

Luke 23:32-46 (Good Friday)

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[0 : 00] Can God be trusted?

250 years ago, a French philosopher, Voltaire, wrote a novel exploring this very question. The main character, a young man, Candide, grew up in a castle living a sheltered life, part of a noble family, being taught by his mentor that everything is for the best in this, the best of all possible worlds. But one day he was thrown out of his castle, captured by soldiers, coerced into military service, taken away from the woman he loved. Later on, he was shipwrecked, flogged, and nearly executed. He witnessed wars, earthquakes, and fires that killed thousands of people with no apparent rhyme or reason. So gradually he abandoned the naive, trusting optimism he had been taught as a child. He concluded at the end, let us cultivate our own garden. In other words, there's no overarching meaning to life or to human history. All that we can do is try to make a decent life for ourselves, maybe a few others around us, and leave it at that.

[1 : 23] Perhaps that's the conclusion you've come to as well. Maybe God exists somewhere out there, but if he does, God doesn't seem to be much help.

So ultimately it's up to us to make our own meaning, to carve out a home for ourselves in this cold, hard world. Even for those of us who identify as Christians, who believe in the God who has revealed himself in the Bible, do we not wrestle with this same question, can God really be trusted? Of course, in principle, we would say yes. But sometimes our patterns of life betray the opposite inclination. When we're constantly, fretfully working and can never stop and rest.

When we're intent on controlling the outcomes of our life and therefore controlling other people. When we engage in addictive patterns because deep down we believe that God won't give me the comfort I need.

when we live in despair or bitterness or coldness because forgiveness is just too hard. When we give up praying because praying feels useless and pointless.

[2 : 52] Or when we bargain with God. God, I will trust you if. According to the Bible, human beings have had trust issues with God since the beginning of humanity.

Back in Genesis 3, the tempter asked the man and woman, did God really say? Is God really good? Does he really have your best interest at heart? And ever since that time, human beings have repeatedly taken matters into our own hands.

But what we see tonight, what we've heard in the readings tonight, is that there was one human being who trusted God perfectly, completely, without wavering in his life and in his death.

Tonight I want to focus on Jesus' last words in Luke 23, verse 46. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

[3 : 59] Now if you read the four Gospels, if you compare the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, there are actually seven words that Jesus speaks while he's hanging on the cross.

The first three words that Jesus speaks demonstrate his love and concern for other people around him. even in his hour of great distress.

If you look up to verse 34, Jesus prayed for those who were crucifying him. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. In John 19, Jesus provided for his grieving mother.

Woman, behold your son. In verse 43, Jesus pardoned the criminal who called out for mercy.

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. So the first three words are focused on the other people around Jesus and Jesus showing his care and concern for them even while he's hanging on a cross about to die.

[5 : 06] The next two words that Jesus speaks are words of anguish and agony as he bears the weight of our sin and guilt. as he longs for the comfort of God's presence.

If you read in Matthew and in Mark, Jesus cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And in the gospel of John, Jesus cries out, I thirst.

But the last words, the last two words that Jesus speaks recorded in Luke and in John are confident declarations of trust in God.

It is finished. As it says in John, and here as we're looking at tonight, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Tonight I want to focus on two aspects of this last verse of Jesus' trust in God. Number one, that Jesus trusted God's authority, specifically the authority of God's word.

[6 : 12] It's remarkable that the last four words Jesus speaks from the cross are all taken from the Psalms. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The opening words of Psalm 22.

A prayer of a righteous sufferer. It is finished. The closing words of Psalm 22. A cry of victory that his work was complete. I thirst.

Psalm 63, Psalm 143, the psalmist is crying out to God in the midst of a literal and spiritual desert. And here, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Quoting from Psalm 31. Jesus lived and studied and breathed and preached and prayed the scriptures he knew them by heart. He understood his own identity and calling and destiny in light of them.

The scriptures were the story and the song and the framework that shaped his life more than anything else. And the scriptures, specifically the Psalms, were what he turned to in his hour of affliction.

[7 : 22] Jesus trusted and lived by the authority of God's word. Psalm 31, we read part of it earlier this evening. It's a prayer of an afflicted person.

A prayer of someone who's crying out to God in the midst of distress. Later on in that psalm, it says, I am in distress, wasted from grief, spent with sorrow.

Those who see me in the street flee from me. They scheme together against me as they plot to take my life. But that psalm is also a prayer of trust. Several times in the psalm, the author reaffirms his trust in God.

I trust in you, O Lord. I say, you are my God. My times are in your hand. Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and my persecutors. And Jesus embraced the words of this psalm as his very own. Quoting in particular from verse 5, a simple and poignant expression of trust into your hand. I commit my spirit.

[8 : 31] For you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. You see, Jesus knew all along that according to the Scriptures, he must suffer and die in order to fulfill God's plan and establish God's kingdom and rescue God's people.

You see, on his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus had told the disciples, he said, see, we are going up to Jerusalem. And everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets, that is, in the Scriptures, will be accomplished.

He will be delivered over to the Gentiles, mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, and after flogging him, they will kill him. You might ask, how did he know this?

