

Some friends were hanging out one day... and the conversation grimly turned to the issue of death. ... One of the friends asked the others...
"What would you like people to say about you at your funeral?"

(That is a good question... isn't it...? Have you ever considered it...?)

"Well..." one of the friends in this group answered... *"I would want people to say, 'He was a great humanitarian who cared about his community.'" ...*
"Hmmm... Wow..." came the thought-filled replies...

Then a second friend responded, *"I would want people to say, 'He was a great husband and father, an example for many to follow.'" "Ohhhh... yes..."* each seemed to mumble... except the third friend.

The third friend was deep in his own thought... until the others pressed him for a response. ... Suddenly he gave them what they waited for... he answered, *"I would hope someone says, 'Look, he's moving!'"*

Many today ... and I say this of Christians as well... are actually leading desperate lives... that yearn for longevity... they (like this third friend...) want to prolong death... because they live in terror of it. ... Even though a detailed national survey from 2003... claimed that 92 percent of Americans believe in God... 85 percent believe in heaven... and 82 percent believe in miracles... the deeper truth is... that our religious belief in a heavenly afterlife... does not calm the fears of the average person... to face their own death. ... Rather than the truth of the **Gospel**... the most trusted priesthood of our society...the only one in which people *really* believe... is the medical profession... The priesthood of Doctors... drugs... and medical technology... provides people with their strongest... and an

unquestioned **hope** - for longevity. It is the sole unchallenged good of contemporary Western life... as if it can deny the inevitable.

You have probably all seen the life insurance commercial... where this guy walks onto the set all somber-looking... and explains the benefits of their policy. ... Then he says you and I should sign up... so our families will be taken care of "*in case the **unthinkable** should happen.*" ... Of course, by "the unthinkable," he means "*in case you or I die.*"

But the thing is... death isn't unthinkable... ... it's **inevitable!**

What kind of culture calls things that are inevitable - unthinkable? What kind of world refuses to think about what is certain... but instead spends its time worrying about things that aren't?

Well... today we are going to spend time discussing our cultural taboo.

This morning our passage takes us to the death of Jesus Christ. ... Here are the questions we will ask of this passage: How did Jesus approach death? ... How does that relate to how He approached life? ... What does that mean about how we might face death. ... What does that mean about how we should live? ... Our primary focus will be on the last words that Jesus uttered.

Some people's last words seem to embody the idea of mystery. ... Some seem to suggest resignation. ... Some keep **laughing** even at the end. Jesus' final words are words of trust... dependence... and faith. ... Jesus faced death by laying his life in the hands of God. ... As we consider these words... we'll think about the kind of trust that Jesus had... and whether

that kind of trust is possible for us as well. ... We will observe that Jesus died the way He lived. ... We'll talk about how we can live... the way we'd like to die.

The sister of Steve Jobs has recently reported that his last words just before dying were, "*OH WOW. OH WOW. OH WOW.*"

Henry Beecher Ward's last words are reported as being, "*Now comes the mystery.*"

Lord Byron's last words: "*Now I shall go to sleep. Goodnight.*"

When Voltaire died... it is said that a priest asked him to renounce Satan and he replied, "*This is no time to be making enemies.*"

George Washington said, "*I die hard, but am not afraid to go.*"

18th Century comic playwright...Oscar Wilde's last words were less intense. He is reported to have said, "*Either that wallpaper goes or I do.*"

There is something powerful about last words. ... the idea that the last thing you say... might sum up your life in some way. ... We are fascinated by last words. ...They say something about a person's life... they say something about a person's death. ... And somehow they say something about our lives and our deaths as well.

Let's look at how Christ approached His death... and observe His final words...

Luke 23:44-46

As Jesus approached His death... the Heavens make their own declaration. ... They join the discussion. Throughout Scripture... whenever God moves creation to speak... something of GREAT importance is about to happen.

Thirty-three years **earlier** ... there had been dazzling **light** in the night when Jesus was born. ... Now there was darkness at noontime... as He died. ... Revelation shows how Creation will again have a lot to say – at the return of Christ

What did it mean? ... The Old Testament identified darkness as a cosmic sign of mourning. ...

Amos 8:9-10 (ESV)

“And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

Jesus' death was a time for mourning. ... The darkness also signified - the reign of evil. It was mentioned by Jesus when He was arrested. At that time He said, "*But this is your hour—when darkness reigns*" (Luke 22:53). Demons must have been squealing and shrieking their delight... Devilish music... [[*probably fresh out of Nashville or Bakersfield...*]] swirled in the darkness.

What was actually happening? ... In those three black hours... sin was poured upon Christ's soul. ... Peter makes what happened very clear:

1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus in full,...lucid... consciousness... took on your sins and mine... and bore them with a unity of understanding and pain that none can fathom. ... All analogies or explanations of what happened fall short, although they might bring us partial understanding.

