

Chapter Seven: Jesus' Seventh Saying

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Luke 23:46

"Where to Find Contentment"

One afternoon this past week, I met a man for the first time. I would guess him to be about 60 years old. Though he tried to be jovial, the lines on his face indicated to me his heart was full of pain. As he shared his life story, I soon learned such was the case.

When he was a boy, his life was scarred by his stepfather. His stepdad worked on the railroad, and was gone all week. But every weekend, his stepdad would cash his check, fill his body full of alcohol, come home in the middle of Friday night. Then the drunken husband would yank his wife out of bed, and demand she fix his breakfast. The man shared that he would watch as his stepfather beat his mother. Over and over. Every weekend it was the same.

The man told me, "I determined that when I grew up, I would never hit my wife." Well, he did grow up, and though the circumstances changed, his heartache did not. He married, but that marriage did not last. He married again, and had a child. When the child was a year old, his wife took the child, left, and shut the man out of their lives. With anger and grief he said to me, "My child is now a grown adult, and I have only seen him 3 times in his life."

Since then, he's gone from one broken relationship to another. My heart ached as he told me he has been married 9 times.

I looked him in the eye and said, "You've been through a lot of pain in your life. You have been looking for someone who would really love you, haven't you?"

He responded, "Yes, and I have not found that person."

I said, "Jesus loves you."

Here's what he said, "No. I've tried Christianity twice already. It didn't work. Now it's too late. Some day I'll die, and my body will rot. That's it."

We talked a little more, and then he left the room.

I hurt for him. In the past few days, I've thought about what he said. I know there are no pat answers to explain the pain he's been through. But as I have reflected on his story, I have come to realize that what is missing from this man's life can be summed up in one word--Contentment. Here is a man who merely exists in life. He knows that death is coming, yet he lives without contentment. And he faces death without contentment. And he is not alone.

Do you have contentment in your life? Is it possible to have contentment in this life with its pain and sorrow? Allow me to ask a more specific question. Can a person have genuine contentment in the face of death?

Jesus did.

When Jesus hung on the cross, when He stood in the face of death itself, Jesus exhibited contentment. How? He knew that death was not the end.

Death was not the end for Him. Nor is it for us who know Him.

How do we know that? Because of what Jesus said in His final words from the cross, recorded in Luke 23:46. His last words from the cross were these: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Those are the words of One who personified contentment.

What is the significance of Jesus' final statement from the cross? Why did Jesus say what He said? What impact did Jesus intend for those words to have on us? As we consider Luke 23:46, we will learn that our Lord had two aims in mind when He spoke His final words from the cross.

I would suggest that as we get a handle on these two aims, it will produce contentment in our lives. Here's the first aim.

I. Aim #1: Jesus calls our attention to His Plan.

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit (46)."

This morning, we are finishing our 7 week series on the 7 sayings which Christ uttered from the cross. With the angry mob and calloused soldiers before Him, Jesus' first words were a prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk 23:34)." Then, to the repentant thief, He promised, "Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise (Lk 23:43)." To His mother and beloved disciple John, Jesus spoke words of compassion, "Woman, behold thy son...Son, behold thy mother (Jn 19:26-27)." When He endured the wrath of God for our sins, and His Father turned His back, He cried, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me (Mt 27:46)?" After He felt the horrid pain of hell's fire on the cross, He cried, "I thirst (Jn 19:28)." Then in triumph, He shouted, "It is finished (Jn 19:30)!"

Several years ago, John Moore wrote a hymn entitled "Why?" In it, points us to the cross with a series of questions, "Why did they nail Him to Calvary's tree? Why? tell me, why was He there? Jesus the Helper, the Healer, the Friend, why, tell me, why was He there?"

"Why should He love me, a sinner undone? Why? tell me, why should He care? I do not merit the love He has shone, why, tell me, why should He care?"

And the chorus, "All my iniquities on Him were laid, He nailed them all to the tree. Jesus the debt of my sin fully paid, He paid the ransom for me." (Singspir. '53)

Of the seven sayings, Luke recorded three: the first (34), the second (43), and the last (46). You'll notice both similarities and differences between Jesus' first and last sayings. Both are prayers. Both begin with the word, "Father." The first involved others. The last involved Himself. The first was a request. The last was an announcement.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Notice a comment in Luke's narrative in v 46, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice." What did Jesus say with a loud voice? Luke doesn't tell us. John does, in Jn 19:30, "It is finished!"

