

Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit

Introduction

The Text

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44–46)

- A. You might have noticed last time, we did look at this text, but I skipped over these final words of Jesus there in [v. 46](#), as I thought them worth more reflection than I had time for. So this morning, that really is going to be our sole focus.
- B. You may know that there are traditionally understood to be seven last sayings of Jesus spoken from the cross. And as far as we can tell, synthesizing the various gospel accounts, this is the seventh and final.
 - 1. In other words, this is the last thing Jesus says before he dies. And that's not insignificant. That should mark these words out as particularly important, and certainly worthy of a sermon in their own right. And so that is what we shall do. "[Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!](#)" ([v. 46](#)).
- C. We'll consider this by way of three headings: (1) David Says It; (2) Jesus Says It; and (3) So Can We Say It?

(1) David Says It

Bleeding Bible

- A. On this first point, we need to understand that Jesus, as he is so often prone to do, is simply quoting Scripture here. In particular he is reciting King David's prayer in [Ps. 31:5](#).
- B. But before I take us there, we should pause and let it strike us—this fact that Jesus, even in his darkest moments, even when we'd be grumbling and venting frustration and, for us, curse words would likely be coming out . . . for him, Scripture is there.
- C. I was reminded of Charles Spurgeon's words at this point: "Oh, that you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord—not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the words, or to recollect the poetical expressions, or the historic facts; but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, and, what is better still, your spirit is flavored with the

words of the Lord.” He goes on to give the example of John Bunyan in this and says if you read his works you’ll see the guy was a living Bible. You prick him anywhere and the Bible flows out.

- D. And what Spurgeon here says of Bunyan, well, of course, it could be said preeminently of Jesus Christ. You cut him and he bleeds Bible. That’s what is happening in our text here. They slap his face and Scripture comes out.

1. But I do wonder, could the same be said of you, of me?

Psalm 31:5

- A. Okay, now we are ready to consider these words in their original context, as they’re taken from [Ps. 31](#), as they’re found first on the lips of David before they’re taken up on the lips of our Savior.

1. And there are two things I’d want to consider briefly here: (1) The context of it; and (2) The meaning of it.

(1) The Context

- A. As far as the context is concerned, we need to understand that David, as he often would find himself, is in dire straits, he’s in a tough place, being hated on and hunted down.

1. So we see that these enemies of his are trying to put him “to shame” (v. 1).
2. They’re attempting to trap him as a man would an animal in a “net” (v. 4).
3. [Vv. 11-13](#) are particularly powerful, where he says: “¹¹ Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. ¹² I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. ¹³ For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.”
4. And then in [v. 22](#) we see it had gotten so bad that points he had even questioned God in it all: “I had said in my alarm, ‘I am cut off from your sight.’” “It seems like you have forsaken me.”

- B. But, nevertheless, in the midst of such trial and terror, David speaks: “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (v. 5).

(2) The Meaning

- A. So what’s the meaning of this statement here? Well, I see it as an expression of at least three things.

EXPRESSION #1: SURRENDER

- A. One of the ways we typically respond to hardship in our lives is to try to take matters into our own hands, right? We don’t say: “Into your hands I commit my spirit” . . . we say: “Into my hands I take the situation.”

- B. The way you can check into this for yourself is to look into your prayer life.

1. First consider whether you're praying at all. When I'm stressed, I often realize I've not stopped to pray, I've been too busy taking matters into my own hands, trying to figure it out, fix it, save myself, that sort of thing. So have you been praying at all?
2. But, secondly, even if you have, you need to consider how you've been praying.
 - a. You see David uses prayer here to put himself into God's hands.
 - b. But a lot of times, if we're honest, we use prayer as a way of trying to take, not just the situation in our own hands, but God in our own hands as well. What I mean is we try to shape him and pressure him and demand from him. We are not surrendered to him, we are trying to get him to surrender to us.
 - i. We are miles off from the spirit of the Lord's Prayer: "⁹ Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10).
 - (1) It's only in that spirit of surrender that we can then go on to ask for our daily bread and keep us from evil and things. We're not taking God into our hands at that point. We are surrendered to him.

