God the Father in the anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion. So that all through his life Jesus lived in continual communion with the Father.

This teaches us a marvelous lesson. That whether it was the good times or the bad times, whether it was victory or defeat, whether it was agony or ecstasy, whether it was pleasure or pain, he was continually in that communion of relationship to the Father. Jesus gave to us the marvelous good news that our communion with God the Father is not dependent upon the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Often we think it's that way. Often we are anxious to describe our spiritual ups and downs in terms of the ups and downs of life's circumstances. But it need not be that way. The truth of it is that we can have that very special relationship with God the Father everyday. Every

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Whether it is the moment of birth or the moment of death. Whether it is the day of marriage or the night of divorce. Whether it is the first day on a job or the day

of being fired from a job. Whether the newspaper has that day the brightest of news or the bleakest of news, our communion with God is not dependent upon that ebb and flow of circumstances. No matter what the circumstances, we, too, can have that communion with God and call him Father.

How then shall we die? Well, I suspect that for each of us we shall die as we have lived. And if we have lived daily, monthly, yearly, - all of life - with that kind of communion with

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the Father, then, like Jesus, we can swing open death's door and look to God and say, "Father." As one lives, so one dies.

Jesus Christ not only lived in communion with God but also in commitment to God. And Jesus died in commitment to God.

Giving something important into the hands of another person, something really important, is an act of commitment. But more than that, it's an act of faith. It takes faith to walk into a bank or a savings and loan association and turn over your life savings to a teller. Perhaps someone that you have never even met before. It takes faith to commit your newborn baby into the hands of a medical worker for care, perhaps life and death care. It takes commitment and it takes faith to commit your body into the hands of a surgeon who will do as he or she may choose with that body while you are totally unconscious and unaware of what is being done.

But the greatest of faith is not the turning over of savings or even of child or of life, the greatest faith of all is to give your soul into someone else's hands. It's an awesome thought. If an error is made, it is obviously the worst and the greatest of errors that ever could be made. To entrust one's spirit, one's soul, one's life into someone else's hands to do with as he sees fit, that is the greatest trust, the greatest faith of all.

And yet, when Jesus stood at the edge of death, it seemed not to be difficult for him. It seemed to be as natural and normal as possibly could be for him to entrust his soul, his spirit, saying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

But you see, that is the way Jesus had always lived. Day by day he had continually given everything into the hands of God the Father. He had committed every minute, every hour, every week and month and year. Every decision he had committed to him. He'd committed to God the Father his finances to the point that Jesus lived day by day not even knowing where his bread would come from or where he

would put his head at night. He committed his family, a family that apparently had been entrusted to him through the death of his earthly father, Joseph. A family for which he was responsible. But he committed that also to God the Father.

Hunger, thirst, friendships, mission, employment. You name it, he had committed everything to God the Father. And he had demonstrated that God the Father had been invariably faithful. He had been completely trustworthy. So no matter whether the simplest things or the greatest of things, whatever Jesus had entrusted, committed, into the hands of the Father had always been cared for right. It is no wonder that Jesus, who so lived, so died.

Being a Christian is not just for dying, nor is being a Christian just for living. Being a Christian is not just for today, nor just for the dying day. Being a Christian is for everyday and for everything. There are some who discover that marvelous mystery, the marvelous mystery of committing absolutely everything to God. Their schedule, their jobs, their health, their children, their money, their cars, their houses, their plans, their disappointments, their opportunities, their lives, and even their deaths. And those who so live, with every detail of life committed to God, discover the trustworthiness of God and his absolute faithfulness. Then they - we - like Jesus, can walk up to death's door and, perhaps gingerly, push it ajar. But when it swings open, with all of its uncertainties and with all of its inevitability, then we, too, can say on the basis of the lives that we have lived, committed to him, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." As one lives, so one dies.

Perhaps you didn't know that these final words of Jesus as he spoke a seventh time from the cross come from Psalm 31:5. Perhaps you also don't know that the words of Psalm 31:5 which Jesus recited in his final statement from the cross were the words that ancient Jewish mothers used to teach their children to pray as the last thing that they spoke before they went

to sleep at night.

A modern American mother might teach her son or daughter to pray, “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” But an ancient Jewish child instead prayed, “Into thy hand I commit my spirit, O Lord, Faithful God.” It was a bedtime prayer. A prayer of confidence and a prayer of commitment. A prayer that, in Jesus’ name, I invite you to pray. Ask God to take into his hands your eternal destiny. Trust him to save your spirit, your soul, from sin through Jesus Christ. Pray, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

It’s a prayer, not only for eternal destiny, but it’s a prayer for everyday life. So that whatever the worry or burden which each one of us has, whether it’s simply an irritation or it’s the tragedy and difficulty of a lifetime. Whether it’s a decision that has to be made or a worry that has to be carried or a cross that has to be borne. Why not pray as little Jewish children prayed? Why not pray as Jesus Christ taught us to pray? Take whatever it is and say, “Father, into your hands I commit my everything.” Then, through Jesus Christ, we may live and die in communion with and commitment to God the Father.

Remind us, our Father, that these words are far more than the record of an ancient history. They are the living communication from the living Son of God, and there is an impact for them in our lives and for our eternity. And, specifically, we pray as Jesus prayed, calling you “Father” and asking that you will accept into your hands the commitment of our everything. The burdens which we bear and the sins which we have committed. No matter how minute, no matter how major. We say with Jesus, “Father, into your hands we commit our spirits, our souls, our all.” Amen.

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