



**Sunday, March 17, 2024**

**Speaker:** Pastor John VanderWindt

**Scripture:** Luke 23:44-49

**Sermon Title:** Praying with an Eternal Perspective

As Siggie shared, to be in a place where, as a pastor, you are encouraged, it is indeed a blessing. This past week, I thank you for your prayers, as I put on over 4,300 kilometers to go to a conference in North Carolina, which was truly a blessing. God was moving there and it was a place in which I was encouraged and taught. Just to be able to share that time with God in a different way was truly a gift. So thank you for that. We also had prayer from Anthony about lament. And that actually leads very well into where we are today in our scripture reading and our series on prayer.

So I invite you to turn to **Luke 23**. We are going to begin at verse 44. To put in perspective as to what is happening and where we are picking up, this is at the point in which Jesus has been on the cross. Jesus has been tortured. Jesus has been abandoned by God. Jesus has, as we saw a few weeks ago, said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they're doing." So we pick up the story in verse 44 of Luke chapter 23, where it says this...

**44** It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, **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.

**47** The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." **48** When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. **49** But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

This is the Word of the Lord. And we say, thanks be to God. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we come to You this morning to hear from You. Lord, You have heard our praises. You have heard our prayers. Lord, we now ask that You will open our ears. That You will open our hearts to hear Your word. Lord, may my words fall away. May Your words be loud and clear to your people. It's because of the powerful name of Jesus that we can even come to You. And we do so. In His name. Amen.

Jesus on the cross. When you think about Jesus on the cross and him bearing our pain and our sin, we see at the beginning of this reading today that it was noon and darkness covered the entire land. God, we read in Colossians, is the Creator of all things and through Him and in Him, all things were created. At noon on that Friday, creation went dark. God began creation by saying, "Let there be light." It is the first thing God created. When Jesus was on the cross, light was taken away. Creation, all of creation, as Anthony prayed this prayer of lament in which it's not just about our sins but it's about all of creation, all of creation went dark at that moment, as our Savior was being crucified.

So it's not just humans. It is all of creation that mourns during the time of Christ. And then it says in the middle of **Luke 23:45**, "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two." The curtain of the temple was torn in two. This curtain, which was in the temple, was between the areas where the priests could go and the Holy of Holies. The priests would go there once a year. And when they went in there, they would wear a rope around their ankle. And on that rope would be bells. Because if something happened to them while they were in there, nobody else could go get them. They would simply pull on the rope and drag them out. This curtain that was between the temple and the Holy of Holies was so thick that light did not shine through it. If we remember the time when Moses was on the mountain in the face of God, he came down and his face shone - that they had to put a veil over top of him because he was in the presence of God's glory - the Holy of Holies was this place where God's glory dwelt. And so a curtain was needed there to block that glory of God because we could not handle it.

So once a year, the high priests would go in there. And in the dark, they put blood on the mercy seat of the ark on behalf of the people as a payment for their sins, and a request for the mercy of God. We read here that that temple curtain tore in two and it tore not from the bottom up. It tore from the top down. Heaven was being brought to earth and we now had access to the throne room of God - to that mercy seat. We could come at any time to that mercy seat and be in the presence of God and not die. And Jesus then says with a loud voice in **Luke 23:46**, "**46** Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit."

There is a lot in this one line. First of all, there is the aspect that he said it in a loud voice. This was a declaration. This was not a, "Well Lord, here I am again. I give myself to you." But there is something else to be remembered. If you remember that a person who was crucified actually dies by suffocation because as they are on the cross, they are stretched out. Their knees are bent. And because they hang, they are not able to get full lungs of breath. So as they are up there, what they end up doing is they end up pulling themselves up to breathe and then going down again. So Jesus, in this time of hanging on the cross in which the normal process is suffocation, he does not declare it with a little bit of breath. He declares it with the entire breath that he can muster. And he says, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit."

