

“Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit”

LUKE 23:46 (TEXT); PSALM 31:5; 1 PETER 4:19

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Beloved congregation of Christ: Our Christian faith is summed up in the gospel: Christ lived, died, and was raised on the third day for the forgiveness of sins so we may be declared righteous by God. The Second Person of the Trinity, who eternally dwelt in heaven, came down to earth for the sole purpose of saving his people from sin.

How did he accomplish that Trinitarian redemptive plan? Just as he declared to his disciples, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”* (Luke 9:22).

Our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished willingly all of those things he was assigned to do by his Father. All of his life, he suffered. He preached good news, healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, had compassion on all his suffering people, but what did he get in return? *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... oppressed and afflicted...”* But especially in his death, he suffered, *“he was pierced for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities... like a lamb that is led to the slaughter... cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of [his] people.”*

All of these he suffered, *“although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”* But these was what he must accomplish. And as he hung on the cross, he declared, *“It is finished.”* He had finished all the work that the Father sent him to do to save his people from sin. And as he was about to breath his very last, *“calling out with a loud voice,”* he prayed, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*

Knowing the greatness of what he had finished in his life and death, he prayed to his Father. And it was not a silent prayer; it was a prayer that everyone who witnessed his death heard. In fact, the whole world has heard his prayer. It was a prayer of victory, trust, and thanksgiving. His death was a victory over sin and Satan. And his knowledge of his resurrection was a victory over the sting of death. He openly declared this victory to all the onlookers, and then to the whole world.

We must notice three things about his death in these last words of our Savior. First, **he died trusting his Father.** Second, **he really died physically.** Third, **he died looking forward to glory.**

He Died Trusting His Father

In his fourth saying on the cross, Jesus exclaimed his agony, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* His Father forsook him who knew no sin, to suffer his wrath against his people's sin.

Yet, a few hours later, he would pray a prayer of trust and thanksgiving to his Father, committing his own soul to him. He remembers that at every point in his life, except in his death, the Father was with him. At his baptism, the Father was pleased with him. The Spirit of God worked in the great signs and wonders he performed. In this hour of temptation and suffering, the Father gave him all the strength he needed.

This is why he could pray in the Garden before willingly dying on the cross, *“Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done,”* then also, *“Father... glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you”* (Lk 22:42; Jn 17:2).

Our example of one willing to die for Christ is Stephen the evangelist, who on his martyrdom, prayed the same prayer, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”* (Acts 7:59). In 1555, Nicholas Ridley, as he was burning at the stake, cried out With a loud voice, saying “Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit!”

The Apostle Peter must have thought of Christ's own trust in God when he wrote, *"Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good"* (1 Pt 4:19). Christians, then and now, suffer according to the providential will of God. Since God is the sovereign Providence, he faithfully fulfills all his promises to us. So we should entrust our whole life to him. Jesus did so as he suffered on the cross and before he gave up his soul. The good work that he accomplished is our example.

He Really Died Physically

After praying with a loud voice, *"He breathed his last."* Matthew 27:50 also tells us, *"he yielded up his spirit."* They want to show that Jesus died of his own accord, *"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord"* (Jn 10:18). All of his life and death was of his own will and of his Father's will. Not only did he die willingly; the manner of his death was of his own will. At the exact moment, he willingly breathed his last.

He willingly gave up his human spirit or soul because he was paying the penalty for sin: the curse of death on Adam and all his descendants, *"all have sinned"* and *"the wages of sin is death."* Since man sinned, a man has to die; no angel or any other creature qualifies to be the Substitute Redeemer.

But if Jesus is the Son of God, the Eternal Second Person of the Trinity, "very God of very God... of one substance with the Father," did God die on the cross that day? Certainly not! God did not suffer death on the cross, even vicariously through his Son. If God died, there has to be change in him, and God cannot change. And if God "breathed his last," the whole universe upheld by God would also breathe its last.

No, the atonement was made by Christ's human nature. The God-Man, the Person Jesus Christ died, since only creatures die, but God did not die. Let us not probe into this great mystery, but instead praise Christ for his mercy and grace in willingly dying for us.

He Died Looking Forward to Glory

Several times on the cross, Jesus quoted, prayed and fulfilled the Psalms, some of which we sung today. His fourth saying, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* is from Psalm 22:1. *"They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots"* was a prophecy from Psalm 22:18. Psalm 118:22 speaks of his suffering and exaltation, *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."* Psalm 41:9 was fulfilled by Judas Iscariot, *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."*

Jesus' last saying is also from the psalms, *"Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God"* (Ps 31:5). This psalm speaks of his sufferings, *"I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors ... I hear the whispering of many";* and also of his trust in God, *"But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God' (verses 11, 13, 14).* At the end of the psalm, David is confident that the LORD preserves those who faithfully love God, *"Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful (verse 23).*

This is why Isaiah 53 not only speaks of the suffering and death, but also of triumph and satisfaction of the Suffering Servant. Christ trusted in the promises of his Father, including an allusion to his resurrection in verse 10: *"he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."* He will have a multitude of offspring (Gal 3:27-29; Rv 7:9) and an indestructible life (Hb 7:6); and he will finish his Father's plan to redeem and restore his people and all creation (Rm 8:21-23; Eph 1:9-10).

In Isaiah 53:11, God foresees that Christ will be satisfied with the work he has finished after his affliction, *"Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied."* Verse 12 then says, *"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."* The imagery of dividing a "portion" and the "spoil" is that of a conquering general sharing his victory with his troops—the multitudes of believers who receive strength from the LORD (Php 4:13).

In facing death, Jesus also trusted joyfully in the promise of Psalm 16 regarding his body: *“Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption”* (verses 9–10). We know that this is about Christ's uncorrupted body in death from Peter's sermon (Ac 13:35).

Jesus not only entrusted his body and soul to his Father in death, but he was also confident that he would be raised from the grave. No, God would not deliver him from death on the cross. But afterwards, he was assured of his Father's promise of vindication, satisfaction, and “long life” in Isaiah 53.

Since all mankind is under the curse of sin and death, Christians as well are not delivered from physical death. But even in facing death, we know that God has not “hidden his face” from us. When we cry out to him in trust, he hears our pleas for mercy and turns his face upon us, giving us the light of life in Christ. In the end, we too will be delivered from the corruption of our bodies in death on the day of resurrection.

Beloved Congregation of Christ: We have confidence that Christ has completely redeemed us from sin and death because he laid down his life once for all of our sins. Of his own accord, he came down from heaven to be despised, rejected, oppressed, smitten and afflicted by his enemies as the Servant of the LORD, all for the sins of God's own chosen ones.

He completely entrusted his own body and soul to his Father in heaven as he hung on the cross. May you also be comforted with these words: “That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1). May you also commit your body and soul to the hand of our Father in heaven, in this life and in the life to come.

Today, we will partake of the Holy Supper which our Savior instituted on that night before he was crucified, his body broken and his blood shed, to atone for all our sins. We do this to remember his fragrant offering on the cross, and in order that our spirits will be nourished by his body and blood. And may we always hunger and thirst for righteousness that only Christ the Living Water and Bread of Life can give.