

Father, into Your Hands

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the movie, *Sleepless in Seattle*, a young mother dies, leaving behind her husband and her 7-year-old son. At one point, a year or so after the mother has died, the little boy asks his father, “Do you believe in heaven?” The father replies, “I never did, but now I don’t know. I dream of your mother sometimes and she is so real.” Well, those of us who were raised with the belief in life after death sometimes have a hard time imagining how people cope with the thought that their deaths will be the utter end of themselves and of the ones they love; but we all must face the question: After we die, is there something more; something next? Well, Jesus knew there was something next, and his last words from the cross bear witness to his faith. Today on *Groundwork*, we look at another word from Jesus as he died. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now on the second to the last program, program number six in our last words from the cross—the seven last words that we glean from the four gospels. We have looked at five of them so far, and we have one very triumphant word to go, which we will look at in the final episode in this series, coming up next; but today, we are going to go to a final word from Jesus from the cross that is found only in Luke’s gospel.

DAVE BAST

Right; and before we get to that, maybe we should back up just a little bit in this story because again, as we pointed out more than once, the different gospels include some minor details that are unique often to each particular writer; and in Luke’s case, there is an incident that happened to Jesus on the way to the cross that is both unique and just a bit puzzling. We will pick up the reading from Luke 23:26:

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁸Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore, the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ ³¹For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” So, a very curious thing, which you do not find in Matthew, Mark, or John...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where on his way to the cross, Jesus has a little time out, and despite all the whipping and the agony and the fact that he is going to die, he stops and delivers a little sermon, of all things.

DAVE BAST

Right; now, Matthew and Mark also mention Simon of Cyrene as the man who helped Jesus carry his cross, so...in fact, one of those identifies him as Simon of Cyrene, the father of Rufus and...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, yes.

DAVE BAST

I forget the other brother...Rufus's brother, but one of things that probably indicates is that people to whom the gospels were addressed—for whom they were written in the early Church—knew these folks, because their names are mentioned...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And the implication is they were there; they have become believers now, too; you could go ask them about it. Ask Simon...ask old Simon about the time he carried Jesus' cross...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

Which is kind of fascinating.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Jesus is going to the cross and there are all these people following him, including people who loved him, apparently, and who were mourning, and they were audibly weeping; and Jesus sees this and stops and gives a terrible word of judgment, saying: Don't worry about me; I am going to be fine, but if you do not get on God's side of things, the day is going to come when Jerusalem is going to fall, and it is going to be so horrible you are going to wish you never had children because you are going to see your children die. You are going to want the mountains to fall on you; and this isn't the first time in Luke that Jesus pronounces a word of judgment. It happened also in Luke 19, in what we often call the Triumphal Entry, but it wasn't that triumphal in Luke because before Jesus even gets to the city he weeps; he stops and weeps and pronounces judgment.

DAVE BAST

Right; "How often I would have gathered you," he says to the city—to its inhabitants—"as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you refused—you would not..."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because they failed; he said: You failed to recognize what time it is, and the time was the coming of the Messiah, which seems strange at the Triumphal Entry because they were all just saying: Blessed be the King! It looked like they recognized Jesus, but they were doing it for the wrong reasons; and so, here is this note of judgment: Jerusalem is going to fall (and it will in 70 AD)...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus says that is going to be judgment from God. It is not exactly what you would have thought Jesus would have said at this particular point. When you see people mourning and weeping, you might think Jesus would stop and say: Oh, my children, be ye comforted!

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I've got this. I shall handle all things and all will be well; but no, he stops and says: Yeah, you're in a lot of trouble if you don't get with God's program.

