

THE WORD OF COMMITTAL

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." Luke 23:46.

Much is said in these days about learning from Christ Jesus how to live, but we do not hear much about the equally important matter of learning from Him how to die. Perhaps the reason this is not stressed is because death is never considered a pleasant subject of conversation. We instinctively shrink from thinking and speaking about it, although we know that its certainty is one of the most undeniable facts we have to face.

Christ's life helps us to interpret His death. In fact, His death is a reflection of the life He lived. Had He not intimately and constantly lived in communion with the Father, we could not account for His trustfulness and confidence in death. Dying and living are related closely. As a rule men die as they live. There is nothing in the mere act of passing that makes a bad man righteous or a godly man bad. Generally we die as we live. Immortality without God is the consequence of a life without Him. The death of the righteous must be preceded by an acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour.

Christ's birth was unique. His life was unique. His death was unique also. In "laying down" His life, His death was differentiated from all others. He died by an act of His own volition. None but a divine person could have done this. In a mere man it would have been a suicide, but in Him it was a proof of His perfection and uniqueness. His death was a public spectacle for men and angels. His passing was without the solace of privacy.

The cross had long been known as the most cruel form of suffering, but even that was overshadowed by its shame. To die on a cross was the limit of degradation. It was an ignominious, scandalous and infamous form of death. The proud Romans made sure by legal enactment that no Roman should ever die on a cross. That manner of death was reserved for the lowest of the low, for the very scum of the earth. And yet our text portrays the Saviour on the cross, surrounded by a taunting crowd, His body suffering intense agony; nevertheless, He was in fellowship with the Father.

Up to the cross there had been perfect and unbroken communion between the Father and the Son. His first utterance on the cross was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). His last utterance on the cross was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Between those utterances He had hung there for six hours. During those last three hours God had withdrawn from the Saviour, evoking that terrible cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). But now all is done. The cup is drained; the storm of wrath is spent; the darkness is past; and the Saviour is back again in communion with the Father, which communion is never to be broken.

Oh, the blessedness of communion with God! Communion with Him is something that may be enjoyed independently of place or circumstances. Even though the Saviour was on the cross and suffering intense agony, He was in

fellowship with the Father. One of the sweetest truths brought out in this text is that it is our privilege to enjoy communion with God at all times, irrespective of outward circumstances or conditions. Communion with God is by faith and faith is not affected by the things of sight. No matter how unpleasant your outward lot may be, it is your unspeakable privilege to enjoy communion with God.

If we cherish the last words of a relative or friend, as all of us do, how much more should we cherish the last words spoken by our Saviour from the cross. As at the beginning so at the end of His crucifixion, Christ addressed God as Father. Perfect master of Himself, unconquered by death, He spoke with a loud voice to show that He was not succumbing to death because He had to die or because He was weak and exhausted. Those of us who have seen men die know that the human voice grows weaker and weaker, until the last words of the dying are often only faint whispers. But Luke the physician, writing as directed by the Holy Spirit, took special care to tell us that Christ's last cry from the cross was not in subdued tones, but with a loud, triumphant voice. He spoke thus in order that all might know that He was willingly laying down His life. This fact bears witness to the truth that He was the Son of God. It was not strange that His last saying was at once a prayer and a quotation from the Old Testament, Psalm 31:5. This turning to the Scriptures was nothing new in the life of our Lord. He was a Man of Prayer and a Man of the Book, so the habits of a life-time were not changed easily. God's Word and prayer are always a great source of strength in life and in death.

When our Lord cried with a loud voice, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," He was in possession of all His powers, and of His own accord was giving up His life for our salvation. Those who heard His utterance knew that He was still conscious, and was consciously trusting in God, His heavenly Father, unto the very last.

These words of committal, which our Lord spoke just before He died, have been cherished by His followers through the centuries, many of whom such as Polycarp, Augustine, Bernard, Huss, Luther and Melancthon, have died with them upon their lips. These words show us the manner in which death should be met by all of God's children. We may meet the king of terrors with confidence and profound repose because he is a vanquished enemy, whose sting has been taken away by Christ's death. What a comfort!

Knowing that He was launching into eternity and believing that God was able and willing to keep His spirit, without hesitation or reservation the Saviour committed His spirit into His keeping, saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." This utterance of our Lord teaches us to take supreme care of the soul. Most of us try to take good care of our bodies and maintain good physical health, but frequently we are very careless about our souls, and this ought not to be the case.

This word "commend" is a term peculiar to the vocabulary of faith. It is the identical word employed by Paul when he spoke of the deposit which he had committed to the keeping of his Redeemer. Jesus Christ deposited His spirit in the hands of the Father for safekeeping until three days later when it would return to His body and He would rise as the victor over the grave. In like manner, when you place your soul on deposit with God, it is there for safekeeping until the day when you shall appear before Him. He is strong enough to guard that which you place on deposit with Him. Therefore, walk boldly to the bank of God's grace and place your soul on deposit with Him. Inasmuch as Christ committed His spirit to the Father, we would do well to follow His example in this regard.

Just as certainly as Christ said, "Father, I trust my spirit to thy hands," we ought to make a full committal of ourselves to Him. When Paul urged us to present our bodies, our very selves, to God, he never encouraged us to think that it would not cost us anything. To the contrary, he told us that it would cost us everything. Give yourself to God and He will accept you, transform you and use you far beyond your fondest expectations.

You need never have any care about the safety of that which you commit to the Father. It matters little what happens to the body of the Christian whose soul is committed to God in Christ. Man may kill the body, but he cannot harm the soul. Just as Christ committed His spirit to the Father, so let us commit our souls to Him. A good many people do not seem to know what to do with their souls. Some try to cleanse them by their good works. They endeavor to cover them with the rags of their self-righteousness. Others neglect them altogether. They are as careless and unconcerned about them as if they were of little or no value. But the example of our Saviour should cause us to commend them into the keeping of the heavenly Father. The voluntary committal of self into the hands of God for service is the only method by which any good may be accomplished in life. Into God's hands must go all that we are and all that we have. This is the only way to success in life and service.

Christ spoke as though He was making a deposit in a safe place, to which, after the crisis of death was over, He would come and recover it. Such is the force of that word. Who would be afraid of death when it means that the spirit is in His hands?

The Saviour committed His spirit into the hands of His Father in death because it had been in the Father's hands all through His life. Is this true of you? Have you committed your spirit into the hands of God? If so, it is in safe keeping.

Just as nothing could harm Noah after the hand of God had fastened the door of the ark, so nothing can touch the spirit of the Christian which is grasped by God's hand. None can pluck us thence. How safe and strong His hands are! According to John 10:29, Christ said, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Can you say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (II Timothy 1:12)? Commit your soul, your life, your all into the hands of the Father every day of life. Such a surrender will mean security and blessing for every day. The voluntary committal of self into the hands of God for service is the only method by which any good may be accomplished in life.

As Christ committed His spirit to the heavenly Father, so let us commit our souls to Him. Then, whether we live or die, we shall ever be with the Lord. We trust that when God shall call us home, we, too, shall be able, even when turning away from many who are dear to us, and leaving behind our life work, to say with gladness, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," joyfully going to Him and to the Father's house.