

## The Words of Surrender

There had been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of crucifixions in Jerusalem prior to the day that Jesus was crucified and probably thousands after Jesus was crucified. So, it wasn't just the fact that a man was being crucified. What made this one so unusual is the man who was on the cross that day.

There was a tension in the air. There were huge crowds that had flooded into the city of Jerusalem because it was Passover. Frankly, things could very easily get in a state of frenzy in Jerusalem during this time of year. There was an explosive sort of mob psychology that was at work that particular day. All morning long, the leaders had served as cheerleaders. They were among the people yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" All the crowds were joining in. The Roman soldiers were very much on alert that day. They had seen crowds of Jews like this turn violent before, so they were on their watch very carefully.

But now finally, Jesus is nailed to the cross. Some of the uproar seems to have subsided just a little bit, but now really strange things were beginning to happen. No one could quite put their finger on it, but there was something strange about what was going on, almost as if something was sneaking up on you, and you didn't know what it is. You couldn't tell for sure. Although it was high noon straight up and down, 12:00 in the middle of the day, it became dark; not just the kind of darkness that we are accustomed to seeing when a bad storm comes through during the day because it is still somewhat light, but it's pitch dark. It was the kind of dark that you just can feel. It's like midnight when it's overcast and the moon is not out, you can't see the stars and you're away from the city lights. You literally have a difficult time even seeing the hand in front of your face. It was that kind of dark in the middle of the day.

It was the kind of heavy darkness you could almost feel, so thick you could almost cut it with a knife. It was the kind of dark that makes birds go and roost. It was the kind of dark that makes soldiers light torches so they can see. It was the kind of darkness that didn't go away quickly like an eclipse would. But it lasted seemingly forever, three hours of absolute total darkness. Things were more than unusual, a strange, eerie and even frightening feeling.

Yet the amazing thing about these three hours is how briefly each one of the writers of the gospel tells the story of what was happening during the last hours of Jesus' life. The *Narrated Bible* which F. LaGard Smith edited several years ago has a marvelous way of putting the various accounts of the gospel altogether so that they read as one narrative. "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, darkness came over the land. About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of those standing there heard this, they said, he's calling for Elijah. Later, knowing that all was now completed and so that the scriptures would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar and put it on a stick and offered it to Jesus to drink. And the rest said, 'Now, leave him alone and let's see if Elijah will come and save him.' When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.' With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs. And after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and explained, 'Surely, this was the Son of God.'

Some women were watching from a distance, among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. When all the people who had gathered to witness the sight, saw what took place, they beat their breast and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching all these things.

During the last three hours of Jesus' life, from noon until 3:00 in the afternoon, Jesus said very little, but what he did say is extremely important. The very last thing that Jesus said was "Father, into thy hands I commit my **spirit**." The very first word he said there is the word, "Father." What a beautiful word that is. Throughout this long ordeal, and even just prior to it, we see Jesus in very frequent communication with his Father. Somewhere between the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says, "Father, the hour has come." But notice how he addressed God: "Father, the hour has come."

In his place of solitude, he prayed "Father, not my will but thine be done." After he had been nailed on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." While shouldering our sins he said "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Finally, just before his death, he said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Throughout all these circumstances, no matter what they were, Jesus never lost communication with his Father. He was praying to his Father, talking to his Father, in union with his Father and in communion with him. Except for that brief moment when God turned his back on Jesus, and Jesus cried out those words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus never broke that communion with his Father.

Unlike Jesus it doesn't take much of a distraction to get us off track for a day or a week or longer, to distract us and our attention away from Father, from the way God blesses us. We tend to forget to pray "God, thank you for taking care of me" or "God, thank you for doing this in my life." We're so easily distracted, but not Jesus. Regardless of the circumstances, Jesus was always in communion and communication with his Father.

Then Jesus said, "Father, into your hands..." For the last twelve hours, Jesus had been in the hands of others who had abused him. They had plucked his beard, stricken him in the face, brutally smashed him about the neck and the body and taken a crown made of long thorns and pressed that down onto his scalp and into his brow. They had abused him terribly. But now he is finally in the hands of his Father. He is no longer in the hands of those who brutalized him, but it's into your hands, Father, that I commit my spirit. He was embraced now by the loving arms of God where there would be safety and comfort and acceptance. I can't help but think there are times when perhaps we feel persecuted or brutalized

or lonely or whatever our situation might be. But just to know that we can be in the hands of God, not in the hands of those who would mistreat us or even in our own hands is a comforting thought.

Jesus also said: "I commit." "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." In the original language "commit," meant to deposit or to lay aside. In other words, nobody took Jesus' life away from him. He had said that even before his crucifixion. He said, "I lay down my own life. Nobody takes my life from me." Voluntarily, Jesus laid down his own life for you and for me. Jesus had done everything the Father had asked him to do. "It is finished." Jesus had become the propitiation for our sins, the atoning sacrifice. Jesus had become the satisfaction that God demanded for the sins of the world deflecting God's wrath from us. It was finished Jesus offered himself as a substitute for us. (1 John 2:1-2)

It can really be outlined this way:

1. We've got a problem – we are sinners condemned to death
2. There's a solution – a sacrifice without blemish, sinless, was required
3. There's a result – Jesus offered his own sinless life shed his own blood and satisfied God's demands for reconciliation.

Jesus said "Into your hands, Father, I commit my spirit." Almost ten centuries earlier David said the same thing but added a request "Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth." (Psalms 31:5) It is a statement of surrender. That's what Jesus had done throughout his whole earthly life. He trusted God and had surrendered his life in total submission to God Almighty. Jesus knew with great confidence that resurrection and glory awaited him.

It was over. He had accomplished everything God had asked him to do. The full payment for our sin debt had been paid. Jesus, our atoning sacrifice, had made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. Perhaps we can now better understand what John meant when he said "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We must commit. We must endure. We must commit our lives to him. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." (Romans 6:3-8) We must also stay focused and faithful. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning it's a shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such

opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:13) Amazing Grace #1256 Steve Flatt, March 31, 1996