

# Love Trusts

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:7; Luke 23:44-46

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## **Tenth Presbyterian Church**

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I begin this morning with the question: Would you still trust God if...? Would you still trust God if he called you to leave your family behind and travel half way around the world to do his will? Would you still trust God if you followed that call and all of your plans for serving God failed? Would you still trust him then? Would you trust God if you ended up abandoned and alone? What if you died a miserable death? What then? Would you still trust God if you lost everything you loved in life including life itself?

On the seventh of September, 1850, a group of seven missionaries set sail from the city of Liverpool. They were under the direction of Captain Alan Francis Gardner and they were heading for Patagonia, the southern most tip of South America to do missionary work. They had six months of provisions. They had very high hopes for the work of the gospel among the people there and their own calling to the kingdom of God and yet their trip ended in total failure.

The natives were hostile. The climate was harsh. The ground was unforgiving. The resupply ship failed to arrive until much too late and so the missionaries died one by one of starvation.

Richard Williams was the surgeon on the ship and when his body was later recovered, the search party also found his diary. And the last page of that diary was his dying testimony to his undying faith in Jesus Christ. Imagine the doctor huddled in the hull of a small ship suffering from scurvy and writing the following words as his last testament.

“Should anything prevent my ever adding to this,” Williams wrote, “let my beloved ones at home rest assured that I was happy beyond all expression the night I wrote these lines and would not have exchanged situations with any many living. Let them also be assured that my hopes were full with immortality, that heaven and love and Christ, which really mean one and the same thing, these things were my soul, that the hope of glory filled my whole heart with joy and gladness and that to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

What faith.

This was the testimony of Richards Williams, a man who trusted God no matter what. There was no if in life or in death that would ever compel him to abandon his faith. No,

right to the end he believed in the love of God and in the glory of Jesus and in the hope of eternal life. And his diary, thus, stands as a lasting testament to the truth of 1 Corinthians 13 verse seven that love always believes.

You can find this verse in your bulletin this morning or in the Bible itself at 1 Corinthians 13. In the English Standard Version you will see a slightly different translation.

“Love... believes all things.”<sup>1</sup>

But now you should not think this means that love will believe absolutely anything, because if love were so gullible that it would believe something logically impossible or fraudulent to the faith or against the will of God, what, then, does the Bible mean when it says that love believes all things?

Some have taken this verse to teach that we should love other people well enough to believe the very best about them. That is an interpretation that goes back at least to the time of Augustine. Rather than simply believing every word of malicious gossip that passes by, we should protect the reputations of the people that we are called to love—and for Christians this includes our enemies—and that means giving them the benefit of the doubt. That is what love does. It doesn’t assume the worst about people and reach our own conclusions about their secret motives, but always seeks to believe the best. This, then, is what the Scripture means when it says love believes all things.

Louis Smeads adopts this interpretation. He contrasts the lover with the cynic who always suspects the worst about other people. The cynic will even see someone do something selfless and reach the conclusion that they are actually acting out of self interest. And so the cynic, rather than taking the risk of being hurt or getting taken advantage of, holds back from really loving other people for fear of what they will do. But 1 Corinthians 13:7 tells us to make ourselves more vulnerable, to be ready to believe in other people. Love is a kind of believing power. It is the impulse that enables us to trust others. A cynic tells you to not to trust other people too much, but the lover would rather trust too much than too little and miss the opportunity to love. And, therefore, it is the lover who believes these things.

But now there is another way to take this verse. It is really the way that the majority of commentators take it. Rather than taking this word “all” as a noun meaning all things, it takes it as an adverb meaning always. That avoids any misunderstanding about what love does or doesn’t believe, the object of loves faith and it puts the emphasis in the circumstances in which love will keep believing. This love will persevere under all circumstances, all ways at all times. Even though situations of unbelievable hardship and difficulty, love never loses faith.

