

GOOD FRIDAY

“It Is Finished” John 19:17-30

March 29, 2024

Quesnel

“Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

This is our text.

“It is finished”: one of the last words of Jesus on the cross. But just what kind of a statement was it, this “It is finished”? What is it that is “finished”? What was Jesus talking about? How did he say, “It is finished”? What did he mean by that? Was it a statement of defeat and resignation? A statement of final relief?

- And whatever it was that was finished, and however Jesus may have been saying it, what in the world does it have to do with us? As we’ll see now, the answers to these questions are all wrapped up in this one little word: “It Is Finished.”

“It is finished.” Could this have been Jesus’ way of finally admitting defeat? Let’s consider that as a possibility. Say that Jesus had come as a great prophet, one of the world’s outstanding religious teachers. What’s more, many people were looking to Jesus as the Great Jewish Hope, the messianic king who would free Israel from Roman rule. For a while, at least, things seemed to be going fine. Jesus was attracting big crowds. People were listening to his message.

But then things started to go south. Jesus faced increasing opposition. Even one of his own disciples turned on him and turned him over to the authorities. Jesus was arrested, and all of his followers deserted him. The wheels of justice, such as they were, turned against Jesus. Both the religious and political establishments lined up against him. The tide of popular opinion changed from “Hosanna” to hostility: “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Everything Jesus had worked for—all that his followers had hoped for—now it was all going down the drain. It all seemed so tragic, so futile. The mission had failed. If that is the case, then “It is finished” could simply be a weak cry of resignation and defeat.

Let's explore another option: "It is finished" as an exhausted sigh of relief. You see, Jesus was relieved that his personal humiliation, his agony, his suffering—that it was all finally over. No more putting up with fickle, faithless disciples. No more long days and sleepless nights. No more misunderstanding and criticism. Now it's finally over. "It is finished."

The long night of trials and beatings, the six hours of pain and anguish on the cross—six hours that must have seemed like an eternity—these were now coming to an end. "It is finished." And now Jesus could die in peace, looking forward to the bliss of heaven.

Is that what Jesus meant?

No, neither of these first two explanations is what Jesus meant when he said, "It is finished."

The gospels paint an entirely different picture of Jesus, one that rules out those possibilities. Jesus was not a defeatist who saw his mission as a failure. That's because he didn't come to lead a successful "cause," "success" being defined in worldly terms. He didn't come as just a great prophet, or teacher, or moral example. He didn't come to lead a rebellion.

Jesus tells us why he did come. He says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." This was Jesus' mission. But how he would complete that mission—that would be the most shocking yet wonderful surprise. So "It is finished" is by no means an admission of defeat.

Nor was it an exhausted sigh of relief. The Jesus we meet in the gospels is not someone who was concerned with his own welfare or with escaping from problems. Jesus came to do the will of his Father, no matter what it took. Jesus and his Father were one in their desire to accomplish the salvation of the world.

Jesus would carry out this mission. For us to have life, real life, and to have it abundantly, Jesus would need to free us from our bondage to sin, Satan, and death. And the only way for that to happen was by Jesus going to the cross. There the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, lays down his life, for us. In that light, we see the darkness of Calvary. In that light, now we can understand the meaning of Jesus' words.

"It is finished" was not an admission of defeat. It was not an exhausted sigh of relief. Rather, it is a triumphant shout of victory! Notice what happened just before Jesus said this word from the cross:

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'"

And then: *“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’”*

Jesus knew that “all was now finished.” The Greek word here is the same as the one when he says, *“It is finished.”* Knowing that all he came to do for us was now accomplished, Jesus was ready to announce the completion of his saving mission. So this man Jesus, this real man whose throat and lips were parched after hanging on a cross for six hours, first said, *“I thirst.”* He requested that drink in order to moisten his mouth, so he could speak out with a full and strong voice. Then, in a loud voice, Jesus gives the victory shout: *“It is finished!”* With that, he gives up his spirit, saying, *“Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.”*

Now we can hear the words, “It is finished,” as they really are. They are the most glorious words we could hear! Actually, in the biblical text, “It is finished,” is said with just one word. Maybe you’ve heard it before, it’s the Greek word, “Tetelestai.” “Tetelestai” means that the “telos,” the goal, has been reached. “Mission accomplished,” we might say. “Tetelestai” means that it is finished, completed, accomplished, and that it continues to stand as a completed and accomplished fact, still good today.

In the ancient world, “Tetelestai” was the word you would write across a bill after the last payment has been turned in, much like we would write the words, “Paid in full.” So Jesus has written a giant “PAID IN FULL” over the debt of our sins! He paid the entire bill for us. “Tetelestai.” With that one word, Jesus shouts his victory over sin, Satan, and death. “Tetelestai.” “Paid in full.” “It is finished.” “It stands accomplished.”

“It is finished.” And so what is finished now for us? Thankfully, we are finished with any idea that we somehow have to earn our way into heaven. That is a good thing, because we couldn’t do it anyway. We are finished with rationalizing our sin and excusing it away. Instead, we can repent, confess our sins, receive God’s forgiveness, and seek God’s help to do better. We’re finished with focusing only on self and thinking we need to look out for Number One. Instead, we can serve our neighbor in love. We’re finished with keeping track of our good works. Since Christ has finished the work for us; there’s nothing to add to it. Salvation is a free gift, accomplished on the cross of Calvary. So on this Good Friday, and every good day in the Lord, simply trust in Jesus Christ, your Savior, and in his finished work of redemption.

“It is finished.” Jesus dies with the cry of the victor on his lips. This is not the mournful moan of the defeated. This is not a weary sigh of relief. Rather, it is Jesus’ triumphant cry that now he has fully accomplished the work he came to do. Jesus came to do the Father’s will, and he did it by dying on the cross for the world’s salvation. This mighty work has now reached its conclusion. “It is finished.” The goal has been reached. With these words, Jesus shouts his victory over sin, death, and the devil. Christ’s victory—and with it, our victory—now stands accomplished forever as a most glorious fact.

“It is finished.” But it is not over, not by a long shot. No, this is just the beginning. The beginning of a whole new life opening up, as we will see when that tomb opens up on Sunday morning. To be continued. . . .