

Main Idea: 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.

The Seven Sayings of Jesus from the Cross:

1. “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).”
2. “Today you will be with Me in paradise (Luke 23:43).”
3. “Dear woman, here is your son... Here is your mother” (John 19:26-27).”
4. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Matt. 27:46)?”
5. “I am thirsty (John 19:28).”
6. “It is finished (John 19:30).”
7. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46).”

I. Jesus calls our attention to His plan.

- A. It was His plan to fulfill prophecy.
 1. Jesus is quoting Psalm 31:5.
 2. He is making it clear that the hands of God are stronger than the hands of men.
- B. It was His plan to free fallen humanity.
 1. I have finished the rescue work.
 2. Now I am coming home!

II. Jesus calls our attention to His power.

- A. Jesus reveals His power over death.
- B. Jesus reveals His power over the devil.

Application: Two vital truths to consider...

1. Our contentment does not depend on our circumstances.
2. When we know Christ, death is not the end but a transition.

This morning we come to the seventh and final saying from the lips of Jesus on the cross. We’ve called this series, “The Puzzle of the Cross,” since for so many, it is a puzzle. They know that Jesus died, but why? For what purpose? Jesus Himself actually tells us, as the Master Teacher, while on the cross. Thus far, we’ve heard Him say...

Jesus’ first words: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).”

Jesus’ second words: “Today you will be with Me in paradise (Luke 23:43).”

Jesus’ third words: “Dear woman, here is your son... Here is your mother,” (John 19:26-27).”

Jesus’ fourth words: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Matt. 27:46).”

Jesus’ fifth words: “I am thirsty (John 19:28).”

Jesus’ sixth words: “It is finished (John 19:30).”

And now finish by considering His final words, which are in Luke 23.

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:44-49

Many years ago, when I was a young pastor, a man came to see me on a weekday afternoon. It was our first conversation and I actually wrote down what happened, for it was a sobering conversation. Recently I found those notes. I would guess his age to have been about sixty. 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

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message has been adapted from a sermon preached at WBC as part of a 1994 series on “The Seven Sayings of Jesus from the Cross.”

drunkened 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 three 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 nine 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 don't know whatever happened to that man. Frankly, I don't even know the man's name. What I do know is that he represents many other men and women in this community. He may be our neighbor, or family member.

Think about what that man said. I know there are no pat answers to explain the pain he'd been through. But as I have reflected on his story, I have come to realize that what is missing from this man's life, and so many others, can be summed up in one word.

Contentment. Here is a man who, for a variety of reasons, was merely existing in life. He knew that death was coming, yet he lived without contentment, and he was facing death without contentment. And he is not alone.

Do you have contentment in your life? Does that word describe you? Is it possible to have true contentment in this life with all its pain and sorrow?

Allow me to ask a more specific question. Can a person have genuine contentment in life, and specifically when they are facing the reality of their impending death? Is that possible?

Yes. Jesus did. When Jesus hung on the cross, when He stood in the face of death itself, Jesus exhibited contentment. And just think what He'd been through. All the abuse, physically and emotionally. Nailed to a cross. Scorned and hated by people. Rejected and abandoned by His closest friends. And yet, as we'll see, He exhibited contentment, even on the cross.

How is that possible? It's because He knew something, and what He knew produced the contentment. He knew that death was not the end, not the end for Him, nor for those who belong to Him.

How do we know that? We know it because of what He said in His final words from the cross, recorded in Luke 23:46. His last words from the cross were these: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (ESV)." In the AV, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

These are the words of the One who personified contentment. Why did Jesus say what He said? What effect 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 as He spoke His final words. I'm convinced that as we get a handle on these two aims, it will produce a true, joyful contentment in our lives.

I. Jesus calls our attention to His plan.

Notice the fuller context of verse 46, “Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.”

To this point, Jesus has been hanging on the cross for six eternal hours. I say “eternal” because as the God-man, He is eternal. And the penalty that He paid had to be eternal, for the wages of sin is eternal death and punishment in hell. And He endured that on the cross.

Every word that He spoke from the cross is significant. Jesus is the Master-Teacher. When He speaks, it’s because He wants His hearers to know something. These words are for our benefit.

With the angry mob and calloused soldiers before Him, Jesus' first words were a prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing (Lk 23:34).” This is what the cross is all about. Sin and forgiveness. This is what He extends to sinners because of the cross, the forgiveness of their sins.