We find the perfection of this love and of all loves in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ. Haven’t we been finding that again and again? As a church we have been working our way through 1 Corinthians 13 and we have seen that it is the love of Jesus that is

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:7.

humble and patient, that is hopeful and selfless. And we have traced that love, over the course of his life and ministry. We have witnessed his love in his teaching and in his miracles, in his conversations with ordinary people, even in his prayers to his Father in heaven? It is all a demonstration of the love of Jesus?

And then as we have come closer and closer to the cross, we have seen that love more intensely, the way that Jesus surrendered his will to the Father, the surrender of his love, the way he courageously and sinlessly suffered great abuse on his way to the cross.

But now we have not yet seen, for all that we have seen of the love of Jesus, we have not yet seen the faith of his affections, the way that his love is a trusting love. And I believe the best place to see this is at the crucifixion when Jesus was at the absolute extremity of human suffering in his very last moments on the cross.

And so we turn again this morning to the cross and listen to the dying words of Jesus as a testimony of his faith in the Father.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23. And here we find Luke telling us that Jesus was crucified, not over dramatizing it, but really understating it. Luke 23 at verse 33. Luke has talked about the trial and the conviction of Jesus and how he has been led to the place of crucifixion and says in verse 33:

“And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him.”<sup>2</sup>

And nothing further needs to be said of that barbarous act except what we have said already that from the standpoint of physical suffering this was a most excruciating way to die. And yet at least in this respect the death of Jesus could hardly be considered unique because many men were crucified in the days of the Roman Empire. In fact, there were at least two other men who were executed on the same day, the very same way, one on either side of Jesus.

But now what was unique was the psychic torment that Jesus endured, the suffering of his soul.

Luke gives us a symbol of that in verse 44 when he tells us about the darkness that covered the cross during the hours of that crucifixion. It is a reminder that on the cross a spiritual transaction was taking place. By the will of God and according to his own deliberate intention, Jesus was accepting upon himself the guilt of all of our sin. He was a sacrificial victim making an atoning sacrifice. He was bearing our sin. He was carrying the guilt of our transgression. And so it was that during the hours when Jesus was hanging on the cross, Jesus the Son of God was separated from the Father.

Here we encounter a great mystery of sin and of guilt and of judgment and of sacrifice, a great mystery within the very triune being of God, because while he was under that

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:33.

darkness slowly suffocating, Jesus quoted the psalmist and cried out these very famous words.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>3</sup>

Now we don't read those words here in Luke, but they are part of the context for what we do read in Luke and so I just want to comment on them briefly that those words, “My God my God,” those come from the opening verse of Psalm 22 in which David offers an anguished prayer and his lament here is that he is under the threat of immediate death and yet his prayers are going unanswered. He feels forsaken. And by taking those words from the psalm and putting them on his own lips, Jesus was declaring that he himself was dying a God forsaken death.

From all eternity the Son of God had lived in unbroken fellowship with the Father, but when he took our sin upon his shoulders he suffered the wrath and the curse of divine judgment against human sin. And part of that curse was the Son's separation from the Father. It is a psychological reality we can hardly even begin to grasp that finds, I think, a natural symbol in this darkness that descends on the face of the earth.

Notice how Luke describes this miraculous darkness, verse 44.

“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed.”<sup>4</sup>

And I say it is a miraculous darkness. It could not merely have been an eclipse because this was the Passover, when, from an astronomical perspective, an eclipse is impossible. But in any case the crucifixion of Christ was a black death. For three long hours the sun refused to shine. And regardless of the material causes for that, this descent into darkness showed, I think, that Jesus was suffering God's curse against our sin. It was one fulfillment of an ancient prophecy that we read in Zephaniah.

“A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.”<sup>5</sup>

You see, that is the darkness that comes on a day of the wrath of God. That is what the darkness symbolized.

I think Isaac Watts said it very well in one of his crucifixion hymns.

Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut his glories in,  
When Christ the might maker died,  
For man, the creature's sin.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:44.

<sup>5</sup> Zephaniah 1:15.