EXPRESSION #2: TRUST

- A. Surrender could just mean "Fine you win, I give up, I raise the white flag, I'm done fighting." And if we stop there, our understanding would be incomplete. Because there is more than just raising a white flag. Armies do that even to their enemies when they have lost.
 1. But this is something positive. We let go, not because we are forced into it, but because we want to, because we trust the one we are surrendering to. He's not just powerful and stronger than us. He's good. That's the idea.
- B. That's why David says . . .
 1. Right before this: "³ [Y]ou are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge" (vv. 3–4).
 2. And right after it, similarly: "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God" (v. 5). "You're faithful. I trust you. That's what this means.

EXPRESSION #3: DESIRE

- A. With this last one, what I mean is: it's not as if David is saying, "Hey God I give you this hard situation, please fix it for me, I put these enemies in your hands, I put this financial struggle in your hands, I put this health issue in your hands, please take care of it, I trust you."
 1. No, he's saying more than that, much more. He's saying: "I put myself, my spirit into your hands."

- B. This is different than finding some financial adviser you trust, giving them access to your money to invest and things. You surrender your money to the adviser. You trust the adviser. But you don't desire him. You just want him to make your money grow and things.
- C. But David is saying: "I give you everything. I give you all of me. Because I just want you more than anything else."
 - 1. And this is why David comes out at the end of this Psalms with this exhortation: "Love the LORD, all you his saints!" (v. 23). It's not just surrender. It's not just trust. It's a love affair.
 - a. "Into your hand I commit my spirit" (v. 5)

(2) Jesus Says It

Following David's Example and Fulfilling David's Hope

- A. So David says it. And, then, some thousand years later, while hanging bloodied and lifeless on the cross, Jesus says it as well: "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46).
- B. Of course, we see the parallels at once, don't we?
 - 1. Jesus too is surrounded by enemies, he's entangled in the trap they've laid for him, beat up and shattered like a broken vessel.
 - 2. He too, at one point, cries out in alarm wondering why it seems God has forsaken him.
 - 3. But, even in the face of all that, Jesus, like David, commits his spirit to the Lord as an expression of surrender, trust, and desire.
- C. You see, by quoting from David here, Jesus is showing himself to be that long anticipated coming King promised by God to come along in the line of David, the Messiah, the Christ—the one who would someday sit down on David's throne and rule and reign, only not just for a few years, but forever.
 - 1. In other words, Jesus is not merely following David's example in these moments. He is fulfilling David's hope!

Where Was Jesus on Holy Saturday?

- A. But let me fill that out a bit more. There is a layer to this fulfillment I wanted to consider with you now. It's a bit complex, and mysterious, and debated, but it's nonetheless intriguing and I think, awe-inspiring and worship-invoking.
 - 1. It'll take me a few moments to really back into this, so bear with me.
- B. You see, until coming to this text here, I must confess I'd never really thought about where Jesus was after his death and prior to his resurrection. Where was he in between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday? Where was he on Holy Saturday?

1. When he breathed his last, we're told where his body goes in the verses that follow—they take it down and lay it in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (vv. 50-56).
2. But what about his soul, what about his spirit? That's what's brought into view here isn't it? "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (v. 46). "My spirit is going somewhere. I'm not just body, I am soul."
 - a. He is fully God but he is also fully man and as a full human being he has both body and soul. So what about that? Where did his human soul go? Where was he after he breathed his last and before he breathed again? And what was he doing? What do you think?

C. Well, it seems we have at least three options here . . .

Option #1: He's Suffering in Hell

A. Some people believe that Jesus hereafter descended into hellfire to suffer more.

1. If you've been a Christian for anytime at all, it is likely you've at one point or another been led through a recitation of the Apostles' Creed. And it went something like this: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, / creator of heaven and earth. / and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, / who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, / born of the Virgin Mary, / suffered under Pontius Pilate, / was crucified, died, and was buried; / he descended to hell. / On the third day he rose again . . ."

- a. So where was Jesus after he was crucified and dead? Well, his body was buried, but his soul "descended to hell" the creed says.

B. Now, understood properly (and even translated properly), the phrase doesn't have to be problematic, but some have taken it to mean that Jesus' sufferings carried on after the cross. Indeed, it would seem to have gotten worse.