Then, to one of the worst kind of sinners, a thief whom the world considered deserving of death by crucifixion, but who repented and called out to Jesus, the Savior spoke these words, “Today you will be with Me in paradise (Luke 23:43).” Amazing! Can a sinner who has wasted his or her life go to paradise, and know for sure they are going to paradise when they die? Yes. Who has the authority to tell someone they are going to paradise? The One on the middle cross does.

Next, to His mother and beloved disciple John, Jesus spoke words of compassion, “Woman, behold your son.” Then, “Son, behold your mother (John 19:26-27).” With these two simple commands, Jesus made it clear that everyone, including His mother, needs His salvation. And that once we receive His salvation, we enter into a new family, a forever family called the church, with a new responsibility that exceeds that of our most cherished earthly ties. We are to be devoted to our forever family, to care for widows in this forever family, to love one another in this forever family.

Then came the darkness. Luke describes it this way, in verses 44-45, “It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.” Luke doesn’t tell us what Jesus said during that darkness, but Matthew does, and so does Mark. When Jesus endured the wrath of God in the place of sinners who deserved that wrath, He cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me (Matthew 27:46)?” Forsaken. Alienated from God. That’s what hell is, and that’s what the Savior experienced as He took upon Himself the sins of every person who would ever believe on Him.

And then, after He felt the horrid pain of hell's fire on the cross, He cried, “I thirst (John 19:28).” The pain was real, and the effect of that pain sapped Him to the core of His being. But there was another reason for this cry of thirst, for this willingness to accept the offer of sour wine on a hyssop branch. He had something else to say, something He wanted everyone to hear loudly and clearly.

His sixth saying, when He shouted in triumph, “It is finished (John 19:30)!” He had finished the work His Father had given to do. Out of love for His Father, and amazing love for those for whom He died, He finished the work of redemption. There’s nothing more to be done, He says. He defeated our enemies of sin, Satan, and death itself. On the cross. Finished, He says. Tetelestai. The debt is paid in full.

This is why a man of the world, a Roman jailer in fact, could ask, “What must I do to be saved?” And receive this answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be

saved (Acts 16:31)!" There's nothing left to do, but believe in Him, and what He accomplished. And having believed, live for His glory the rest of your life.

Several years ago, John Moore wrote a hymn entitled "Why?" In it, he 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.²

Of these seven sayings, Luke recorded three. He includes 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. And oh, what an announcement!

"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Notice again a comment in Luke's narrative in verse 46 (AV), "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice." What did Jesus say with a loud voice? The AV seems to indicate that what Jesus had just said, His sixth saying, was with a loud voice. And indeed it was, as discussed last time, based on what Matthew's account says. "It is finished!" Indeed, He said that loudly, for all to hear.

But He also said something else loudly, likely, just seconds after His sixth saying. The ESV captures this, stating, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!'" This too He said in a loud voice.

Why? With these words, and the way He said these words, Luke is showing us how Jesus called attention to His plan. And what was this plan? With this seventh saying He revealed He had two accomplishments in mind.

A. It was His plan to fulfill prophecy. Do these words, "Father, in your hands I commit my spirit," sound familiar?

1. *In Luke 23:46, Jesus is quoting Psalm 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).

Listen to Psalm 31:1-5, "In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ³ For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God."

I want you to see a contrast in verse 15 between the "hand of God" and "the hand of the enemy." David writes, "My times are in Your hand." That's God's hand. "Rescue me from the hand of my 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.

² Singspiration, '53

You can tell a lot about a people by looking at their hands. When I was a little boy, 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 Psalm 31? The hands of His enemies had beaten Him, plucked His beard, and driven the spikes through His flesh. Had the plan of God failed? No, not according to Jesus. He's still trusting His Father, indeed, fully trusting, as did David in Psalm 31, praying, "Father, into *your hands* I commit My spirit."

We know that God does not have human hands. He is a Spirit. Yet by using this metaphor, Jesus is making something clear to the onlooking the world, something that didn't appear to be true in that moment, but certainly was.

2. *He is making it clear that the hands of God are stronger than the hands of men.* Arthur Pink ponders this contrast.³ For more than twelve hours Jesus the Christ had been in the hands of MEN.⁴ Do you remember what Jesus told His disciples in Gethsemene? In Matthew 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, "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."⁵

Yes, by His seventh saying, He's calling attention to the sovereign plan of God. His death was no accident, but was indeed 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 highlights a another accomplishment.

