

Born to Die
Luke 23:44-46
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I was on the wrestling team in High School. The grapplers and the basketball players didn't get along very well. We practiced on the gym stage while the round-ball guys ran around in the gym. There was a big stage curtain that we always pulled shut so we wouldn't have to look at our rivals. We loved it when a basketball would slip under this thick curtain and bounce on one of our mats. We had a routine whenever this would happen. We'd give the ball to Guy Duffy, who wrestled heavyweight, and waited for one of the basketball guys to jump up on the stage to retrieve the ball.

When "Basketball Jones" would poke his head under the curtain and crawl up on the stage, one of us would tackle him and the rest of us would pile on. When we were done tenderizing him we'd roll him off the stage and then Guy Duffy throw the ball out after him. As the season went on, I think they wished this curtain could have been a brick wall!

Do you ever feel like there's a brick wall between you and God? Does He seem far away and distant? As you read through the Old Testament, you can't help but recognize that God is holy, majestic, and separated from His people. There's a definite doctrine of *divine distance*. Close contact with the Holy God of the universe was formal, and somewhat limited. A clear line of separation was drawn between what was sacred and what was profane. When God spoke to Moses, He told him in Exodus 19:21: ***"Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish."***

The "Most Holy Place" was off-limits to everyone, except the High Priest. There was a thick curtain here, which was also called the ***"shielding curtain"*** in Exodus 39:34 because it was designed to keep people away. The High Priest could only enter once a year on the Day of Atonement to make sacrifice for the sins of the people. This was a scary thing for the priest because this was where God dwelt. It was a holy place. A rope was tied around his ankle just in case he died while he was in there so someone could pull him out.

The curtain that separated all the people and the priests from going into the presence of God was blue, purple, and scarlet and was made out of yarn and fine linen. It was 60 feet long, 30 feet high and was about two inches thick. It took 300

priests just to install it. This was a piece of lasting tapestry that was designed to withstand all strains, tears, and rips. It was even bigger than the electronic billboard on John Deere Road!

As we wrap up our “Seven Shouts from the Savior” by focusing on the final cry from the cross, I want to make sure we put our text in context by reading the two verses that come before it in Luke 23:44-45: ***“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.”***

These verses remind us that this was no ordinary death. The sun in the sky was snuffed out for three hours while the Son of God became our sin bearer.

When Jesus died, this indestructible curtain, that separated people from God, was torn in two -- from top to bottom. The word ***“top”*** can also mean *“from above,”* which helps us see that God did it. Now, instead of just one person having access to the Almighty once a year, the way to God stands wide open to everyone, on every day of the year – 24/7/365.

The result is that we now have unlimited access to God. *Tetelstai!* Everything has been paid in full -- we are free and forgiven, and have been declared righteous. Friends, all this is possible only through the death of Christ!

Can you imagine what must have been going through the minds of the priests? It had been dark for three hours. And now the sun is bright again. They weren't supposed to even look at the Holy of Holies and now it was right in front of them. Did they run out? Did they cover their eyes? Did they drop to their knees and wait to be consumed by God's righteous wrath? Did the lamb jump off the altar and scamper to freedom that day because the true Lamb of God had taken his place – and ours?

Because of what Jesus did for us, Hebrews 10:19-22 tells us that we can now come right into the very presence of the Holy God: ***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.”***

This curtain was designed to prevent access to God. Because it was torn in two, the veil of secrecy has been lifted and God's glory is now manifested to everyone

who puts faith in Jesus. In addition, the old order has ended. The curtain was not just opened, but ripped in two, indicating its total destruction. The Temple and the sacrificial system are no longer needed.

Life Lessons

Now let's unpack Luke 23:46: ***“And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.”*** I see three life lessons from this verse.

1. Jesus was faithful to the finish. After enduring the physical trauma, the emotional ridicule, and the spiritual isolation of becoming our sin sacrifice, Jesus was able to cry out with a strong voice. Jesus is not dying as a victim but is in total control of everything – someone dying of asphyxiation would not be able to cry out in a loud voice. We get the word “megaphone” from the Greek phrase that is used here.

