

**Foundations—From the Cross 7:
Into Your Hands
 Luke 23:44-46**

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....

This is going to take you back a ways. For some of us, it's a longer trip than for others.

I want you to try to remember the first prayer you learned to pray as a child? Do you remember what it was?

1) Maybe for some, it was the blessing: **"God is great, God is good; let us thank him for our food."**

2) For others, it might have been the bedtime prayer: **"Now I lay me down to sleep, pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, pray the Lord my soul to take."**

Many of us likely learned both prayers, but which one did you learn first? I guess it depended on whether your family put more emphasis on eating... or sleeping (dying?!?). It was "eating" at our house, but... I learned them both!

Think with me for a moment about that second prayer, the "pray the Lord my soul to keep" prayer. This simple children's prayer that so many of us learned really is not so different from the prayer Jesus prayed from the cross.

"If I should die before I wake, pray the Lord my soul to take," shows a similar concern, it says much the same thing as **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."**

This should come as no surprise—especially when we realize that these words of Jesus--His final words from the cross—were, in fact, a familiar children's prayer.

You'll find these same words--with exception of the word, "Father"--in the fifth verse of the 31st Psalm: "into your hands I commit my spirit."

Jewish parents in Jesus' day would often teach their children this simple prayer just as we might teach our children, "God is Great and God is good," or... "Now I lay me down to sleep."

Mary and Joseph may well have prayed this same prayer with Jesus when He was just a toddler. In many ways, though, the prayer summarizes the relationship Jesus had with God all through his life: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

This is a beautiful prayer for every day of life—and simple enough to be remembered and repeated by a child. What a release it would be from the burdens we bear and the pressures we face if we would simply commit our lives into the hands of God each day.

Let's take this a step further. Can you think of a more suitable prayer for the day of one's death? As Jesus suffered on the cross, He forgave the angry mob. He promised paradise to a "thief."

He cared for the needs of his mother. Only then did He mention His own need of drink.

Next, He expressed the agony of feeling separated from God--the horrendous result of taking the sins of the world upon His shoulders.

Then, as we discussed last week, He shouted "Finished!" to let the world know that His God-appointed mission was now accomplished.

Finally, as this awful ordeal is drawing to a close, Jesus whispers a familiar prayer, a simple prayer, the prayer of a child, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

1. The first thing I want you to notice about this last word of Jesus from the cross is that it's a prayer of **relationship**. I mentioned earlier that these same words can be found in Psalm 31... again, with the exception of the word "Father."

The Psalmist addresses God like this: "O Lord, God of truth." That's not bad. It's a fine way to address God. It says something very important about who God is—the "God of truth."

Don't you agree, though, that it doesn't have quite the warmth or the sense of closeness to God as does the word, "Father?" Jesus told us to think of God as our "Heavenly Father."

Remember the first word Jesus spoke from the cross? It was also a prayer. He said "Father, forgive them." His very first recorded word from the cross... was "Father." And He begins His final statement with the very same word: "Father."

One of the most significant revelations of God that we have in our Christian faith is that God wants us to know Him as our Father.

This is how Jesus told us to address God. It's what He called Him; and He taught us to pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven."

Think of the first words of Jesus that are recorded in Scripture. Jesus was speaking to His parents, having to defend Himself, if you recall. Jesus had stayed behind at the Temple even though Mary and Joseph thought He was on His way home with them.

This is when He said to them, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" Jesus, at the tender age of twelve, was telling His parents something important about Himself, and God. He called God, "My Father."

That's a powerful truth for us to understand—that the Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, is first and foremost our Heavenly Father. Amazing, isn't it?

It's no wonder that, in his first letter, John sounded a bit amazed when he wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God."

We all know the parable Jesus told—the one we call "the prodigal son." We would be closer to the point of the story, however, if we referred to it as "the parable of the loving Father."

That's really what it's about. The story pictures God—and we noted this last week as well—it pictures God as a very loving and

caring Father who is waiting and watching and hoping for his boy to come back home.

Then, in His final word from the cross, Jesus reminds us again of this intimate relationship with God that we have through Him—one that's as close and tender as parent and child. This is a beautiful prayer of relationship.

2. But now let's see this prayer in a different way. It can also be seen as a prayer of **contrasts**. Nowhere do we see more vividly the differences between good and evil, between holiness and sin, than what we observe in Jesus as He dies on the cross. These stark contrasts really defined Jesus' life.

Look at the cross. See the spotless Lamb of God--He who knew no sin, but who has now become sin for us. Because of this new status, Jesus is separated from the Father. He cries out in anguish, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Notice the difference, though, between Jesus' attitude and the attitudes we often have. Jesus' only concern was to mend that broken relationship—to end the separation—so that He could place His life back into the hands of the Heavenly Father.