DAVE BAST

He does, and it is a very sobering reminder of the importance for us to respond with faith and with trust. What Jesus does for us, what he did for humankind, he offers to one and all freely, but we have the responsibility to say yes to him, and to put our trust in him. You know: How often I would have gathered you, he says to the people of Jerusalem, but you refused. Somehow, human freedom comes to bear on this most momentous of questions; and as you say, Scott, it is rather jarring, this note of judgment that intrudes on the story of the cross, because God so loved the world, you know, that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish...the most famous verse in the Bible; but for those who don't believe, the consequences are dire...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And the next time, by the way, that we hear the words: You will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" are in the book of Revelation in connection with Christ's return. From Chapter 6—Revelation Chapter 6—which includes one of the most jarring phrases in the Bible. They will say at the end, in the judgment, hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; and you think: How can a lamb have wrath? But it is true, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For Jesus, of course, on his way to die for the sins of the world, I guess it shouldn't be too surprising that judgment might have been high in his mind at that particular moment. When you are on your way to the cross to die for the sins of the world, this is as serious as it gets; and so, Jesus isn't going to stop and deliver some cheery little sermonette to say it will be fine, chin up, you know. He is going to stop and say: Look, I am dying because of judgment. Sin is this serious. What I am about to do is this serious. So, that makes perfect sense that we can...and we like to skip over judgment and hell in the Church today. A lot of preachers just literally...even sometimes the revised Common Lectionary, which is a scripture guide for preachers...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Will just all of a sudden delete three verses in the middle of a passage, and say: Oh, which verses are those? Oh, the ones where Jesus talks about judgment and hell. Jesus talked about hell more than anybody in the New Testament. You cannot ignore it. The cross tells us that it is exactly that serious; and so, for Jesus to speak these words on the way to the cross makes a lot of sense; but of course, what we want to get to in just a moment is the next word Jesus speaks from that cross, and we will take that up in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are in Luke 23, Dave, the crucifixion of Jesus, and we want to get at one of the last words of Jesus from the cross. We just looked at a curious thing that happened on route to Golgotha—to the crucifixion site—where Jesus makes a dire prediction of judgment on Jerusalem. Now we want to get to...starting at verse 44 of Luke 23, and hear the word from the cross we want to think about.

DAVE BAST

So, Luke writes: It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until 3:00 in the afternoon. ⁴⁵For the sun stopped shining and the curtain of the Temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁴⁷The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man!” ⁴⁸And when all the people who had gathered to witness the sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away, ⁴⁹but all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

DAVE BAST

So, Luke is...it is kind of interesting the way he describes Jesus’ death, and he has a number of short phrases, but we are not quite sure in what order they happened. He states them one after another. He says that it was noon and there was darkness; the sun stopped shining. What did that mean? What was that like? Not presumably a natural occurrence—not an eclipse of the sun—but suddenly this eerie, supernatural darkness descends, and the curtain of the Temple was torn. That probably happened when Jesus died, but Luke states it first; and Jesus calls out with a loud voice, and Luke says that what he said was, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” It is a little bit curious because all of the gospels say that at the end, just as he died, Jesus shouted something, but they report different things that he shouted, so we assume he said all three, but not quite sure in what order he said them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but for this particular word, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” it doesn’t seem super dramatic, and if you didn’t believe in God or in a heavenly Father you might think: Well, that is just delusional thinking. He is dying and, you know, wishing for a better life, and it won’t happen; but what is very interesting about this is the effect... So, we will want to think about the actual word, and we will do that more in the last segment of this program, but this word had tremendous effect. It convicted a Roman soldier that he [Jesus] was a righteous man, and then the people who had come there to just sort of watch the public execution...you know, it was cheap, free entertainment, sick though that seems to us...but this was true through a lot of history, public executions were carnival atmospheres...but they heard this word and they went away beating their breasts...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Like this wasn’t all that fun after all. They were shaken up. Why, what happened?

