



## Invitation to trust

### 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'

## Week 5

### Introduction

The young woman sat on the floor of her makeshift shack in an informal refugee settlement in Lebanon. Samah had less than nothing to her name; she was heavily pregnant and heavily in debt. She had had to borrow money from local businessmen to pay for an operation for her young son and to give birth in the hospital she would need another 750 dollars. Samah's friend had recently gone into labour but five hospitals had refused to deliver her baby. Samah wondered how she would find the money not only for the delivery, but also for food and electricity with a newborn baby to care for at the same time. She had to go to six different hospitals because no one would help her deliver her baby. When I asked her about the future she told me she had no hope. She couldn't go home to Syria. She couldn't stay in the camp in Lebanon. What would happen to her family?

When Jesus says '**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit**' he is quoting Psalm 31 which begins with the words: 'In you, Lord, I have taken refuge'. In other words Jesus' prayer from the cross is a request for asylum under the protection of God. Jesus – in agony, stripped of all his worldly goods, facing the hostility of the authorities and the crowds seeks sanctuary with his Father.

### Prayer

*Dear God, thank you that you are a refuge in times of trouble. You are a listening ear. You are a rock and a fortress, a guide and a redeemer. You are faithful, powerful and available. Whatever lies ahead, please help us to remember these truths, and to trust you even in our darkest moments. Amen.*

### Setting the scene

In the Garden of Gethsemane, before he was arrested and tortured and nailed to a cross, Jesus had wrestled with the suffering that lay ahead and had submitted his will to God. As the suffering became more and more intense and the sky turned black, there was still opportunity for Jesus to pull out. At any time he could have ended the pain and used his power to walk away. But with the world watching, and without disguising his pain and distress, he approached the end of his life. As we read the Bible passages for today, look out for clues that point to this moment being mysteriously and magnificently profound.

## Luke 23.44–49

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.' When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.*

## Psalm 31.1–5

*In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.*

## Focus

The trust in God that led Jesus to say, 'not my will, but yours' (Luke 22.42) now appears again like a brilliant light in the midday darkness of the crucifixion: 'Into your hands I commit my spirit'. Jesus demonstrates incredible confidence that here, in the middle of tragedy and torture, he declares that God really is still in charge. By his example, Jesus invites us to trust God even in chaos, darkness and despair.

The cross of Christ is a challenge to anyone who believes it is possible to follow Jesus and avoid heartache. Jesus himself said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?'

For 2,000 years, Christians have shown trust at the most extreme and tragic moments of their lives. History is full of testimonies of martyrs facing their executioners with confidence that no matter what horrors are thrown at their bodies, their souls are safe.

Today, men and women around the world face similar horrors. Extremist terror groups have deliberately targeted Christians – amongst people who practice other religions – in horrific acts of torture and violence, but we hear of many of these persecuted believers crying out to Jesus as they are killed. Perhaps they call out to him because they know they have someone who really understands them; someone who has also faced executioners and remained faithful to the end, for their sake.

I wonder how I would fare in the face of torture and death. Would I hold on to my faith in God, or would I renounce it? All I know is whatever difficulties I face on my journey, Jesus invites me to trust him, and however hard it gets, I know that he has dealt with much worse. There is hospitality here – an invitation to do the hard stuff together, to face the pain together, and ultimately to trust that we will eventually be with Jesus in paradise, where there is no pain or suffering.

The way Jesus died had an immediate and profound impact on one of his executioners – a Roman centurion. From what we know of the times, crucifixions were relatively commonplace,

and yet Jesus's words inspire this military officer to make a confession 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' (Mark 15.39). The death of Jesus may not have been a spectacular miracle like the feeding of thousands or the calming of a storm, but nevertheless, the way that Jesus died impacted this soldier and invited from his lips an acknowledgment that Jesus was the Son of God, God in human flesh.

### Personal reflection questions

1. Describe a time in your life when you found it very hard to trust God and a time when it was very easy.
2. At the crucifixion, God does not rescue Jesus from the agony of the cross. Why do you think God sometimes doesn't rescue people from suffering?
3. How would you respond to someone who says: 'Christianity isn't what I expected. I don't feel anything when I worship God and I still struggle with life sometimes. Is it worth it?'
4. What struck you in the video from Jordan about what it means to be a refugee in our world right now? How does it inspire your own thoughts and actions?
5. Read through Psalm 31.1–5. Which of the images of safety do you find most encouraging?
6. As a group or on your own, list five places globally, or people you pray for regularly, that are suffering persecution for their faith right now. Pray for them using Psalm 31.1–5 as inspiration.

### Final thoughts

In Jesus' darkest moment, he entrusts himself fully to his Father's care. There is an intimacy here between Jesus and his Father. There is hope as Jesus knows that death is not the end. There is trust as he confidently gives his spirit into the hands which made and sustain the universe. There is inspiration as he shows us that in the real distress of death there can also be a real assurance of God watching over us. There is hospitality in the picture of God waiting to receive us into his presence. Jesus invites us to follow his example and commit ourselves to God and his plans for us, fully believing and trusting in his love for each one of us.

### Closing prayer

Father God, into your hands we commit our lives. We want to live every day for you. We trust you that you are our refuge, our shelter and our rock. Help us to stand with those who have no place they can call home, who still seek refuge. In the precious name of Jesus. Amen.