I loved it when the prize in my Cracker Jacks box was a toy magnifying glass. ... Guys... do you remember all the potential damage we used to do with those things...? I must have spent hours holding it under the sun's rays... moving it up and down until I could get the tiniest white dot of concentrated light on a leaf... or a bug... or an ant. ... Smoke would start to ascend as it would begin to burn. (I think only boys burned bugs like this!) ...If you agree with me that this was cruel... just imagine the cruel pain that our Lord suffered. During those three hours... our sins had a laser-like focus... pointed on Christ's soul... as He hung on the cross. He suffered the fiery wrath of God. ... With horror... Christ found his entire being to be sin in the Father's sight.

Wave after wave of our sin was poured over Christ's sinless soul. ... Again and again... during those three hours... His soul recoiled and convulsed... as all your lies... and my lies... hatreds... jealousies... murders... lust... sexual sin... and pride were poured upon his purity. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.."

Near the end of this ultimate cruelty... another sign occurred. The curtain of the Temple was torn in two.

This curtain was the grandest of the thirteen curtains in the temple. ... It was woven with expensive yarns from Babylon in blue... white... red... and purple... with embroidered cherubim. The veil was made of very sturdy material which would require great force to tear it. ... Alfred Edersheim said the veil was... so heavy, that it needed 300 priests to hang it. (That is a **heavy** curtain.)

The purpose of this curtain was to block all eyes from and forbid access to the Holy of Holies... except once a year... when the high priest entered with blood... offered for himself and the sins of the people. ... But now... in the inner sanctum of the temple... this great curtain (as thick as a man's hand) was slashed in two as if a great sword had sliced through it. ... This was a fateful omen of the coming destruction of the temple. The judgment had begun.

But even more... it was a joyous sign of our new spiritual access. ... With the curtain torn... the Ark of the Covenant... the blood-covered mercy seat... and the cherubim... were momentarily opened to the world. That

afternoon... the way into God's presence opened to all. The writer of Hebrews exults:

Hebrews 10:19-22 (ESV)

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Unlimited access to God would now be available to every child of God.

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Now let's examine these final words of Christ.

Luke 23:46

The final cries of Jesus are strong proclamations. ... This is incredible given what He has been through over the past 18 hours... and especially these last three. ... Jesus died... **not** with a whimper... but with a **shout**. Rarely are last words so strong... or so confident.

In order to learn how to face death... we look at how Jesus faced His death. How did he die? ... Our text says He "committed" His spirit into the hands of the Father. ... This word "commit"... is an interesting one. ...It means to set something before someone... to offer it up. ... It's used frequently of ideas. ... I offer you an idea... and then after I have said it... it is no longer under my control as a private thought in my head. You can

then take my idea and distort it... think the worst of me for saying it... or of course admire my extreme brilliance. ... But you now have control of it.

Several gospel authors use this word... when Jesus tells his parables. “He offered them a parable, saying...” ... and Jesus watched to see what they would do with them.

But it’s also used of people... entrusting them to someone else. ... At the end of his life... Paul uses it during his goodbye speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He says... in Acts 20:32... “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.” ... The idea... is that I’ve done all I can do... and now I trust that God will do something with it.

As Jesus dies... He says... *“God, here is my life. I have finished my part and now I give it to you to do with as you see fit.”*

These words don’t come out of nowhere for Jesus. ... If we look at his life... we realize that **this** is the way He lived His entire life. ... **Jesus faced death the same way he faced life.**

Luke begins his gospel with a story of Jesus’ trust in God being **tested**. Right after Jesus began His public ministry... Satan tried to get Jesus to **dis**trust God. ... He got Jesus really hungry... and really tired... so he had the best opportunity. ... Then he paraded before Jesus many of the things that frequently get **us** to abandon trusting God. Jesus was offered sensual pleasures... like food... power over others... and the insistence that God

prove Himself. ... But Jesus didn't give up trusting. ... He lived His life trusting God... just as He ended His life - trusting God.

That points us to the principle... that facing death... begins now. ... We don't spend our lives preparing for what we **might** say on our deathbed. ... We spend our lives **living** the way we want to **die**.

Jesus' life and death show us that... clearly and powerfully. ... Facing death with God happens by living life with God.

These final words of Christ... as with many of the statements that Jesus made from the cross... is a quote from a psalm. ... These words are from Psalm 31... a psalm attributed to David that begins by talking about finding refuge in God. ... In the psalm... David is the object of **unjust** punishment. You will remember that King Saul... in a jealous rage is chasing David all around the wilderness... because he wanted to kill David. He was jealous of David's success and popularity. David is what theologians call the "righteous sufferer." ... But even in the midst of that kind of **UN**just suffering... David expresses faith. ... He asks God in verse 4... to "*Free me from the trap that is set before me.*" ... In the next verse he declares his faith that God will do just that... by saying in verse 5... "*Into your hands I commit my spirit... redeem me... O Lord, the God of truth.*"

But that is not the end. ... As the psalm progresses... we get to see the result of David's trust. ... It works out in the end. ... In verse 8 he declares "*You have set my feet in a spacious place.*" ... In verse 22... "*You heard*

*my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.” ... Then... the psalm ends with David telling others that because God was faithful to him... **we** can trust that God will be faithful to **us**. ... Verse 24 concludes, “*Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.*”*

I think that **Jesus** had this entire psalm in mind... when He quoted part of it in breathing His last breath. ... He knew that David had to trust God... and that trust worked out. ... So He said that He was going to trust God in the same way... knowing that He was trusting the same Heavenly Father... and there was just as good a good chance... that it would work out the same way. ... Jesus followed the example that David set of trusting God...

