
Jesus' Last Words

*"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.'
Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46).*

With the shouting of His last words, Jesus expressed His full surrender to the Father's will, His fulfillment of the assignment God had given Him, and an awareness of the rest He was about to enter after His great suffering. With this prayer, He gave His spirit permission to leave His body and enter into Paradise to abide until Sunday morning, the grand morning of His resurrection from the dead. A few minutes after this final utterance, He would keep the promise He had made to the penitent thief in Luke 23:43. A soldier would come and break the thief's legs; then the thief would breathe his last. His spirit would leave his body and join the spirit of Jesus in the place where righteous souls abide and rejoice in salvation until the end of earthly time.

As Jesus spoke His dying words from the cross, He quoted a brief sentence from Psalm 31:5. David may have written this psalm as he described his journey through a great and distressing trial. Jesus took one line of his words, lifted it to a higher plane, and adapted it to Himself as He announced that He was handing His spirit over to God. David said, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth." Jesus used only the first part of the couplet, changed the singular "hand" to "hands," and made the words His prayer.

His statement reflects a beautiful calmness. It contains a serenity that could only be characteristic of One who was completely conscious of His Father's care. He had gone through the storm of offering Himself for our sins and had

now come back into the fellowship of God. The darkness had passed, and the sunlight of God's presence was now shining.

Jesus had punctuated His six hours on the cross with two prayers, one at the beginning of the six-hour period and the other at the end of it. Each one began with "Father." Between these two addresses to God, Jesus suffered the wrath of hell and heaven. No mortal mind can comprehend what He endured during this time. Perhaps it would be no understatement to say that the severest pain He experienced was the awful separation from the Father's presence as He became sin for us. This crushing agony was defined by a quotation from a familiar psalm: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46; see Psalm 22:1). He used these words to give a backward glance at what He had been through. His quotation of the first verse of this psalm was used more as an announcement than a question.

Now His fellowship with God had been restored. The pain of His sufferings for our sins had come and gone. At last, with His body and strength spent, He released His spirit into His Father's hands.

His last utterance is also a message of confidence and faith. He knew His Father, and He knew where He was going. He was placing His spirit into His Father's hands. The Greek word used in Luke 23:46, *παρατίθημι* (*paratithemi*, "commit"), translates a Hebrew word that suggests "entrustment." It gives the idea of putting one's most precious possession in safekeeping.

Jesus had been in the hands of men—the

cruel, hard, murderous hands of those who had rejected Him. They had inflicted upon Him the wrath of hell. Peter said to the multitude on the Day of Pentecost, “. . . you nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23). The hands of men had done their worst, and now He would place His spirit in the hands of God.

God’s hands are gentle yet almighty; they are tender, yet they hold us more firmly than any other hands can. Jesus entrusted them to bear Him away to Paradise and to hold His spirit until His resurrection. God had promised safety to His people, saying, “I have . . . covered you with the shadow of My hand . . .” (Isaiah 51:16). We can only imagine the safety of residing “in the hollow of His hand” (Isaiah 40:12).

The hands of God still constitute, as they did then, absolutely the safest place possible. No wonder many believers over the years, following Jesus’ example, have uttered Jesus’ last words as their own.

In addition, His last words reflect His divine will and power. *He uttered a declaration of commitment.* Jesus was choosing to die. Having finished all that the Father had sent Him to do, having drunk the bitter cup of pain and sorrow, He yielded up His spirit.

He had imparted His peace to His disciples and His clothes to the soldiers who crucified Him. He was leaving the care of His mother to John and His body to Joseph of Arimathea; but He committed His spirit to God. These were the final earthly choices that He made.

Jesus placed His spirit, as a trust, in the hands of God. As He did so, we see His sovereign power and control. Read John 10:18. It was only by His free and active will that He yielded to the power of death. He is the Lord of both life and death; He holds both keys in His hands.

Matthew used a phrase that denotes death, but it also lends itself to the idea of Jesus’ freedom of choice. Matthew said, “And Jesus

cried out again with a loud voice, and *yielded up His spirit*” (Matthew 27:50; emphasis mine). The word ἀφίημι (*aphiemi*), meaning “to send away,” suggests that He dismissed His spirit as a king might dismiss a servant.

Regarding this final moment of Jesus’ life, Luke wrote, “Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46b). Mark used the same verb for “breathe” (ἐκπνέω, *ekpneo*) in writing, “And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last” (Mark 15:37; see v. 39). Luke’s phrasing focuses on the literal outgoing of Jesus’ spirit, suggesting that He voiced His prayer for God to receive His spirit and then exhaled His spirit with the last breath of His strength. John’s account emphasizes the fact that His death was a voluntary action rather than a fatal necessity. He wrote, “And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30b). He died when the last word of prayer expired on His lips; the sense here is that He discharged the breath from His body as He yielded Himself into the hands of God.

Some of our Lord’s last words are echoed in the death of Stephen (Acts 7:59). The Son of Man changed the words of the psalmist to fit His need, and Stephen adapted the words of the Son of Man to suit his situation. For Jesus, David’s appeal to the Lord, the “God of truth” (Psalm 31:5) became an address to the Father; for Stephen, that address to the Father became an appeal to Jesus. Stephen could not do what the Son of Man did; he could not breathe out his spirit as a matter of choice. However, he did what he could. As he was being crushed beneath a storm of stones, he asked the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit. Stephen was the first to recall Jesus’ words and keep that prayer on his lips as he faced death.

Eddie Cloer



“It remained for [Jesus] to will both when He would lay down His life and when He would take it again. He was fully conscious in that last great crisis, and He chose to commit Himself to the Father at the very moment at which He chose to die.”¹

¹Marcus L. Loane, *The Place Called Calvary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), 127.