DAVE BAST

Did you catch that? Because this is the very crowd that is mocking him, that is laughing at him, that is...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Hey, come down from the cross, Mr. Messiah, and we'll believe in you! And now, after the darkness and after the loud cry and with these last terrible words, and in some sense, words of faith and commendation, they beat their breasts. It is like they are deflated like a balloon that has become untied, and they go home in a very somber mood...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Very different.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it may be on one level...I am going to suggest another level in just a second...but it may be that they recognized that some horrible miscarriage of justice had happened here. Surely this was a righteous man, the soldier cries out, meaning: Oh, no! We just watched an innocent man die; which is horrible, right? So, that alone could have upset the people and sent them away beating their breasts and caused the soldier to say what he did; but maybe it was also because these words made such an impression because of how Jesus said it. Usually when people died on a cross, their last sound was sort of like: Pffff...huh...; you know, a croak and you are gone; but we are told in the Greek language that Jesus cried out with *ph?n? megal?*, which means voice loud, from which we get our English word *megaphone*, an amplified voice—a *ph?n? megal?*—a megaphone voice...was there some divine majesty in what Jesus somehow summoned, and did it give them the willies a little bit and scare them silly? Maybe.

DAVE BAST

Maybe; I don't know...I always thought that the loud cry was the last word that John records, which we are going to consider in our next program...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that he maybe followed that with this. We are taking them in a different order for a particular reason, but he followed this kind of breathing this in a calmer voice; but maybe you are right, Scott. I never thought of that before, that Luke does say he used his megaphone voice, and with that he died. They also all say he breathed his last. Literally, to use the Latin word, he *expired*, he breathed out his final breath; but again, characteristically, the prayer that he offers here...and it is a prayer...begins and is addressed to his Father. So, whatever else has happened, at this moment Jesus knows to whom he is committing himself; and again, as so often with the last words on the cross, he is quoting from a psalm here. This is actually found in Psalm 31:5. In the midst of a passage where the psalmist is calling for the Lord, in whom he has put his trust, he says: [paraphrased] Lord, I have taken refuge in you. Let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. (Well, that didn't happen to Jesus here on the cross, but this is the context.) Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge...and then verse 5: Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, Lord, my faithful God...as for me, I trust in the Lord. I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. Beautiful psalm, and surely Jesus is living that now.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure; and once again, we talked about this in the previous program when he quotes from Psalm 22. Jesus is so saturated with the Word, particularly the psalms, as good, devout Jewish people were and are, that these

words come readily to his lips even in extremis—even in this extreme circumstance; that he is fulfilling scripture; that this is part of the plan; and that, too. So, yes, maybe the megaphone voice scared people, but the fact that he seemed to die so willingly, that he seemed to be so in control, that he seemed to have so much confidence in his Father to whom he is commending his spirit; that, too, probably made a deep, deep impression on the people and is part of why the soldier said: This looks like a righteous man to me...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He looks like he has an awful close relationship to the God he calls Father; and that, too, made a deep, deep, searing impression on the people standing nearby.

DAVE BAST

It sure did. It is a wonderful lesson for us, too. Many, many Christians through the centuries have found in scripture a comfort in their last hour; either memorized and spoken by them or read to them by those nearby; and Jesus models that for us, too, as he... for him death was not a leap into the void; it was not just sort of a journey into nothingness or who knows where; it was a committing of himself to his Father; and how that can be applicable further to our lives is what we want to consider in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and the program number six of a seven-part series on the last things Jesus said from the cross; and in this program we are looking at something we read in Luke: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit; and we have looked at what that meant in the life of Jesus; why it elicited such a huge reaction of people being cut to the quick; but now I think we also want to think a little bit about...on a more pastoral, practical level...what does this word promise to us today—that Jesus would die with that kind of confidence in his Father?

DAVE BAST

It's true; and Scott, you mentioned early in the program the puzzlement that many believers have that people could face death with no hope of anything beyond and not be sort of overwhelmed by that; but the fact is, most people don't give it much thought. We seem to ourselves to be immortal. One of my favorite jokes supposedly was told by Sigmund Freud, where the fellow turns to his wife and says: You know, if one of us should die, I think I would go live in Paris. We find it impossible to conceive that it is not the other person who is going to die, it is actually me; and so, people do kind of live their lives without giving much thought to what lies next—what lies beyond.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we said in the opening of the program, referring to a movie, *Sleepless in Seattle*, where a father is asked by his little boy whose mother has died: Do you believe in heaven? He said: I never did. For those of us who were raised with the belief in heaven or hell, and for those of us who were comforted and are comforted with the knowledge that there is, not only just life after death, but it can be a profoundly wonderful life with God after death, it is hard for us to imagine how people just have such a bleak view of things. Jesus didn't. We saw another word earlier in this series to the penitent thief on the cross: Today you will be with me in paradise; and now in this word, Jesus knows there is a next. His last heartbeat isn't going to be the end of him; and it is a promise for all of us that neither will it be the end of each of us.