Jesus wanted to make sure that his final words were amplified and broadcast widely and so He shouted out loudly. This same word is used in Revelation 5:12 to refer to the worship volume of the thousands upon thousands of angels who are worshipping around the throne of the Lamb: ***“In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’”***

2. Jesus loved and lived Scripture. This closing cry is a quotation from Psalm 31:5: ***“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** He literally died with the Bible in His mouth. As we've seen during this series, Jesus fulfilled Scripture throughout his life and is now doing so in His death. He quoted Scripture against Satan in the desert, He loved Scripture, He lived Scripture, He fulfilled Scripture, and in His dying breath, His mind and mouth were filled with the Word of God. Shouldn't we do the same?

Beth and I had the privilege of attending the Together for the Gospel conference in Louisville this week where we heard 10 hours of sermons about being unashamed of the gospel. One thing that really stood out to us was that all the preachers attended all the sessions. Normally at conferences, the speakers come in for their scheduled time and then they leave. We'll never forget seeing John MacArthur and John Piper, who have been preaching God's Word for a combined 80 plus years, leaning forward with their Bibles open and taking notes while Mark Dever, from Capital Hill Baptist, preached on evangelism from the Book of Isaiah. It's

obvious that they can't get enough of God's Word. They love and live the Scriptures.

The phrase that Jesus uttered was a common bedtime prayer taught to every Jewish child. It would be similar to one of our childhood prayers, *"Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."* Every night a child went to bed in Israel, they would kneel and say, *"Into your hands I commit my spirit."* Jesus not only dies with Scripture in his mouth but with a child's prayer on His lips.

Parents, don't underestimate the power of God's Word in the lives of your children. Read to them. Play Christian music in their bedrooms as they go to sleep at night. I applaud those of you who are serving and impacting the children of this church! We could use more servants for our Easter services.

This passage from Psalm 31:5 was often recited at the evening offering in the Temple. Here's the picture. As the priests were preparing to sacrifice lambs at around 3:00 p.m., people were speaking this section of Scripture. Jesus, the Lamb of God, who had taken our sins with Him to the Cross and was one breath away from making the final payment, shouted loud enough for everyone to hear, ***"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."***

3. Jesus surrendered Himself to the safety of the Father. Jesus voluntarily gives Himself to the Father. Every word of this verse is important.

a. ***Father.*** While Jesus quotes Psalm 31:5, I want you to notice that He *adds* something to this Scripture. Do you see what it is? He uses the term of endearment and relationship, ***"Father."*** This shows the bond of love that He has with the One who sent Him. Jesus begins his cries from the cross with a prayer to his Father as He pleads with Him to forgive the sins of those who have crucified Him. His final cry is likewise directed to the Father.

Jesus also *omits* something from this Psalm. Look at the clause that immediately follows in the second half of verse 5: ***"You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth."*** Jesus does not pray this part because as the Son He has no need of redemption from the Father. His relationship with the Father has existed from all eternity. Now that His work on earth is finishing, He can't wait to return home.

By the way, Jesus adds and omits because He is the living Word of God. We don't have the option of adding or omitting Scripture, do we? Revelation 22:18-19

warns us: “...*If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life...*”

Jesus loved to use the word, “*Father.*” His first recorded sentence is found in Luke 2:49:

“*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*” In his first formal teaching time on the Sermon on the Mount, He speaks of His Father seventeen times. In his final discourse found in John 14-16, Jesus lovingly uses the word “Father” forty-five times! And with his final breath, He once again shouts out to His Father.

b. *Into your hands.* Just as the sixth day of creation was followed by a day of rest, so too the Savior’s sixth utterance, “*It is finished*” is followed by shout seven as He puts Himself in a place of rest in the Father’s hands.

c. *I commit.* The word, “*commit*” means to place something with someone for protection. It was used when depositing valuables into a safe place. At the end of his life, the Apostle Paul used this word when he said in 2 Timothy 1:12: “...*I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day.*”

When He commits Himself to the Father, Jesus is ministering at His own committal service. He is entrusting Himself into the Father’s hands, never again to be at the mercy of the hands of wicked men.

d. *My spirit.* Now that His physical life is over, Jesus is committing His spirit to the Father for safekeeping. This is a good reminder for us that our bodies were never designed to last forever. We’re all wearing out and running down. When our time here on earth is over, our bodies go into the grave, but our spirit will live forever. Jesus teaches us that death is the door by which we are admitted into the presence of the King.