There is something else we need to note here. Jesus returns to the term 'Father.' When Jesus began, as we read a few weeks ago, he started with, "Father forgive them for they know not what they're doing." He referred to God as Father. That loving relationship that he had with the Father. But in between that time, you may recall the phrase which he uses, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He understands that God had forsaken him.

And then he didn't have that relationship with his Father. That had been broken and he is now alone. But here we see him use the term Father again.

Just before this, if we read in the other gospels, he had also used the phrase, "It is finished. My work of salvation is finished." This work of salvation which began in the Garden of Eden, Anthony mentioned that since the fall, the world has been in lament. Since the fall of mankind, this battle has been going on between God and Satan over the lives of humans. And here, Jesus, when he says it is finished, he has taken this entire battle from the Old Testament all the way until now. He says, just like the Lord said in **Genesis 3:15**, that Satan will bruise his heel. That he will be stomped on." And Jesus says now, "It is finished." And when that work is finished, he is now in a place to return to his Father. And that restoration of relationship has been granted. But he can now say, "Father." But here is the blessed part for us. Because Jesus did the work on the cross we too can say, "Father."

Jesus, when He taught his disciples to pray, he said, "Pray, 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.'" He taught us to pray, "Father." The tearing of the curtain in the temple allows us to come to God as our Father. And then he says this, "Into your hands. I commit my spirit." That would have been a prayer that he learned as a child. And actually it's from Psalm 31:5, which says, "5 Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God." All Jewish parents, when their children would go to bed, would pray this prayer over them. "Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God." Some of us may have grown up with the prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." It's the same thing. It's a variation of this prayer which Jewish parents prayed for their children every time they went to sleep. And Jesus is now praying that prayer to his Father.

But you'll notice the difference between **Psalm 31** and what Jesus says. In Psalm 31, it is, "Lord." Jesus says, "Father." Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." The difference here is that Jesus knows the Father. Jesus knows that he can trust his dad and that his dad will take care of him throughout whatever happens. This aspect of committing my spirit to God is a prayer which we can all say as well. But Jesus was able to pray this prayer because it was the way that he lived. Jesus began each day with, "Today Lord, I commit this day to you. I commit my spirit to you. I commit whatever I am doing to you." And as he prayed, it would be a constant reminder of his trust in God, that he would say each day, "I commit my life to you. I trust that you will care for me. Whether the day goes well, or whether the day does not go well. I leave my spirit in your hands."

Now this prayer, it says that when he said it, he breathed his last. It was a prayer that he said just before he died. We don't like to think about death. But the reality is we will all die unless the Lord comes in. And the question which we have this morning is, "Can we, in all calmness, say that prayer as we edge that bridge of death?" Can we say, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit." That I'm at a place where I know that God will care for me throughout eternity. Am I at a place where I can say, "God, my Father. He loves me and He cares for me. And He will carry me through this time of death, to a time to be in His arms for all eternity."

That would be a prayer that I hope all of us can pray. When that time comes in our lives, we can say, "Father, I commit my life and my spirit to You." But that prayer is harder to pray if we have not done so daily up until that time. So when we look at the life of Christ at His aspect of prayer and when we look at our life, are we willing to say every day, "Father, I commit this day to you." Are we willing to say when we're going into a difficult conversation, "Father, I commit this conversation to You." Are we willing to say when we're going to a birthday party, "Father, I commit the celebration to you." Are we willing to enter every moment of our life by committing it to our Father? Sometimes it's easy to do. But sometimes it's not.

As Anthony prayed the prayer of lament, there are times in our lives where we say, "How long, O Lord?" Or we ask, "Why oh, Lord?" And then we have to go back to, "Am I in a place in which I am going to trust God to take care of me and to bring me through whatever it is that God has for me?"

In the book of Philippians, we read the example which Jesus gave in Philippians 2:8-10 which says, "8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

There will come a day when everyone will acknowledge Jesus as Lord. If we read on in our passage, we see that for the centurion, that day came the minute Jesus gave up his life. It is interesting as well that Jesus gave up his life and he also says, "Into your hands, I commit my spirit." When we read the story of Jesus just the days before this, it talks about how he would be delivered into the hands of men. And it talks about men laying hands on him in the garden of Gethsemane. And how they beat him. He was beaten by the hands of men. It was the hands of men who nailed him to the cross. It was the hands of men who yelled to crucify him.