It was towards the end of those hours of darkness that Jesus opened a window to his soul that lets us get at least a glimpse of what he was suffering inside when he said,

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>6</sup>

The only time in the Bible that Jesus speaks to God without calling him Father. All of his other prayers begin the way that he taught us to pray with the word “Father.” So when Jesus was outside the tomb of Lazarus and was praying for his miraculous return from the grave, he said:

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me.”<sup>7</sup>

Or on the last night of his life when Jesus was praying that great prayer in John chapter 17, he said:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son.”<sup>8</sup>

But, see, that he is in extremis, now that he is bearing the weight of our sin, that killing weight of sin, while he is dying on the cross he cries out to his Father and calls him God, partly in fulfillment, I think of Psalm 22, but also, in a way, a little indicator of the rupture in their relationship, a separation between Father and Son as the Son dies a God cursed death.

Now it is desperately difficult for someone who feels forsaken to keep trusting God. There are many of us here this morning that could testify to that from our own experience. How impossible it is even to put your words into prayer when God seems absent, when you are afraid that he is not there. When everything goes dark, it is only by faith and not by sight that you can believe in the light of the presence of God. And so it was for Jesus on the cross. The sky was black. He felt forsaken by the Father. Indeed, he was forsaken by the Father and yet the announcement of his abandonment was not his last word from the cross, because after saying, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>9</sup> he goes on to say what we read in the gospel of Luke chapter 23 at verse 46.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”<sup>10</sup>

And it was at that moment that Jesus breathed his last.

Now these words are another quotation from the Psalms. They come from Psalm 31. There David prayed that God would deliver him from all his enemies.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

<sup>7</sup> John 11:41.

<sup>8</sup> John 17:1.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 23:46.

“Into your hand I commit my spirit,”<sup>11</sup> David said in the face of that great danger. And then he expressed his complete confidence that God would save him. He said:

“...you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”<sup>12</sup>

That is the end of the verse that begins with David committing his Spirit into God’s hands.

Luke tells us that Jesus cried out these words with a loud voice. You see, it wasn’t a timid and doubtful request, but a bold and confident petition. In fact, in a way, I believe it was a confession of the Savior’s faith that, like David, Jesus believed in redemption, that he was showing the kind of love that Paul has been describing for us in 1 Corinthians 13, that love which always believes.

We find confirmation of the trusting aspect of Jesus in his death on the cross in the words of the apostle Peter, chapter two. Peter is describing what Jesus went through in his earthly suffering and says that while Jesus was suffering in this way he continued in trusting himself to him who judges justly. That is a word of faith, isn’t it? He was entrusting himself to the Father.

Even in the most desperate circumstances at the very point of death when he was forsaken by the Father and crushed by the damning weight of the judgment of God, Jesus still trusted his Father’s love.

Now consider how much faith is expressed in this simple verse. Consider just some of all of the things that Jesus believed and must have believed in order to utter this prayer. First he believed that God is there. And Jesus had to believe this in order to pray at all. Even when he felt forsaken and could not sense the presence of God, he believed that God was there and then prayed on that basis.

Second, Jesus believed that God was his Father. As the eternal Son he had known the Father’s love since before the world began. But now in the weakness of his humanity and the limitations of what it meant for him to be incarnate, as he was dying this God forsaken death, he was distant from the Father and yet nevertheless prayed to God as his Father.

Before it was, “My God, my God,” but now, again, it was, “Father,” a manner of address that was a testimony of his faith in the fatherhood of God.

What else did Jesus believe to pray this way? He believed in life after death. That is the third thing. He was committing his Spirit to his Father. That was a way of declaring that his death by crucifixion was not the end for him, but that he believed that his soul would live on immortal.

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 31:5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

By faith he believed that there was a life to come. Indeed, it ink he was confessing even more than that, because he was quoting this verse from the Psalms that went on to speak of redemption. I think he was expressing his confidence that God would do for him what he did for David and redeem his life from the grave.

Fourth, Jesus believed in the Father's love. It is one thing to believe that there is a God and that he is a kind of a Father, but it is another thing to believe in that Father's love and this is what Jesus believed. He was putting his spirit into the safekeeping of the Father. He was placing everything that was dear to him, even his life itself into the Father's care and you could only do that if you had full confidence in the Father's love.