B. It was His plan to free fallen humanity. Luke alone records this seventh saying. Why Luke? In part, it's connected to His purpose for writing this biography of Jesus. In this Gospel, Luke presents Jesus as the Son of man who had come on a mission. A mission to do what?

Jesus Himself answers that question in Luke 19:10, which many feel is the theme verse of Luke's Gospel. Here we see Jesus in a conversataion with a wealthy chief-tax collector named Zachhaeus. Not exactly a candidate for the kingdom of God, is he? That's what the people were saying too when Jesus went to His house. Why this man?! He's "a sinner"!

Here's why. Jesus announced, "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." This is why Jesus came, not to reward the righteous, but to save the unrighteous. He came to bring salvation to people like Zacchaeus, and us, to seek and save the lost.

But what good is an offer like that if it comes from the lips of a dead man? No good at all. A dead man can't save us. He can't do anything for us. Unless His death isn't the final word.

When Jesus uttered, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit," it's not for His benefit. Nor for the Father's. The Father already knows His heart. Jesus said these words for the benefit of His hearers, including us. He's making it clear that, "My plan to seek and to save the lost is still true. Indeed, it's accomplished! Death has not conquered Me. As you will soon see, I have conquered death!"

³ Pink, 126.

⁴ Pink, 126.

⁵ Pink, 127.

To put it simply, when Jesus called out, “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit,” He was in essence saying to His Father, and to us...

1. *I have finished the rescue work.*
2. *Now I am coming home!*

Home! Yes, back to where it all started, when He left His Father's right hand, and entered this sin-cursed world. He came to fulfill the plan of God, the plan to rescue hell-bound sinners. This was the plan God established long ago, in eternity past, and then put in motion when Adam rebelled, and alienated the human race from its Creator.

Paul described this plan in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”

But someone may object, “How do we know the Father was satisfied with what Jesus did? How do we know it was enough to free fallen humanity?”

These are valid questions. To answer them, I would call your attention to two supernatural evidences that Luke identifies in verses 44-45. One is the mid-day darkness. The other is a torn curtain.

Verse 44 says, “It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.”

Notice the timing. First, there was darkness, representing the wrath of God being poured out upon the Substitute Sin-bearer.

Then next, the temple curtain was torn in two. Matthew 27:51 says it was torn “from top to bottom”. So God Himself tore this temple curtain. Why? Until this moment, only the high priest had access to the holy of holies. But God is making it clear that His Son, Jesus the Christ, has just changed all that. Jesus now makes it possible for sinners to become holy and enter right into the presence of God. Jesus has removed the curse of the Law, by becoming a curse for us (Gal 3:13). Jesus has restored fellowship between God and man, for all who would believe in Him.

Now notice the very next word, in verse 46. “*Then* Jesus...said.” *Then*, after the darkness, and after the torn temple curtain. *Then* He said.

And what did He then say? He said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” So when Jesus uttered His final words, the three hours of darkness were *past*, and the curtain had already been torn. Is that significant? Oh, yes! He’s saying loudly and clearly, “I have finished the rescue work. And now I’m coming home!”

My non-Christian friend, please consider this carefully. Jesus made it clear that the work of redemption is finished, that the penalty for sin has been paid, that access to God is now open through Him. Do you agree with Jesus? If so, have you admitted that you are a *lost* person, as He said, and then asked Him to *save you and bring you home*?

This is the first aim our Lord had in mind when He declared, “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit.” He calls attention to the plan of God.

“But what,” you ask, “does this have to do with contentment?” We’ll see in a moment. But first, we must consider a second aim.

II. Jesus calls our attention to His power.

Lehman Strauss 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.'⁶

It's interesting what people say on their deathbed. This man revealed his passion in life by what he said as he was leaving this world.

Do you know what Polycarp, Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Melancthon, John Huss, Christopher Columbus, and many others have in common? I've read that they all died with these words on their lips: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."⁷

Noble words, for sure. Yet for these men, these words were an aspiration. But 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 reveals His power over death. Notice again the word "loud" in the narrative of verse 46, "Then Jesus, calling out with a *loud* voice."

Luke, by training, is a doctor. He notices these kind of details. The fact that Jesus cried with a loud voice is important to Dr. Luke (he puts this in the emphatic position in the Greek text). Luke knows, with his medical background, that this is unusual. People executed by crucifixion often hung for days on their crosses, and died when they were so exhausted they could no longer push themselves upward to breathe.