What a climactic statement! "It is finished! Tetelestai! The debt is paid in full." Yet it's ironic that Luke doesn't even record those words. Rather, he highlights the words, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Why? I would suggest that Luke intended to emphasize two important aims of Jesus. With these words, Jesus' first aim was to call attention to His plan. His plan, the Father's plan. What was involved in that plan? Two accomplishments...

A. It was His plan to fulfill prophecy.

In Lk 23:46, Jesus actually quoted Psm 31:5. Psalm 31 is a psalm of David. It's a psalm describing a time of distress, a time when David was under attack by his enemies. He felt forsaken (11) and forgotten (12). Yet in his despair, he affirmed his trust in the Lord (1), and invited God's help (2-4).

Look at Psalm 31. Notice the contrast in v 15 between the "hand of God" and "the hand of the enemy." David writes, "My times are in THY hand." That's God's hand. "Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies." That's the opponent's hand.

What a vivid picture. The hand of the enemy takes away life (13). The hand of God preserves life (16). The hand of the enemy attacks. The hand of God helps.

You can tell a lot about a people by looking at their hands. When I was growing up, my dad's hands fascinated me. They were big, strong, firm, and secure. They represented control to me.

Do you see why Jesus identified with Ps 31? The hands of His enemies had beat Him, plucked His beard, and drove the spikes through His flesh. Had the plan of God gone haywire? No. Listen to Jesus' words, "Father, into THY HANDS I commend My spirit."

We know that God does not have human hands. He is a Spirit. Yet by using this metaphor, Jesus was announcing to the world: The hands of God are stronger than the hands of men!

For more than 12 hours Christ had been in the hands of MEN (Pink, 126). Do you remember what Jesus told His disciples in Gethsemane? Mt 26:45 "Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

Listen to the observation of Arthur Pink (127), "Voluntarily had the Saviour delivered Himself into the hands of sinners, and now, voluntarily He delivers His spirit INTO THE HANDS OF THE FATHER. What a blessed contrast! Never again will He be in the 'hands of men.' Never again will He suffer shame. Into the hands of the Father He commits Himself, and the Father will now look after His interests."

Jesus' seventh saying calls attention to His plan. His death was no accident. Nor was the triumph of the hand of God. Jesus' plan was to fulfill prophecy. And He did just that. His words give testimony to that.

With His words, Jesus highlighted a another accomplishment.

B. It was His plan to free fallen humanity.

Why did Luke alone record this seventh saying? In part, it was because Luke sought to present Jesus as the Son of man who had come on a mission. To do what?

Look at Lk 19:10. To sinful, undeserving Zachhaeus, Jesus announced, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Jesus had come to free fallen humanity. But what good is that promise if it comes from the lips of a dead man? No good at all.

When Jesus uttered from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," it was not for His benefit. Nor for the Father's. The Father already knew His heart. He said it for our benefit. He was saying, "My plan to seek and to save the lost is accomplished! Death has not conquered Me. I have conquered death!"

You see, Jesus left the Father's right hand, and entered this sin-cursed world to fulfill a plan. It was the plan

God established long ago when Adam rebelled, and alienated the human race from its Creator. It was the plan the Sovereign Lord designed in eternity past, a plan to restore His estranged world to Himself. It was the plan Paul described in II Cor 5:19 in these words, "To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

When Jesus called out, "Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit," He was saying, "I have finished the plan to free fallen humanity! And now I am coming home!"

Objection: "How do we know the Father was satisfied with what Jesus did? How do we know it was enough to free fallen humanity?"

Those are good questions. To answer them, I would call your attention to two supernatural evidences indicated in vv 44-45. First, when Jesus uttered His final words, the three hours of darkness were PAST. The darkness was over. The wrath of God had been met. And second, the temple veil was already rent, from the top down. Jesus Christ had removed the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13). Fellowship between God and man was restored.

Oh beloved, have you come to grips with the fact that our redemption is complete? Jesus has finished the Plan!

That's one aim our Lord had in mind when He declared, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." He called attention to the Plan of God.

Perhaps you're thinking, "But what does this have to do with contentment?" We'll see in a moment. But first, we must consider a second aim.