And so when he committed his Spirit to the Father, the Son, Jesus Christ, was counting on a loving relationship with the Father that would continue for all eternity. Here is another thing, a fifth thing that Jesus believed. He believed that his death would atone for sin.

Now it doesn't say that in so many words, but I think that is the implication of his prayer. He is asking the Father to receive him even though he knows that he is dying a God accursed death. You see, he is asking the Father to accept that sacrifice, to accept the suffering that he endured for our salvation and to accept that as a sacrifice that actually atoned for sin. By leaving his saving work in the Father's hands, trusting that the Father would raise his body from the grave, Jesus was trusting that we would have the forgiveness of our sins.

With his dying words, the Savior of the world was expressing his faith and confidence that we would, indeed, be saved by the Father's grace. And, see, all of this is part of this simple little prayer. What a prayer of faith it is. You see Jesus dying on the cross. You see the Savior of the world. You also see a man who is showing you how to believe all things, to always believe. And what enabled him to believe all this was love, love for his Father and love for us.

Jesus testified and the gospels testify to the love of the Father for the Son. And, you see, it is not just faith that has the power to believe, but Paul is telling us in 1 Corinthians 13 that it is also love that has the power to believe. You have a loving relationship with someone. You are able to trust them. And that is the relationship that Jesus the Son had with God the Father.

Remember, on a number of occasions in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ the Father gave this audible testimony. He said, "This is my beloved Son."<sup>13</sup>

Jesus himself testified to the same thing. He did it, for example, in the prayer he offered in John 17 on the last night of his life. He said:

"Father... you loved me before the foundation of the world."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7.

And, you see, when it came time for the Savior to die, it was this love that carried him through.

Now as we consider the love of Jesus, the believing love of Jesus, I want to ask one simple question this morning by way of practical application. Do you have this kind of love in your life, the kind of love that the apostle Paul describes for us in Corinthians, the believing all things kind of love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross.

Well, having that kind of faith and that kind of love starts with knowing how much God really loves you. When Jesus testified to the Father's love in John 17 when he was praying for us, he prayed in particular that we would know the Father's love. He put it in a very striking way. He said that the Father loves us even as he loves his Son. And just imagine the implications of that, that God the Father loves you every bit as much as he loves his only beloved and unique Son. And the Son himself prayed that we would know this love, the Father's love for the Son, that that love would live in us. And when you know that love, it strengthens your faith.

I think Louis Smeads was right when he said, "The deepest motive for believing is an awareness of being loved by God."

And if that is true and if we are having trouble trusting God or maybe even believing in God at all, what we really need is to know more of the love of God and we find that in the Word of God.

We go back to the Bible and look at all the promises that God has made, all of the love promises of the Bible and we read those promises and we discover these life changing words that Jesus spoke. The Father himself loves you. And then you see the proof of that love in all of the things that Jesus did for your salvation. You see the love of God and that strengthens your faith in God, your trust in God. This is the way that God makes believers out of us. He gives us his love.

The more we experience of the Father's love, the more we will learn to trust him even in times of extreme need and desperate helplessness. And we will learn to pray the way that Jesus prayed, not just a prayer for the cross, but really a prayer for all of life.

"Father, into your hands I commit..."<sup>15</sup>

Well, whatever it is that you need to commit.

Father, into your hands I commit my finances. I don't know how I am going to pay the rent or cover the medical bills or even buy groceries. I don't know how I will ever have enough for retirement or any of that or medical bills, all of the rest of it. And yet this is the way that you pray in faith.

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<sup>14</sup> John 17:24.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 23:46.

Father, into your hands I commit my finances. And you are able to pray that way because you believe you have a Father who loves you and will provide for you.

It is the same way we pray about our struggle with sin.