And even though the hands of men were pushing all around him, in this place, he says, "Father, into your hands, the hands of the Creator of the universe, the hands of the God of mercy and love, I commit my spirit. I have been tortured and crucified by the hands of men but I am not going to lay my life into people's hands. I'm going to give my life to God's hands." That is where he goes. Each one of us will have to one day say we have either given our life into God's hands or we have not. The centurion, and as we read in **Luke 23:47**, says, "**47** Surely this was a righteous man." In the other gospels it says, "Surely this was the Son of God." The centurion understood at that moment, just like the criminal on the cross understood at that moment, who God was. And I would think that this centurion likely also submitted and committed his spirit to the Lord.

But then let's look at what the other people did. In **Luke 23:48-49** it says, "**48** When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. **49** But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things." These people who had beat him and hung him on the cross had a choice. It says that they beat their breasts and went away.

They could have gone away in two different ways. One is in deep sorrow. And it is believed that many of them did that because when we read in **Acts 2** about Pentecost, it talks about 3,000 people joining that day. Those are probably people who were also at the cross, who understood what happened and who maybe saw what happened. But there were also people who said, "We are leaving. Yes, it was horrible but I am not going to change how I want to live. I'm still going to live my way and go on with my way." And then it says, "Those who knew him were at a distance." They didn't dare come close. Because, "What happens if this mob finds out that I know him? We saw what they did to Jesus. What are they going to do to me? Am I willing to put myself in a place where I, too, might be tortured? Or am I just going to kind of stand back and watch what happens and say in a quiet voice, "I commit myself to God." From a distance.

When we look at these three responses from the people at the cross, it makes us ask ourselves that question, "If I were at the cross that day, how would I respond?" Hearing Jesus pray, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." That is a prayer of complete submission to God. It is a prayer of complete trust saying, "God, no matter what happens, I trust my life with you."

And the question then comes, "Where would I be when I respond? Would I be like the centurion saying, "This surely is the Son of God. I'm all in. And I am willing to say that at the foot of the cross where all the people are."

Or am I like the crowd, who on Palm Sunday, was cheering him as Hosanna. On Thursday, we're yelling, "Crucify him!" I have now witnessed the crucifixion and I leave. But what does leaving look like? Does leaving look like, "I don't want anything to do with this?" Or does leaving look like, "I am in such deep sorrow that I need to go to a place of repentance and spend time alone with God and come out saying, 'Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.'" Or are we like the third group which kind of stands at a distance. They're not willing to be inside the mob where people might know. We're not willing to go to places where we say with a loud voice, "I belong to Jesus and I trust him no matter what." Or do we kind of live our lives from a distance. And say from a distance, "Father, I commit my life to you."

Today, Jesus invites us to be in a space where we commit each moment of our life to him. Just before Saggi and Shawn talked, we sang, "It is Well with my Soul." Many of you may know the song.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot,  
Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.  
Though Satan should buffet,  
though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.  
My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
—My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
O my soul!

It is well with my soul. If we want to be in a space where we can constantly say, "It is well with my soul," the best space to be is when we say, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Father, I trust you." Imagine yourself as a three year old sitting at home. It's time for bed and

your dad comes into the room. He picks you up in his arms and he says, "I've got you and I'll hold you. Though there may be a storm outside, I've got you. You can sleep in my arms tonight."

"Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit. Let's pray. Dear Lord, thank You that You, on the cross, were willing to die for my sin. That the curtain to God's presence was torn and that we may now come to You as Father. Lord, we ask that You will carry us each day. That You will remind us of Your love. That You will remind us that being in Your righteous right hand, You have us. Even when the storms come, when the waters seem high, when the fires roar and we ask, "Lord, how long?" Lord, remind us that you are with us each moment. And Lord, may our prayer be each day, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*