Simply from the Scriptures. Where was it written? Well, Jesus would have seen this pattern in the major biblical narratives.

For example, the life of Joseph. Joseph was rejected by his brothers. He was sold into slavery, falsely accused and imprisoned, nearly forgotten and left to die.

[9 : 53] And only after all that was he exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh and saved Egypt from famine and provided for his family. His suffering came before his glory.

or David who was persecuted by King Saul. Spent years alone in the wilderness, abandoned, mistreated, betrayed, and only after his suffering was he exalted to royal glory to establish his kingdom.

Jesus would have seen that pattern in the stories, in the Scriptures, and he would have known the prophecies. the prophecy of Isaiah about a suffering servant who would be beaten and disgraced and spit upon and only later vindicated and raised to life or the prophecy of Zechariah that one day the people will look upon one whom they have pierced and they would mourn.

One whom they had killed and yet on that day there would be a fountain opened for cleansing from sin. Jesus knew the Scriptures and he knew that according to the Scriptures he had come to be that suffering servant and that promised atoning sacrifice.

And so he willingly submitted to God's plan as it was laid out in the Scriptures trusting that God would not abandon him to the grave. You see, Luke wants us to know Jesus' death was not simply a senseless tragedy.

[11:38] Jesus was not simply an unfortunate victim of injustice. Certainly he was the recipient of injustice. But every step along the way Jesus was willingly, actively, confidently entrusting himself to God the Father.

Jesus' suffering was not an indication of his weakness. Rather, the way he both resisted and endured suffering displayed his strength.

His last words, Luke says, he called out in a loud voice. That was very unusual for a crucified man. Normally, a crucified person would die of suffocation gradually.

But Jesus spoke with intentionality and confidence and authority even with his dying breath entrusting himself to God, to God's word and to God's plan.

Jesus trusted God's authority. That's the first thing we see. But the second thing we see is that Jesus trusted God's goodness. Jesus added one word to the psalm he quoted from.

[12:55] David prayed, into your hand I commit my spirit. Jesus prayed, Father, into your hand I commit my spirit.

Jesus lived and died not only with a trust and willingness to submit to God's authority but with a confidence in God's fatherly goodness. If you read the gospel of Luke, from beginning to end Jesus' life was oriented toward his heavenly father.

Jesus' first words in the gospel of Luke at the age of twelve he says, I must be in my father's house. Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?

As we see, Jesus constantly turned to his father in prayer. He would often withdraw to desolate places and pray. He continued in prayer to God all night before choosing his twelve disciples. He took Peter and John and James up to the mountain to pray. He taught his disciples always to pray and not lose heart. Prayer wasn't just a routine for Jesus, it was his source of energy and joy and wisdom and intimacy with the father whom he loved and trusted.

[14:14] And Jesus trusted the goodness and sufficiency of God the father's provision. Jesus said, if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will the heavenly father give good gifts to those who ask him?

That's the kind of father in heaven that Jesus is talking about. A God who is generous and good to his children. Jesus said, my father has assigned to me a kingdom.

And then he said to his disciples, don't fear little flock, it is the father's good pleasure to give you this kingdom. All that is mine will now become yours.

And so Jesus died the same way he had lived entrusting himself into the father's faithful hands. Trusting God's goodness.

Can God be trusted? Look at Jesus. This is no philosophy of optimism reinforced by a sheltered upbringing.

[15:27] This is no vague platitude about every cloud having a silver lining. This is no far away higher power who is irrelevant and distant from our human sufferings.

In Jesus Christ, the God of all creation has come near, has become human. has suffered death in order to rescue us from our sin and one day to renew all creation.

Even if you don't understand many of his ways, can you not trust his heart? John Stott wrote, I could never myself trust in God if it were not for the cross.

I have entered many Buddhist temples and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world.

But each time, I have turned away. And I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness.

[16:48] He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us.

He gave everything for those who deserved nothing from him. Hebrews 4, it says, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

You see, because of Jesus, because of his unwavering trust and perfect obedience to God the Father, we can now share in his intimate trusting relationship with the Father, knowing that his Father is now ours.

Jesus not only called God Father, he taught his disciples to do the same. Because all that is his has now become ours. And so we can rest from our works, which are never finished, and rejoice in the completion of his.

[18 : 15] We can give up trying to control our life and control other people because we've surrendered to him and he has us in his hands.

We can find freedom from addictive patterns because we have one who will never leave us, never forsake us, and who promises joy that nothing else in this world can provide.

We can forbear and forgive because he has forgiven us so much. With Jesus, we can entrust ourselves into the hands of a faithful God.

Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. Let us pray. I invite you to pray with me in response to three words of Scripture.

First, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

[19 : 32] Lord Jesus, as we consider your sacrifice on the cross, may we trust in you and receive life now and forever.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Lord Jesus, may we rest in the completeness of your sacrifice for us and may we see in your death a forever convincing proof of your love for us.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Lord, we pray that you would grant us the endurance that we do not have within ourselves, that even in our darkest hour we may not grow weary or lose heart.

May we know that you have gone before us and may we look forward to the joy that you have promised to all who love you. We pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.