Father, into your hands I commit my sanctification. I am burdened by the weight of my sin, maybe some particular sin that I feel like I am struggling against, but the devil tempts me to believe that I will never be able to conquer it and yet it is the love of God that persuades us to say, "Father, into your hands I commit my holiness. And by your love I pray that you will deliver me from the evil one and I will know your power over sin in my life."

And then you take that same way of praying. You pray it about everything in life. You pray it about your health, about the health of the people you love.

Into your hands, Father, I commit your body. I pray not only for relief from physical pain, but also for the patience to endure my struggle with physical pain.

It is the way that you pray about your daily work.

Father, into your hands I commit this calling, this career, this labor.

Father, into your hands I commit my homework that I don't understand or the grades that I am afraid I am not going to be able to keep up.

It is the way that you pray about everything in life.

Into your hands, Father, I commit my marriage. I commit my singleness. I commit my family with all of its problems, my ministry with all of its challenges. Father, into your hands I commit my future, whatever you have for me in life with all of my hopes and all of my dreams and all of my fears.

See, this is a prayer not just for the moment of death, but all through life. But, of course, it is also a prayer for the moment of death. And having learned to trust the Father all through life, you come to that final moment. You are able to pray the way that Jesus prayed and say:

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"<sup>16</sup>

I commit my body and my soul to you forever.

Oh, how many Christians have made these very words their dying prayer. The first to do it must have been Stephen, the martyr we read about in Acts chapter seven, that worthy

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

deacon put to death for his faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. His dying words were:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

A century later, bishop Polycarp, another martyr to the faith died with the same words on his lips. There were others, too. I think of men of the Reformation, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Jerome of Prague, John Huss, all of these men dying with these words or something close to them as their dying expression of faith in Christ.

The example of John Huss is particularly remarkable. He was condemned by the Council of Constance in 1415. The presiding bishop uttered these evil words.

“Now we commit thy soul to the devil, John Huss.”

To which he calmly replied, “I commit my spirit into thy hands, Lord Jesus Christ, unto thee I commend my spirit which thou hast redeemed.”

Or consider the notable example of Lady Jane Grey, queen of England for only 16 days. She refused to renounce her faith in Christ. She was condemned to be executed. And upon mounting the scaffold she addressed the spectators with the following words.

“I die as a true Christian woman and I look to be saved by no other means but only the mercy of God and the blood of his Son Jesus Christ.”

And then she knelt down to confess her sins using the words of Psalm 51. The executioner knelt down beside her to ask her forgiveness which she freely granted. And then rising from that prayer she tied a blindfold around her eyes and she felt for the block and she laid down her head and she uttered these words.

“Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

She was only 17 years old.

Now that is a way to die.

I suppose none of us will die in as dramatic a fashion, but we will die unless Jesus comes again first. And when we die we will need as much faith as ever we can get. We will need the faith to know that as we pass from this life trusting in the death that Jesus died for our sins, we pass into the loving arms of a Father who is waiting to receive us. And believing this we will be able to pray, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Another man who offered a similar prayer was Alan Peyton, the South African novelist. His dear wife Dorrie was dying after a long struggle with emphysema and as he shared in that life and death struggle, Peyton wrote an expanded version of the prayer that Jesus

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<sup>17</sup> Acts 7:59.

made from the cross. It is a wonderful prayer to make your prayer both for life and for death.

It goes like this.

Lord, give me grace to die in thy will. Prepare me for whatever place or condition awaits me. Let me die true to those things I believe. And suffer me not through any fear of death to fall from thee. Lord, give me grace to live in thy will also. Help me to master any fear, any desire that prevents me from living in thy will. Make me, oh Lord, the instrument of thy peace that I may know eternal life. Into thy hands I commend my spirit.

It takes faith to pray this way, a faith that comes from knowing the love of Jesus who showed us both how to live and how to die. And when you know his love, you are able to believe him for everything, everything in life, everything in death, everything for the life to come.

*Our Father in heaven, we pray for such faith. We pray for a deeper knowledge of your love that would help us to grow in such faith. Father, help us to know that whether we live or whether we die, we are under the love of Jesus and can trust your fatherly care for everything in his name. Amen.*