

Jesus Died Willingly!

† Trusting in the LORD (vv.7,8)

† Looking forward to heaven (vv.9-11)

In the name of Jesus, our suffering Savior, dearly redeemed saints of God:

Would you really have wanted to be there at Calvary to see Jesus die on a cross? If someone you knew and loved was going to be executed by lethal injection, would you accept an invitation to watch? I could not stomach such a sight. And our laws mandate that executions be carried out as humanely as possible. Death by hanging or electrocution seems more horrendous to most people. But think how desperately gut wrenching a crucifixion was in every way. The Roman Empire known for its power and cruelty would not allow crucifixion for its own citizens. Only slaves and the worst criminals were tortured in such a way as to die slowly suffering the greatest shame possible.

You probably know that none of Jesus' disciples were there. As prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures and repeated by Jesus at the Passover-First Communion meal, they all forsook Him and fled. Only John the disciple Jesus loved was there and the women who had come with Him from Galilee, supporting His ministry with their own money. I must confess, I would likely not have been with them to see through all the agony and blood and sweat something most remarkable: **Jesus Died Willingly!**

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Willingly you say? Combat veterans know what rigorous training was required to make them ready to go into harm's way. Even then, no one knows how they will respond to life and death pressure like they've never seen before. And coming back from it to try to live in a peaceful society can be an even more shocking experience for which we pray God's blessings of peace on those who have held the line to protect our freedoms. Think back to school days. I remember Freshman football, learning to trust my pads enough to block and tackle. What is that compared to combat? Much less to the combat of our Lord Christ on the cross? The more I come to Calvary's holy mountain as a sinner ruined by the Fall, I am astounded at this most of all: **Jesus Died Willingly!** – for me! There's only one reason He could.

How can any of us imagine the pain of being nailed by our hands and feet to a cross? But even more amazing is what Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* Who can fathom the shame of hanging there while the soldiers played dice right in front of you to divide up the clothing which was all you owned? Yet Jesus hangs there in silence. What must it have felt like for guilty criminals on both sides of you to taunt you to use your power to save yourself and them? But how can this be that when one asks Jesus to forgive him, our Lord's simply reply is so kind? *“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”* Talk about kindness! He gives His mother Mary to dear disciple John and John to Mary – as if there is no one else in the world to think about.

How could He hang for three hours in the darkness – from noon to 3:00 PM – then cry out in anguish, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* He asked nothing from anyone except at the very end when He said simply, *“I thirst.”* And what did it mean when He spoke that word of triumph and accomplishment? *Τετέλεσται* – *“It is finished.”* How could He call out with such confidence? *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* He gave up His life. No one took it from Him, just as He had promised. (John 10:18) Roman Governor Pilate was surprised He died so soon. But look! **Willingly!**

Once in my life I've been present when someone passed away. An elderly member without any family left but us was healthy at home until her last two weeks. Finally, as she was unresponsive, I sat and read the Psalms of Ascent (Psalm 120-134) until housekeeping came. Dorothy's roommate was gone, so they were taking the oxygen tank. I paused as they opened the valve – sh-sh-sh-sh-sh.... When I turned

back to Dorothy, I asked, “You’re gone, aren’t you?” Her spirit left at the same time as the sound. A few days before, you know what her final words were to me and Cindy? Dorothy was concerned about travelers who would not have any place to stay. Everyone else, God and her neighbor – not her.

Dorothy Lindig and countless believers like her have died like Jesus – **Willingly!** – for one reason. From Him we have learned to pass from this world **Trusting in the LORD**. His peaceful attitude was foretold in prophecy by the Holy Spirit speaking through the sweet Psalmist of Israel, King David in Psalm 16: **“I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”** (Psalm 16:7f NIV84)

Can you see the secret for **Trusting in the LORD**? When Jesus came to this earth as God’s own Son, He willingly gave up the full use of His divine powers, including His omniscience, the fact that as God, Jesus knows everything. So at twelve years old, we find the Boy Jesus learning in the temple. He kept on learning and praying long into the night, all thirty-three of His years on this earth. His heart could instruct him to be confident of the Lord’s presence **“at my right hand”** because Jesus learned God’s Word by heart. He could say looking ahead to this: **“I will not be shaken.”** In spite of all, Christ held firm.

† **Looking forward to heaven (vv.9-11)**

At this point in the sermon you should all be going, “Wait a minute, preacher! Didn’t you just read Jesus’ words on the cross, **‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’** Now you say Jesus was confident that God would be with Him. Maybe Psalm 16 isn’t really about Jesus. 1000 B.C.? How could Jesus be alive a thousand years before he was born, much less look ahead to dying **Willingly?**”

There is only one way for us to know this Psalm is for sure about Jesus. We let Scripture interpret Scripture. The Bible tells us what it means, so that we don’t have to guess. Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, and Paul’s mission sermon in Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13, both quote this Psalm 16. Both say Psalm 16 is about Jesus. There’s no guesswork here – miracle, yes! But no guesswork. And you can see the answer to your **forsaken – not forsaken** question in the apostles’ sermons and the Psalm itself.

Check this out: **“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”** (Psalm 16:9–11 NIV84)

Athlete understand this. Mom who went through childbirth get it. Students, workers, folks who started their own business know all about conquering pain for ultimate gain. Jesus’ goal was greater than anything else on earth. In fact, He was **Looking forward to** two goals – one for Him, one for us. He was confident that His body would not decay. (More about that on Sunday.) Jesus knew He was headed home when His work was done: **“Today you will be with me in paradise.”** Jesus knew His victory was not just for Him. **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”** (Luke 19:10) – like us, totally **“lost”** in sin, headed for eternal despair by ourselves. Jesus came looking **“to save”** us by dying **Willingly!** because He was **Looking forward to heaven**. Jesus paid our debt in full. We’re reconciled to God.

“It is finished!” “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” These are not just Jesus’ words; these are ours too! By faith in Jesus, we can all say with absolute confidence: **“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”** Good Friday is Good! But the best is yet to be! All because **Jesus Died Willingly!** As Paul Gerhardt wrote in one of our favorite hymn, “Who dieth thus dies well.” (TLH 172:10)

*Whether my pathway leads to hilltops fair and high, or through the sunless valleys where the shadows lie, it matters little. For I know that thou art with me, and that underneath are the everlasting arms. Where thou dost lead me, I shall gladly go. Oh, guide me unerringly on life’s uncertain way here to my heavenly homeland there. In Jesus’ precious Name.*¹ Amen.

¹ *My Prayer Book*. (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 10.