II. Aim #2: Jesus calls our attention to His Power.

Lehman Strauss (103) tells the story about a man who became famous through his restaurant business. "He established eating places for 3,000 miles from New York to California and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. When at last it came time for him to die, his family gathered about his bed to hear his last words. Now please don't laugh when I tell you that they heard him whisper, 'Slice the ham thin.'"

The man revealed his passion in life by what he said on his deathbed.

Do you know what Polycarp, Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Melancthon, John Huss, Christopher Columbus, and many others have in common? They died with these words on their lips (Jones, 86; Spurgeon, 111): "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Noble words. Yet for them, these words were an aspiration. For Jesus, they were an accomplishment.

With these words, Jesus calls our attention to His power. What kind of power? Power over two great foes.

A. Jesus revealed His power over death.

Notice again the narrative in v 46, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice." The fact that Jesus cried with a loud voice struck Dr. Luke (emphatic position). To Luke, with his medical background, this was a notable fact. Men executed by crucifixion often hung for days, and died when they were so exhausted, they could not push themselves upward to breathe. Yet Jesus cried loudly, and then died.

He died when He chose to die! "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Friends, that is not a wish or even a request. That is a pronouncement! Jesus controlled His destiny. And ours too. Augustine said, "He

gave up His life BECAUSE He willed it, WHEN He willed it, and AS He willed it (Jones, 86)."

When He called out to His Father, Jesus revealed His power over death.

Jesus also exhibited power over a second great foe.

B. Jesus revealed His power over the devil.

Take a look at the end of v 46. What happened right after Jesus uttered His seventh saying? "And having said this, He gave up the spirit."

He gave up His spirit. Jesus died unlike any other person. His life was not taken. He gave it up. Just like He said in Jn 10:18, "No man taketh it (My life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have POWER to lay it down, and I have POWER to take it again."

The gospel writers are very careful to describe what happened when Jesus died. The greek term Matthew used indicates Jesus "dismissed His spirit" (27:50). Mark says He "breathed out His spirit." John says He "bowed His head, and gave up the spirit (Jn 19:30)." Luke's description is similar to John's.

What's the point? This--Jesus died as a Victor.

What's the greatest battle that has occurred in history? The battle of Gettysburg? The battle of Normandy? No. Oh, there's no doubt the conflict was fierce at these battles. But the greatest battle in the history of the world happened at Calvary. It was unseen to the naked eye.

Satan hurled his evil forces at the Son of Man. The prince of the world who led the creation into cosmic treason sought to eliminate the Creator. And he thought he had won. But he was wrong!

For in His final words, Jesus revealed over the devil.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Implications: We can know 2 vital truths...

What effect should Jesus' words have on us? To answer that, allow me to restate the question. What effect did Jesus' death have on those at the scene of the cross? Luke tells us.

Notice the effect on the centurion. V 47 "Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man." Was this man converted? We don't know for sure. You say, "I saw the movie 'The Robe' last week, and in it, Demetrius was eventually saved." To which we must say, "Realize that Hollywood's version of the cross is greatly influenced by tradition and imagination."

But this we do know. Luke says the centurion glorified God. He was greatly impacted by the way Jesus died. So were the others. The people smote their breasts (48). Jesus' acquaintances stood "beholding" (49).

We will never be the same again once we grasp the cross.

True contentment is available to us only at the cross. Allow me to be specific. We can know two vital truths because of what Jesus declared from the cross.

1. Our contentment does not depend on our circumstances.

On the cross, our Savior was surrounded by a mob that hated Him. His body was wracked with pain. The agony He was enduring was beyond imagination. Yet in the midst of those circumstances, He exhibited

contentment.

Do you know why? His contentment depended on His communion with the Father, not on His circumstances. So did Daniel's in the lion's den. So did Paul's and Silas's in the jail. So did Stephen's when the rocks pelted him.

Oh beloved, if Christ could exhibit contentment on the cross, so can we, regardless of our circumstances.

Objection: "But how is that possible?" Because of a second truth.

2. When we know Christ, death is not the end.

Death was not the end of Jesus. Nor is it for us! Hear His marvelous affirmation again, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Never forget this. The same hands that received our Blessed Lord hold us. The same ears that heard our Savior's prayer from the cross hear our humble cries.

Follower of Jesus, know this. Our Savior showed us not only how to live. He showed us how to die. We can face death knowing there is a future beyond the grave!

When we know Christ, death is not the end.

Have you placed your life into the hands of the Father? Only then can we experience contentment in life. Contentment is available to us, at the cross.