DAVE BAST

Right; now, though, maybe we should point out a bit of the complexity of Jesus' final words. We have put them in a certain order in this series, somewhat different from the traditional order, but all of the four gospels say that at the end...at the very end...after three terrible hours of darkness, after all of these many hours of suffering beginning with the terrible beating that he endured before the crucifixion, which would have

lacerated his back and opened wounds, and then to be nailed to the cross, to be suspended where every breath is an agony, and finally after three hours of darkness all four of them say that he cried out...he shouted something and then he said something, and died; but they record different words that we have to piece together. So, in John's gospel, which we will look at in our final program, the word is: It is finished; and in Matthew and Mark the word is the cry of dereliction: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But here in Luke, it is this statement of faith and confidence: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. So...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the tension is obvious, right? Did Jesus die screaming: Why? Or did he die saying: Father, into your hands I... Was the Father there? Well, he said: You have abandoned me in one gospel; or was the Father, you know, there very much so that Jesus can say: Into your hands... So, there is a tension there, and it may not be easy to resolve. Did he die in dereliction or in trust? Abandoned by God or abandoning himself *to* God?

DAVE BAST

And the answer is yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The answer is yes. Did the Father turn his back on Jesus or his face toward him? Yes, yes both; and you know, I think that if we unpack that tension a little bit, Dave, probably it is something more of us can identify with than we might at first suspect.

DAVE BAST

I think so, because so often, especially if we have undergone tragedy or loss of some very serious kind, we feel the absence of God keenly. We wonder, are our prayers simply going up and bouncing off the clouds and rebounding on top of our heads; that there is no one there; no one to hear; no one to listen. We are even, maybe, tempted in our bleakest hours to say there is no heavenly Father into whose hands we can commit our spirits. So, yes; we get that, I think; but at the same time, God's saints have testified through the ages, some of whom have suffered almost unbelievable, unimaginable losses in their life, that nevertheless he was there with them in the shadow of death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have referenced this book before, I think, even in this series, but the pastor and theologian Fleming Rutledge has written a very large, landmark book recently called *The Crucifixion*. At one point, she tells the story of a theologian whose son was killed in a tragic accident; and somebody later asked this theologian: How had you managed to go on as a Christian after such a devastating loss? How can you make it and what is it like to be a Christian after that kind of a loss of your child? And the theologian pointed to this very tension: Abandonment by God and the closeness of God, and it is both; and the father said that is what it is like. Sometimes God feels like he is far away; sometimes he feels like he is so very close; and sometimes it is both at the same time. So we live in this tension between these two last words of the cross—between: My God, my God, why, and Father, into your hands.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is where a lot of us live; and the good news is, is that the Gospel has a word to speak to both.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and I think, too, that this word of Jesus from the cross is a word that we can very readily take up and use ourselves. It can be found on our lips, and not only in our last hour, although I certainly hope when my last hour comes if I have any consciousness of it, if I am not totally out of it, that I will be able to pray this; but it is something we can pray when we get up in the morning and when we go to bed at night.

I remember...I mean, this may sound a little bit dramatic, but whenever I used to get on an airplane I would often pause as I got in my seat, close my eyes and into silence say: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit; not that I was, you know, thinking something was going to happen or afraid of flying, but just this... Before you take a journey, when you get up in the morning, when you go to bed at night, to live with that kind of closeness of committing yourself to the Father's hands.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. It is the posture we all have as disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; thanks be to God. Well, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee with Dave Bast. Please let us know how we can help you to dig deeper into the Bible. We have a website, groundworkonline.com. Visit it and give us passages and topics for future *Groundwork* programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/father-into-your-hands>

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