C. Well, I think such a notion does damage to the clear meaning of Jesus' own words there in [John 19:30](#): "When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' [Gk. tetelestai] and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

1. What is finished? The offering for sin. The drinking of the cup of his Father's fury. The experience of wrath and hell. It is finished. He's paid it. He's completed it.

- a. This is the reason the curtain in the temple is torn in two at that very moment, as we saw last week. The work is done. The sacrifice has been made and man can dwell with God again through Christ.

D. You know, this glorious statement—"It is finished"—as far the seven sayings from the cross go, it seems to come in between the fourth and the seventh. And that is massively significant.

1. The fourth we discussed last week as it's recorded in Matthew and Mark's gospels, where Jesus screams out in agony: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).
 - a. And I mentioned that this is the only time we have recorded in the Scriptures where Jesus does not address God as Father. And I said it's because Jesus was bearing our sin in these moments, the relationship between him and the Father turned sour. God was pouring out his wrath. The Son was plunging into the pit of hell as he hung there on the cross.
 2. But then, as we see in John, he says it is finished. And then he proceeds to utter that final and seventh saying of ours. And I wonder if you noticed how it begins: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (v. 46).
 - a. Father? What changed between the fourth saying and the seventh? Well, I think the answer is clear. He finished the work. He drank that foaming cup down to the dregs.
- E. What this means quite profoundly is that, in those three hours when the sun went dark as Jesus hung on the cross, he was suffering in his body and soul the fire of a million hells. What would be an eternity for you and I and all the elect, was packaged into one moment in time, pressed to an inconceivable density, and poured out upon him.
1. He experienced and extinguished in those three hours the hellfire that for you and I would have gone on forever and ever.
 - a. We cannot fathom what the Son went through to save us. But we can know that, somehow, in the mystery of God's grace, after those three hours, it was finished. So he moves from "My God, why have you forsaken me?" to "Father, here's my spirit."
- F. Certainly, then, we know his soul doesn't descend to suffer more in hell. So where does he go?

Option #2: He's Resting in Heaven

- A. This next option is certainly possible and many men I appreciate hold to this view. They would say he goes to rest with his Father in heaven.
1. That's what our text says, right? "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (v. 46). So then he goes to God, right?
 - a. Certainly no one would argue this is where he is ultimately headed, and, to be sure, in one sense this is true regardless of where he goes next as the Father is with him and he with the Father.
 - b. But does it have to mean he immediately goes to heaven, I'm not so sure.
 2. And the same is true of the statement Jesus makes to the thief: "[T]oday you will be with me in paradise" (v. 43).

- a. This whole thing turns on what you think he's referring to when he says "paradise" and what he means by "today" (is it in the next 24 hours, before the clock strikes midnight, or something like this?). There are debates on all this.
- B. Now, this is certainly plausible, and it may even be where I end up on the matter after more research. I'm not totally settled.
- 1. But I simply wanted to hold out to you one other alternative, equally plausible I think, and powerful to consider . . .

Option #3: He's Trumpeting His Triumph in Sheol

- A. This third view reinterprets that phrase from the Apostles' Creed, I think rightly, to say that Jesus, after his death and before his resurrection descends "to the dead"—that is, to the place of the dead—to what in the Old Testament was referred to as Sheol.
- 1. This is different than the idea of him descending to suffer in hell as you'll see, and it provides an amazing window into our Savior's redemptive accomplishments.
- B. There are three questions we have to answer if we're really going to get at this: (1) What is Sheol?; (2) Why would we think Jesus went there?; and (3) What did he do when he got there?

QUESTION #1: WHAT IS SHEOL?