But not Jesus. He cried loudly, and then died. To say that they killed Him is true, but it's not the whole story. Jesus died when He chose to die. And when He said, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit," it was not a wish or even a request, but rather a *pronouncement*. Jesus was in total control of His destiny to the very end, which of course was *not* the end.

Augustine said, "He gave up His life BECAUSE He willed it, WHEN He willed it, and AS He willed it."⁸

Here's where the confidence enters, for Jesus, and for those who believe in Jesus. When you're in control of death, or as in our case, you know the One who is in control of death, then there's no cause for fear. Even if the death is painful, which it often is and certainly was for Him, even if the death is unjust, as it certainly was for Him and at times is for His people, He is working His plan even through that death. And He demonstrates that authority, even as He died on His own cross.

When Jesus called out to His Father, "Father, into your hands I commit me spirit," He was revealing His power over death. He was also exhibiting His power over a second great foe.

B. Jesus reveals His power over the devil. Take another look at the end of verse 46. What happened right after Jesus uttered His seventh saying? "And having said this, he breathed his last." The AV says, "He gave up the spirit."

Again, Jesus died unlike any other person. His life was not taken. He gave it up. Just like He said He would in John 10:18, "No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

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

What's the point? It's this. Jesus died, not as a victim, but as a victor.

⁶ Strauss, p. 103.

⁷ Jones, 86; Spurgeon, 111.

⁸ Quote taken from Jones, 86.

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 in those battles. But the greatest battle in the history of the world happened on that hillside outside of Jerusalem called Calvary.

The human eye couldn't see the real battle that was taking place, but it was real and fierce. Satan hurled his evil forces at the Son of Man. The prince of the world who led creation into cosmic treason was now seeking to eliminate the Creator. And he thought he had won. But he was wrong!

And when he heard these words, "It is finished," and then, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," he must have thought, "Uh oh, I must have missed something, and that's not good for me."

Indeed, he had missed something. The sovereign Son of God had just defeated him and rescued from his wicked clutches a people that would praise, enjoy, and serve Him forever.

Yes, in His final words, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit," Jesus revealed His power over death and the devil. And on the third day, He left no doubt when His Father raised Him from the dead, and He walked out of that tomb alive.

Application: Two vital truths to consider...

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

Notice the effect on the centurion in verse 47, "Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God [AV says 'he glorified God'], saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent [AV, 'this was a righteous man']!"

Was this man converted? We don't know for sure. You say, "I've seen the movie 'The Robe', 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 praised God. He was greatly effected by the way Jesus died, and apparently, by what He said as He died. And so were the others. The people went home "beating their breasts," says verse 48. And verse 49 says that Jesus' acquaintances and the women "stood at a distance watching these things."

This we know. No one is ever the same again once they grasp what happened on the cross. Allow me to be specific. There are two vital truths we need to consider because of what Jesus declared from the cross.

1. Our contentment does not depend on our circumstances.

Picture the scene again. On the cross, the Lord Jesus 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 these circumstances, He exhibited an assurance, even a contentment that doesn't seem possible.

Do you know why? His contentment depended on His communion with the Father, not on His circumstances. He knew, even as He was dying, He would in but a few moments be enjoying the loving care of His Father's hands.

This is the source of contentment, even in the face of death. We see it when Daniel was in the lion's den. We see it when Paul and Silas were beaten and fastened to stocks in a jail, but were singing.

And of course, we see it in Stephen. We see it when the rocks were being thrown at this godly man, and he falls to the ground, and cries out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit (Acts 7:59)," as well as, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60)."

Interesting, isn't it? Stephen essentially puts into his own words two of the seven sayings that Jesus uttered as He died.

Oh beloved, if our Savior could exhibit contentment on the cross, if our biblical forefathers could do the same, so can we, regardless of our circumstances.

And here's why. Here's the truth that makes it possible.

2. *When we know Christ, death is not the end but a transition.*

Death was not the end for Jesus. Nor is it for those who have repented and put their faith in Him. Have you? If not, why not now?

My dear Christian friend, never forget this. The same hands that received our blessed Lord are now holding us. And the same ears that heard our Savior's closing prayer from the cross are now hearing our humble cries.

What a Savior! He took our sin, our punishment, our hell, and gave us the assurance of paradise with Him. But beyond that, He also showed us how to die. But not just show us, but enable us, by the power of His Spirit, to live with contentment, and die with contentment, knowing there is a forever future beyond the grave, with Him!

Closing Song: #203 "*And Can It Be?*" (all four verses)

*And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?*

*'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

*He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.*

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.*

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

*Refrain: Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!*