Then, with his dying breath, Jesus says, "Into your hands, Father, I commit my spirit." The hope and trust of those words define Jesus and set Him apart from the attitudes of so many others who've had to face death.

Thomas Hobbes was a skeptic all his life—critical, questioning, forever doubting. Before his death, he said, "I am going to take a leap in the dark. I commit my body to the worms, and my spirit to the "Great Perhaps."

Francois Rabelais, the French satirist, as death approached, said, "Let down the curtain; the "farce" is played out."

How sad to pass from this life with such cynicism and hopelessness! How much better to face death—as all of us eventually will--with a faith-filled assurance that our lives are safely and securely in God's hands.

I want you to hear this beautiful teaching of Jesus found in John 10:27-29: **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”**

Jesus tells us here that all who follow Him are, first of all, in His own hands, but we are also in the hands of the Heavenly Father. Do you see this picture?

If I held an object tightly in my hands, and then you gripped your hands around mine, that object would be fairly secure. The only way anyone could get it out of my hands would be to first pry your hands open and then pry mine open.

Jesus is saying here, ‘You are in my hands and, together, we are in the Father’s hands; and because of this, you shall never perish.’

Jesus put His own life trustingly in the hands of the heavenly Father. As we, in turn, place our lives in His hands, we have the assurance that, in Christ, we are also in the Father’s hands.

Only something more powerful than God could ever remove us. This faith defines us, friends—it provides the contrast between hope and despair, between eternal life and eternal death.

The Apostle Paul resonated with this faith when he exclaimed, ‘there is absolutely nothing that can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ What a reassuring picture this is of the hope that’s ours through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our hope of salvation and eternal life is not based on our own goodness or purity or anything else that’s up to us to achieve. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness--the solid rock: Christ, our Lord.

We come to Jesus as we are; we place our lives in His hands. In Him we find life abundant—life that, if it’s genuine, is definitively different from what our lives were like before we met Christ.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” The spirit and attitude of this prayer defines Jesus, just as it defines our lives, friends, from that moment when we first place our lives in the Lord’s hands.

3. Finally, I want you, in these last words of Jesus from the cross, to listen for a prayer of **submission**.

Do you think we sometimes forget that to be in right relationship with Christ is to allow this connection to be the defining characteristic of our lives? To follow Christ is to put ourselves at His disposal. It means to submit our wills... to His will.

It’s not easy to do this. Jesus never said it would be easy. Most of us are wired in such a way that we find it hard to submit to anything or anybody, including God!

Jesus Christ went to the cross because He was totally submitted to the will of the Father. His crucifixion was simply the culmination of a lifetime spent committed to the Father’s plan.

Jesus placed his life in the hands of God. From start to finish, He was the person God wanted and “purposed” His Son to be.

If Jesus had wavered, if He had chosen His own way over the Father’s will, He would have failed to be the Savior. He would not have been able to declare from the cross, “It’s finished.”

But Jesus stayed focused. He remained on task. He submitted completely to God’s plan. He was obedient... even unto death.

The powerful thing about submitting to God, though—and I don’t want to jump ahead to next Sunday here, but this needs to be said—the tremendous thing about completely submitting our lives to God is how this always leads to new life.

It did for Jesus. It does for us. Placing our lives in the hands of God—and we do this when we put our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior, and follow Him as Lord—this is the way we find life—abundant, eternal life.

Jesus explained it like this: "...whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it." (Matthew 16:25)

It's in committing our lives to Christ, placing our lives in His hands, turning the controls over to Him--and thus, in a sense, losing our lives--that we find them. That's new birth, new life.

Jesus showed us the way when from the cross he prayed, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When this becomes our prayer, we discover a whole new relationship with God. We know Him as our Father--a loving, caring, gracious Father-God.

And our new life of faith provides striking contrast to life before we met Jesus. This relationship defines us and changes us for the better. And we cherish the change. Now, we're Christ's people, Christians, who desire to be more Christ-like day by day.

So it's without any hesitation that I invite you today to submit your life and your will to God. Receive His Son, Jesus Christ, as your personal Savior. Follow Him as Lord of your life.

Make this your prayer right now—a child's prayer, Jesus' prayer: "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit, my life, my all."

For seven weeks, we've focused on the words Jesus spoke from the cross. The most important thing for us to remember is that He was on that cross because of us, and it was for us that he died there.

He died to show us what extreme measures God will go to in order to save us and bring us back into a right relationship with Him.

But listen, friend: Jesus' death is in vain... until we finally submit ourselves to His will... until by faith we say "yes" to His offer of forgiveness and life. If you have yet to do so, will you--right now—say "Yes?"

Say "yes" to the Savior who loves you so! By faith, place your life in His hands.