- A. On the first question, Sheol seems from the OT to be a place where all the dead would go—not just the wicked dead ([Ps. 31:17](#)), but the righteous dead as well (e.g. Jacob [[Gen. 37:35](#)] and Samuel [[1 Sam. 28:13-14](#)]). Their bodies would be buried, but their souls would depart to this realm referred to as "Sheol."
- B. And, from what we can tell, there seems to have been at least two compartments there.
- 1. This is really brought out in the parable Jesus tells about the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)). Both end up in Sheol it would seem, they're within shouting distance of the other, but they are at the same time separated.
 - a. The rich man, standing for the wicked and unbelieving dead, is in agony, he's suffering in some way for his sins.
 - b. But Lazarus, here standing for the righteous and faithful dead, is stowed away in a place of comfort and joy, he's in that place awkwardly referred to as Abraham's bosom or side. So Jesus pictures Abraham as being there as well.
 - i. This is the resting place for those in covenant with God, who died trusting in the his promises though they had not yet seen it all in full, because it was before the coming of Christ. They are in God's presence in some sense, even in Sheol (as [Ps. 139:8](#) seems to imply) but it is not yet the full experience of it. There's still some sense of waiting here.

QUESTION #2: WHY WOULD WE THINK JESUS WENT THERE?

- A. So why would we think that this is where Jesus is on Holy Saturday and things? Well, there's a number of texts, but let me give you a couple of the more significant ones . . .
- B. First, [Matt. 12:40](#), where Jesus says: "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."
1. Is that just a reference to being physically buried in a tomb?
 2. It sounds a bit more significant than that. Indeed many commentators think it is probably a reference to Sheol here. For Jonah himself likens the great fish to Sheol when he says: "[O]ut of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice" ([Jonah 2:2](#)).
 - a. And Jesus says: "That's where I'm going. Three days and three nights. The heart of the earth. Sheol."
- C. And beyond this we have the way the apostles quote and interpret [Ps. 16:10](#). Both Peter and Paul shout out to this, but I'll direct you to Peter's in particular in [Acts 2:25ff](#).
1. In [Ps. 16:10](#) David says to God: "[Y]ou will not abandon my soul to Hades [Heb. Sheol], or let your Holy One see corruption" (cf. [Acts 2:27](#)).
 2. And in [Acts 2](#) Peter quotes this and then goes on to interpret this for his fellow Jews saying: "Brothers, we know David couldn't be speaking of himself here. He died and was buried. We have his tomb. His body saw corruption and his spirit went to Sheol. So who was David talking about?
 - a. He was prophesying of Jesus, the coming king. He would die and though his body would be placed in a tomb it would not see corruption, and though his soul would descent to Sheol it would not be abandoned there. Soul would be united to body and He would rise again!"
 - i. So Jesus went to Sheol would seem to be the implication. He just didn't stay there (as all the others had up to this point)!!!

QUESTION #3: WHAT DID HE DO WHEN HE GOT THERE?

- A. And this leads us to that third question I mentioned. So what's he doing there? Why is he three days and nights in the heart of the earth? What's the point? What's he up to?
1. Well, it's as I said in passing before: he's trumpeting his triumph (as would seem to be indicated by texts like [1 Pet. 3:18-20](#)). He's not suffering in hell. He's announcing his victory.
 2. But even more, it would seem, he's liberating in full the faithful, righteous, waiting saints of old.

- B. I love how one scholar, Joe Rigney, puts it: “Following his death for sin . . . Jesus journeys to Hades, to the City of Death, and rips its gates off the hinges. He liberates Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, John the Baptist, and the rest of the Old Testament faithful, ransoming them from the power of Sheol (Pss. 49:15; 86:13; 89:48). They had waited there for so long, not having received what was promised, so that their spirits would be made perfect along with the saints of the new covenant (Heb. 11:39–40; 12:23).”
1. In support of this he references texts like [Ps. 49:15](#), where the psalmist says in hope: “[God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.](#)”
 2. And you may have caught his reference to [Heb. 11:39-40](#) at the end there where the author of Hebrews, after listing out so many of the Old Testament faithful says: “³⁹ [And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,](#)⁴⁰ [since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.](#)”
 - a. They died in faith, looking forward to the coming of Jesus and his redeeming work on the cross. They were held up and comforted in Sheol while waiting.
 - b. And then, at last, it happens. Jesus finishes the work. And thereafter he descends into Sheol, declares his victory, rips its gates off of their hinges, and leads them out from Abraham’s side to the Father’s lap.
- C. So Rigney goes on to say (and I love this): “[Now, in the church age, when the righteous die, they aren’t merely carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom; they depart to be with Christ, which is far better \(Phil. 1:23\).](#)” We don’t go to Sheol anymore. We go to glory!
1. You remember how Jesus comforts John in [Rev. 1:17-18](#): “¹⁷ [Fear not, I am the first and the last,](#)¹⁸ [and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.](#)” That’s what’s going on here. They’re breaking out!