1 Peter 2:22-23 (ESV)

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

We need to need to **live** as we are going to **die**. We are called to live and die like Jesus. He did not threaten... but continued entrusting Himself to Him Who judges justly.

But the truth is... when **we** are reviled – we revile back!!! Don't we...? Whenever someone tries to hurt us... we lash back!!! We don't get mad – we get even!!!

This is because we do not **entrust** ourselves to Him Who judges justly. ... We entrust ourselves to... **ourselves**... and our own sense of justice. ... We simply have a hard time believing that God's justice is better than our

own. We constantly feel that **our** justice is the only way. We don't entrust ourselves to Him Who judges justly – because there is a problem with our belief. We don't believe that He will act the way we would **want** Him to... He won't act soon enough... or forceful enough.

Oh! How much vengeance we seek... because each and every day... we do not live like Jesus lived... and we do not die like Jesus died... We are unwilling to entrust ourselves to Him Who judges justly...

We need to die to our **inflated** sense of Justice. We do **not** have a better take on it than God. ...truthfully... we need to know God better... so that we can place a greater trust in Him.

When you get to the book of Acts... you hear about a guy named Stephen. He first shows up in Acts 6... when he was selected to serve as what we would call a deacon in the church at Jerusalem. ... Soon after that... Stephen was arrested for preaching about Jesus to a crowd of people. ... He was tried before Jewish courts... convicted of blasphemy... and stoned to death. ... This was how he died... according to Acts 7:59-60...

Acts 7:59-60 (ESV)

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen trusted God with his spirit... and he trusted God for justice to be done... even as he was being executed for something he didn't do.

Stephen had the courage to trust in Jesus... because Jesus had the courage to trust in the Father... and **that** *trust* was vindicated. ...Stephen followed in the example of Jesus... who followed in the example of David. All of these become examples for us.

Some of **Christ's** *vindication* is seen in the last three verses...

Luke 23:47-49

Jesus' innocence was known. The centurion recognized it... the Daughters of Jerusalem saw it... and the women who followed Jesus... of course... knew it.

In this moment... Jesus served as a model for how to trust... but He also demonstrated Himself as the one to trust in. ... He was dying here for the sake of the world. ... He took on the sin of the world and died to remove that sin from us.

Author Henri Nouwen tells the story of a family he knew in Paraguay. ... The father... a doctor... spoke out against the military regime there... and its human rights abuses. ... Local police took their revenge on him... by arresting his teenage son... and torturing him to death. ... Enraged townsfolk wanted to turn the boy's funeral into a huge protest march... but the doctor chose another means of protest. ... At the funeral... the father displayed his son's body as he had found it in the jail — naked... scarred from electric shocks... and cigarette burns... and beatings. ...All the

villagers filed past the corpse... which lay not in a coffin but on the blood-soaked mattress from the prison. ... It was the strongest protest imaginable... for it put injustice on grotesque display.

Isn't that what God did at Calvary? ... The cross that held Jesus' body... naked and marked with scars... exposed all the violence and injustice of this world. ... At once... the cross revealed what kind of world we have... and what kind of God we have... a world of gross unfairness... a God of sacrificial love.

I love these words by Tim Kellar... Here's the gospel: you're more sinful than you ever dared believe; you're more loved than you ever dared hope.

In His death... Jesus declares victory over sin and death. ... Jesus offers us a new way to face death... with hope. ...In doing so... He offers us a new way to face life. ...If you haven't trusted in Jesus before... now is a great time to do so.

For others... this might be a simple reminder that you need to trust God. ... I love the picture of placing our lives in the open and capable hands of God. Maybe you're facing a difficult situation... and you don't understand how God could let you get there. ... Maybe you're having doubts. ...Maybe you're just apathetic and have found your relationship with God more distant and stale than it has been in the past. ...Take Jesus' example as a model to spur you on to trust.

There are so many ways that our renewed commitment to trust can be played out in our lives. ...Trusting God that reconciliation in a relationship is possible. ...Trusting God that he will provide for your needs. ...Trusting God that even when things look dark... and terribly unfair... there **is** hope on the other side of whatever you're experiencing.

Regardless of whether you need to trust God for the first time... or you need to recommit your trust in Him in some new area of your life... the invitation is the same. The question is the same. Will you trust God? ... Will you trust Jesus?