There’s a tribe in Africa that practices a really cool custom. When a believer dies, they don’t say, “*He departed.*” Instead, they say, “*He arrived.*”

Concluding Questions

The last part of verse 46 is a fitting conclusion: “*Having said this, He breathed his last.*” Some day you will breathe your last. Someone has said that we come into

the world saying hello, but almost immediately we start saying good-bye. Do you know where you'll go when it's your time to arrive?

If you want to live...and die like Jesus did, then make sure you can answer these questions.

- **Will you be faithful to the finish?** Are you starting to slack off spiritually? Don't let things slip. Be faithful. Most of us will die like we live. If you want to die well, then you must live well now.
- **Do you love and live Scripture?** Are you ingesting the Word of God on a regular basis so that it's on your lips and lived out in your life? If not, read it. Study it. Learn it. Apply it.
- **Have you surrendered to the safety of the Father?** Have you ever committed yourself to God? Some of you may need to surrender yourself to Him again because you've taken back the reigns in your life.

This world is definitely not a safe place, nor can we ever feel truly at home here. We have been made for another place because Heaven is our true home. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God ***“has set eternity in the hearts of men.”*** God made us to know Him and we won't truly be happy until we are in a Father relationship with Him. *This is the land of the dying and when we leave here we go to the land of the living.*

There are really only two options and two destinations. We can entrust our spirit into the Father's hands for safekeeping now or we will go into the hands of God for judgment later. The same hands that provide hope and comfort for believers also deliver terror and punishment for those who refuse to receive the sacrifice of His Son. Hebrews 10:31 gives a strong warning: ***“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”***

Responding To the Death of Christ

We see at least three responses to the death of Jesus in verses 47-49.

1. Decide for Christ. The centurion confessed Christ: ***“So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous Man!’”*** He was intrigued by what He saw. You see, he started out viewing Jesus as an ordinary criminal. But, he watched and listened. He investigated. His closed mind was starting to open. He began to seek, to question, to wonder. And, as he processed everything, he changed his mind on the basis of some new

evidence. Mark 15:39 records an additional response of this battle-scarred soldier: **“Surely, this man was the Son of God!”** He analyzed the evidence and decided for Jesus that day. Is that what you’re ready to do?

2. Depart from Christ. Instead of coming to Christ, guilt and shame kept others away: **“And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.”** These people were attracted to the execution. As they walked past the scene, they saw the “gaper’s block” and pulled over. Just like we slow down to take a look at an accident when we’re driving, these individuals were content to just watch, at least when they first came on the scene. When someone beat their breast in the first century, it was a sign of guilt and remorse. As they watched what Jesus went through, maybe they began to realize their role in putting Him on the cross. They came to witness a show, but they left with feelings of woe. What will you do with your guilt and shame? Will you decide *for* Christ or will you depart *from* Christ?

3. Be distant from Christ. Instead of fully following Him, the followers of Jesus kept their distance. Fellow follower, what fear is keeping you from fully surrendering? The friends and followers of Jesus were probably scared so they **“stood at a distance, watching these things.”** Is there some distance between you and Christ? The Apostle John got up close to Jesus but the others held back. Is there something that is holding you back from complete and full surrender? Are you just watching from the sidelines? It’s time to get in the game.

Don’t remain in neutral. A choice is required. The Cross won’t allow you to sit on the fence. You’ll either walk away or take a step closer. What’s it going to be? Jesus is dying to reach you...just as you are.

In 1822 Charlotte Elliot was filled with bitterness about her broken down body and failing health. One day a noted musician came to her family’s home for dinner and Charlotte went off on him. She then proceeded to lash out at God and her family. After a few tense moments the musician told Charlotte that she was holding on to her hate and anger which had led her to become sour, bitter and resentful. He then told her that she needed to put her faith in Christ.

After apologizing for her outburst, she asked him how to be saved. This is what he told her: **“Give yourself to God *just as you are* now...with your *fightings and fears, hates and pride and shame* and He will put His great love in their place.”** She replied, **“So I come to God *just as I am*?”** Fourteen years later she put those words into a hymn that has been song countless times as people have settled their

salvation at the end of crusades and services: *“Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou biddest me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come.”*

Will you come, just as you are? Will you depart, will you remain distant or will you decide to come to Christ? The curtain has been torn in two...for you. Will you come?

Invitation: “Just As I Am”