David Was There!

- A. And you may have caught it if you were listening closely, but Rigney mentioned that a guy like David must have been there in Sheol at the time as well. He is, after all, one of the Old Covenant faithful, who would have been waiting for the fullness of the New Covenant to take effect in Jesus.
- B. And this is why I said, back in [Luke 23:46](#), Jesus isn’t merely following David’s example, he’s fulfilling David’s hope.
1. David committed his spirit to God’s hands, trusting God wouldn’t let him down, that he’d ultimately even ransom his soul from the power Sheol in the end.
 2. And Jesus, by quoting David’s own words, is hinting at the fact that this is precisely what he’s come to do.
 - a. With that last breath he releases his spirit, makes a beeline for Sheol, declares his pending victory, and then waits with them for his Father to be faithful to them all and rise him up from the grave, the firstfruits from the dead, the firstborn of many brethren!

(3) So Can We Say It?

In Our Living and Our Dying

- A. “[I]nto your hands I commit my spirit!” (v. 46). David says it. Jesus says it. So can we say it?
- B. You may have been wondering what all of this means for you and for me. While there are countless implications here, it at least means this: God will be faithful to you.
1. Neither David’s spirit nor Jesus’ spirit was committed to God’s hands in vain. And yours won’t be either.
 - a. So I wonder if you can say it, not just on your deathbed or something, but all the time. “[I]nto your hands I commit my spirit!” (v. 46). “I Surrender to you. I trust you. I desire you Lord above all else.”
- C. David and Jesus say this in the hardest of times. Think of the hardships you’ve been facing lately . . .
1. Maybe you’re dealing with the sting of betrayal. You thought she was your friend. And now there’s a knife in your back.
 - a. Are you taking matters into your own hands?
 - b. Or are you able to say it: “[I]nto your hands I commit my spirit!” (v. 46). “God, you’ll protect me and vindicate me in the end. I don’t have to give in to bitterness and self-defense that destroys my soul more than it destroys anyone else’s.”
 2. Maybe you’re struggling with your finances. You’re watching the bank account drain and dry up like a California reservoir.
 - a. And you’re worried. You’re tempted to take matters into your own hands. “I’ve got to make something happen. It’s on me. The whole family’s relying on it.”
 - b. And, of course, you want to provide, you want to work hard, you want to save, but there’s another bearing the brunt of that yoke. God’s with you. God’s got you. Can you say it? “[I]nto your hands I commit my spirit!” (v. 46). “You’ll be faithful to provide for me and my family in the end. It’s not on me. It’s on you. For your name’s sake, do it Lord!”
 3. Maybe you’re dealing with weight of guilt and shame and condemnation. You know what sin is. You know it’s wrong. But you did it again.
 - a. And you feel horrible. Am I even a Christian? What are you going to do? Are you going to take matters into your own hands? “I’ve got to clean myself up. I’ve got to get better. I’ve got to atone.”
 - b. Or are you able to say it: “[I]nto your hands I commit my spirit!” (v. 46). “You are the only one who can make atonement for my sin. You’re the only one who can wash me from the inside out and help me change little by little. You’ll be gracious

to me in Christ. You wouldn't condemn your only beloved Son for my sin to then turn around and condemn me for it as well. He took it. So I don't have to. Here's my soul, God."

4. Maybe you are facing death—natural or unnatural. Your time is up. You know it. This is where Stephen was in [Acts 7](#), stones being cast at him for his allegiance to Jesus.
 - a. As his skull's being crushed, he's not trying run or fight back.
 - b. No, he looks up and sees the Father in his splendor and the Son at his right hand. And he says it, just like David, just like Jesus: "[Lord Jesus, receive my spirit](#)" (v. 59). Stephen breathed his last, closed his eyes, and woke up in glory!
 - i. God doesn't fumble the pass. When you commit your spirit into his hands, he's got you!
- D. David said it. Jesus said it. Even Stephen said it. And you know what? You can too.