

## **Luke 23:46**

Good Friday + April 19, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls  
The Hands of God

The Word of the Lord from Luke 23:46: "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!' And having said this He breathed His last." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are going to be afraid of one thing in life, be afraid of God. That sounds like a terrible thing to say, but Jesus said it first in Matthew 10:28: He said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." There is only one who can destroy both soul and body in hell, and that's God.

Thus when Luther sums up the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism, he writes, "God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them." That makes perfect sense; yet it is easy to fear all sorts of things more than the wrath of God: you might fear the loss of income and goods because you keep His commands, or you might fear the disapproval of friends, weird looks from your coworkers or discomfort at family gatherings. You might fear that repentance will create a terrible void in your life when you give up a favorite sinful pleasure. You might fear persecution or hardship.

When you fear these things more than God, it means you are developing an idol. It means you fear the wrath of a false god more than you fear God's righteous wrath for sin. It means that you fear idols more than you trust in the Lord to deliver you. I remember Martin Luther writing that whenever he was discouraged and tempted to compromise the Christian faith to appease his enemies, he imagined standing before God and hearing the Almighty say, "Why were you more afraid of them than you were of Me?"

Now, lest we think that the Lord of Hosts is some sort of cosmic mob boss, let me remind you where this sermon is inevitably going: it's going to the cross. On the cross, you don't see peer pressure dying for your redemption, nor do you see your unhappy coworker shedding his blood for your salvation. It is not your upset uncle at Thanksgiving dinner who will call you forth from the grave. Remember as we go deeper into Good Friday that the Lord who is angry at sin (and righteously so!) is the same Lord who suffers that wrath and pays the price for your redemption.

Even so, do not cheapen His mercy and discount His wrath, for that is the way to harden your heart. The point still stands: if you're going to fear one thing in life, be afraid of God. If you are going to trust one love in life, trust the love of God.

A problem, of course, is perhaps one of two things – or most likely a combination of them: you either don't fear God's wrath for sin sufficiently, or you love some sins enough to risk it. If you truly feared God's wrath as you should, you still wouldn't be sinless; but the list of your transgressions would be a whole lot shorter than it is.

Perhaps, on the other hand, you do fear God's wrath so much that it impairs your function. That's the sign of a conscience well-acquainted with your sin, but not so much the assurance that you're forgiven. This is when you lie awake at night, staring at the ceiling and wishing you were asleep. Or maybe you're more afraid of sleeping than being awake. After all, the Lord calls the death of His people a

sleep, and thus He plants in your mind that every sleep is a little death. Perhaps that's why those fears of conscience reach their peak around two in the morning.

Whether you fear God a lot or a little, the truth remains that God pours out His wrath on sin and sinners. His hands execute judgment! Look at what His hands do in Scripture: He stretches out His hand against Egypt and takes the lives of the firstborn sons (Ex. 7:5). His hand brings bitterness to Naomi (Ruth 1:13) and afflicts the Philistines for their idolatry (1 Sam. 5:6). He lays His hand heavy on His own people – the Israelites – in the wilderness for their disobedience, and an entire generation drops dead, though slowly over forty years (Deu 2:15). "Day and night Your hand was heavy upon me," laments the psalmist in Psalm 32, until he repents. God's wrath doesn't disappear in the New Testament either, Hebrews 10:30-31 declares, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.'"

And then, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

If you are going to be afraid of one thing, be afraid of God. You might get away with things here and there in this life, but you cannot outrun the long arm of His holy law, or escape the One who takes judgment into His own hands. You have no hope without some divine intervention.

That is why you are here, at the foot of the cross; and blessed are you for being here.

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Of the seven last words of the Christ when He is crucified, three of them are prayers. The first one is a comfort for you as Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." While you're far more prone to worry and anxiety in suffering, Jesus prays – and He prays for others, not Himself. He prays for those who crucify Him, who mock Him from the ground. Actually, He is praying for all sinners. He is praying for you.

The last prayer is remarkable too: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Jesus commits His spirit into His Father's hands. Marvel, for this is more profound than first meets the ear. At first, it sounds like a pretty ordinary prayer by Jesus, despite the circumstances; after all, when Jesus prays, He always prays to His Father.

Except once. One time when He prays, He doesn't call His Father, "Father."

That's the second prayer from the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

There on the cross, for as long as it takes, God the Father isn't the Father to Jesus anymore – and Jesus is no longer the beloved Son. This is the Gospel, right? The Father forsakes the Son for you. This is where God makes Him who knew no sin to be sin for you. This is where He is stricken, smitten and afflicted: this is where the LORD lays on Him the iniquity of us all. This is where it is the Lord's will to crush Him and put Him to grief.

To put it another way, this is where the LORD's hand lies heavy on the Son, pouring out all of His wrath upon Jesus for the sins of the world. In the solitude of the cross, Jesus suffers the hell of abandonment by His Father.

As creation goes dark, Jesus falls into the hands of the living God, and that is a fearful thing.

So you hear Him pray that cry of dereliction, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

You know the answer to the why: it is for you. In your place. For your sins.

Then those eternal hours are over – the price is paid, the blood is shed and the sacrifice is complete. It is finished.

Then you hear this final prayer: "Father, in to Your hands I commit My spirit!"

*Father.* When He breathes His last, the Son has the Father and the Father has the Son again. The hands that poured out judgment for all sin are emptied of wrath, and they are ready to receive the Son into His kingdom. Jesus will soon ascend to sit at the right hand of God, and that is a good thing.

But even better, before His ascension is His resurrection. On that first day of the week, the disciples are in a locked room, and why? Because they are afraid – because they fear their fellow man more than they fear God. It is to these fearful disciples that Holy God appears in the flesh and raises His hands to them. Look! He does not raise His hands in anger and vengeance and judgment. He raises them to show that His hands have fresh wounds from nails, that redemption is done, that the day of salvation has come.

Then, the One who cried in forsakenness to God speaks peace to His disciples, to tell them that they are not forsaken.

Then, the One who breathed His last on the cross now lives and breathes upon His disciples to give them the Holy Spirit.

He who died lives forevermore, never to die again; which means He lives and breathes for you. He keeps His scars so that you might be sure His hands have no wrath left for your sin, but only grace and life for you. He shares His cross in your baptism so that He might share His death and resurrection with you, so that you might be certain that you will rise from the dead.

Where you are fearful, He is your strength. Where you are still prone to sin, He is your salvation.

"Father, in to Your hands I commit My spirit!" Take this final prayer of Jesus with you – and I mean that in a very concrete way. When he wrote the morning and evening prayers in the Small Catechism, Martin Luther included these words of Jesus in both: both of those prayers conclude with, "*Into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.*"

Pray those prayers: commend yourself to the One who received the Crucified and raised Him back to life. Then go joyfully to your work in the day and go cheerfully to sleep at night. You are in the Lord's hands, and the Lord's right hand and His holy arm have done great things – and the greatest is that He has stretched it forth on the cross for your salvation.

The wrath is gone. The price is paid. Be at peace in the hands of God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen