

"It Is Finished"

SEVEN STATEMENTS FROM THE CROSS (#6)

John 19:28-30

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Introduction:

Over the past two months, we have been looking together at the seven statements that Jesus made as He was hanging on the cross, and we learned first of all that as the Lord was being crucified, He continued to say, ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*** And we discovered several weeks ago that that prayer was answered seven weeks later as 3,000 people had a change of heart and were immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins on the Day of Pentecost.

We then noticed that Jesus was crucified between two thieves, and yet when one of those thieves had a change of heart, the Lord spoke up for the second time that day and said, ***"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."***

We then noticed that the Lord looked at His mother and says, ***"Woman, behold your son."*** He then turns to the apostle John and says, ***"Son, behold your mother."*** And with that very simple exchange, the Lord made plans for the care of His mother and set an example for children everywhere.

At noon, we find that darkness covers the land until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and we discovered that as the darkness was coming to end, the Lord cried out with a loud voice, ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** And we reminded ourselves that Jesus came to this point in His suffering for us. Jesus was feeling the weight of sin. God was allowing His Son to suffer as a sacrifice—taking our place as our substitute on the cross.

And then last week, we discovered with Statement #5, that Jesus cried out with a single four-letter word in the Greek language—in English, ***"I am thirsty."*** And with that statement, we are reminded not only that Jesus really was human, but also that His life was the perfect answer to several prophecies from the Old Testament.

This morning, as we come near the end of these seven statements, I would like for us to think together for a few moments about the idea of finishing things. And perhaps the greatest example of an unfinished project here in our nation is Mount Rushmore. Many people do not know that Mount Rushmore was originally intended to show each of the four presidents all the way down to the waist. We were supposed to be able to see Lincoln holding the lapel of his coat. We were supposed to see Jefferson's left hand. We were supposed to see Washington with his hands resting in his lap. And

yet history tells us that the project ran out of money. Imagine that! Some things never change. And so today, we have an unfinished project as one of our most famous national memorials.

And on a personal level, we also know how frustrating it can be to not get something done as we had planned. For years, I have been meaning to add a new circuit in our basement—a dedicated circuit for the dehumidifier. And so last summer, I went out and bought the outlet—and that is pretty much where it ended. That brand new outlet is still sitting there by our breaker box in the basement. It has not even been opened, I never bought the wire, I never did anything with that project. The brand new outlet in its shiny little package is mocking me every time I go down there to switch a load of laundry.

In fact, most of us will never be able to look at our work and say, **"It's finished."** And yet our Lord was able to say, **"It is finished,"** shortly before His death on the cross. The first three gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all tell us that Jesus shouted out before He died, but they do not tell us exactly what He shouted. Thankfully, though, John does tell us what He shouted. John, remember, was nearby, so he heard the shout, and the passage is found in **John 19**. In our pew Bibles, the Scripture is found on **page 1694**. And to put it in context, to understand when this statement was made, I would like for us to look back again at the two verses we studied last week, because it all fits together. He needed something to drink so that He could make this next statement. If you will, then, please look with me at **John 19:28-30**...

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. ³⁰ Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

Jesus, then, was able to look back over His life, and He was able to shout out with a loud voice, **"It is finished!"** What was He talking about? We know that Jesus had done a lot of healing over the past 3-½ years, but had He healed every sick person in the world? No, He had not. Jesus had fed thousands of people over the past 3-½ years, but had He fed every hungry person in the world? No, He had not. Jesus had done a lot of preaching over the past 3-½ years, but had He done all of the preaching that the world has ever needed? No, He had not—at the time of His death, millions of people still had not heard the gospel message.

And so in what sense, then, was Jesus **"finished"**? As we start to consider this question, I should point out that, once again, the phrase, **"It is finished,"** comes from a single word in the Greek language, and from what I have read, the word was used quite often in the ancient world. A servant, for example, would use this word when reporting back to his master at the end of the day, **"I have finished (or accomplished) the work that you have given me to do."** Or, as we might say

today, **"Mission accomplished!"** When a priest would examine an animal before making the sacrifice, he would use this word to declare that the animal was fit or complete and ready to be sacrificed. When a painter had completed his work, he would lay down the final brushstroke, and then he would step back and use this word to declare that the painting was complete, that it was done, that it was now exactly as he had imagined it. In the ancient financial world, this is the word that was used when a debt was completely paid off. Today, when we pay off the car, we get a letter from the lender allowing us to remove the lien from the title. In the ancient world, this is the word that would have been printed or stamped on that document, **"Finished! Paid in full!"**

With this in mind, I would suggest at least two reasons why Jesus was able to shout out **"It is finished,"** at the end of His life. This was not the cry of a defeated Man. The Lord was not a quitter. We know that during His perfect life, the Lord faced many obstacles. Even as a baby, King Herod tried to kill Him. He was rejected by His family and friends. The religious leaders labeled Him as a false teacher. His own disciples turned away from Him. He was arrested, and falsely accused, and was basically tortured to death, and yet through it all, the Lord did not give up. Notice: The Lord did not say, **"I am finished,"** and so this was not the Lord giving up, but this was a cry of victory, a cry of great accomplishment.

I. **First of all, therefore (based on the Scriptures), I would suggest that as the Lord died on the cross, HE CRIED OUT "IT IS FINISHED," BECAUSE THROUGH HIS DEATH JESUS BROUGHT THE OLD TESTAMENT SYSTEM TO AN END.**

Here at this congregation, we have had to deal decisively with the false teaching that certain aspects of the Law of Moses are still binding on people even today. And yet when we examine the Scriptures we learn that the Law of Moses was never designed to be permanent, it was never designed to be a Law for everybody, but it was designed only for the Jewish people and only for a very limited period of time.

We look in **Galatians 3:19**, for example, and the apostle Paul asks the question, **"Why the Law then?"** And then Paul answers his own question by saying, **"It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."** In other words, the Law of Moses was designed to last only until the coming of Christ. The Law of Moses was not a permanent Law. It paved the way for Christ, it served as a schoolmaster (or a tutor) to bring the Jewish nation up to the time of Christ, to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah, but once the Messiah had come, the Law of Moses lost its significance, it lost its power.

Some people might say, **"But didn't Jesus say that He did not come to abolish the Law?"** Yes, He did say that, but I would invite you to look with me at that verse in context. The passage is found in **Matthew 5**, in the Sermon on the Mount. A lot of people who tell us to keep the Sabbath Day like to quote **Matthew 5:17**, sometimes they may even quote **verse 18**, but they usually forget the very last

phrase in **verse 18**. And so, let us look at what Jesus actually said in **Matthew 5:17-18**. He said, ***“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”*** I have put a good article on this passage in the cubbyholes this morning. But for now, let’s notice what Jesus said about the Law of Moses. He came here to ***“fulfill”*** that Law, and then He said that the Law would not pass away ***“until all is accomplished.”*** Let us then tie this in with what Jesus said on the cross, ***“It is finished!”*** It seems to me that Jesus is saying, ***“You know when I told you three years ago that the Law of Moses would not be abolished until all is accomplished? Well, all has now been accomplished!”***

Please remember: The Jewish people had been offering blood sacrifices for hundreds of years at this point. Once a year, the High Priest would make a sacrifice for his own sins, and then he would take a blood sacrifice into the Most Holy Place on behalf of the entire Jewish nation. At the time of Christ, the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, was partitioned off with a giant curtain. When I was a kid, I used to think that it was like one of the curtains we have here, and yet we know from history that it was a thick curtain. It was 4-6 inches thick, and it would have blocked out all of the light. It was heavy, and it was the barrier between God and the people. Sometimes we may overlook this, John does not tell us about it, but there is an interesting detail recorded for us in the other three gospel accounts. Do you remember what happened to that curtain at the very moment that Jesus died on the cross? The other three accounts tell us that at the moment Jesus breathed His last, that veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom! The gospel writers do not give us an explanation, but it is simply stated as a matter of fact. At the very moment of Jesus’ death on the cross, that barrier that had been manufactured by the Law of Moses, that barrier between God and man was ripped in two. And notice: That thick curtain was not ripped by man, it was not ripped from bottom to top—not an act of vandalism, but it was ripped by God, it was ripped from top to bottom. In other words, that was God’s way of saying that the Law of Moses was no longer a factor. We as human beings no longer needed to go through a human priest to have access to God. But, as the writer of Hebrews explains in **Hebrews 4:14-16**, ***“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”***

Later on, the apostle Paul would explain it in **Colossians 2:14** by referring to Christ making our salvation possible, ***“...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”*** In other words, when Jesus died on the cross, the Old Law, the Law of Moses, died with Him there. The same basic argument is made in **Ephesians 2**. Because of the Law of Moses, Jews and Gentiles were separate, and yet in **Ephesians 2:14-16**, Paul referred to Jesus, who,

“...broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” Through His death on the cross, therefore, Jesus *“...abolish[ed] in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.”* Or, as the Lord Himself said on the cross, ***“It is finished!”*** First of all, then, by dying on the cross, Jesus had brought the Law of Moses to an end.

II. There is a second (and closely related) aspect of the Lord’s death that allowed Him to claim, *“It is finished,”* and that is, THE DEATH OF JESUS PAID THE PRICE FOR OUR SINS.

And again, please remember the meaning of the word: paid, paid in full, accomplished, or done. Archaeologists tell us they have found this Greek word (and its Latin equivalent) scribbled all over tax receipts that were given out in those days—indicating that the bill was paid. With that in mind, perhaps we could compare the Old Testament system to a system of taxes. Up until the time of Christ, people had paid for their sins as they would pay a tax, so to speak. The bill keeps coming due. This is the problem with Madison—we pay our property taxes, but the bill keeps coming back—year after year! This is not a perfect illustration, and yet we find in Hebrews 10:3-4 that, *“...in those [Old Testament] sacrifices there [was] a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”* Those sacrifices were necessary, they were important, but they did not *“take away”* sins. The sacrifices allowed people to “be okay” with God for another year, but the sacrifices were not permanent—they had to be repeated over and over again. With each sacrifice they were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. And again, the credit card illustration is not perfect, but perhaps it helps us to understand that the debt of sin was not fully paid until the death of Jesus on the cross. On the cross, the bill of sin was stamped, **“Paid in Full.”** In other words, ***“It is finished!”***

Perhaps some of you listen to Dave Ramsey on the radio. Here in Madison, Dave is on weekdays from 10 until midnight on WIBA AM. He gives financial advice. The other day, for example, I heard him coach a couple through a **“Plastectomy.”** A Plastectomy is when you cut up all of your plastic, all of your credit cards. And people regularly call in to do the debt-free scream. There is a countdown, and then the members of the family will scream, **“I’m debt free!”** It is such a happy occasion. And that is what the Lord has done for us in a spiritual sense. The debt of sin has been completely paid off. We are debt free!

And so, with the death of Jesus, the Lord purchased our freedom from sin. In Revelation 5, we discover that those in heaven sang a new song to the Lord, saying, ***“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”*** We have been purchased by the blood of Christ. As the Lord

Himself said in **Matthew 20:28**, *“...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* Jesus was our ransom on the cross! Jesus was our sin offering, and through His sacrifice, the tax, the debt of our sin, has been paid in full. As Paul said in **Ephesians 1:7**, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”* On the cross, our atonement was purchased, and because of that, right at the point of His death, Jesus was able to say, *“It is finished!”* Paid in full!

Conclusion:

As we close this morning's lesson, we realize that there may be a lot of unfinished business in this world. In fact, sometimes it seems as if I spend a decent amount of time revising my to-do list, and sometimes there are things that end up just getting dropped from the list, and I'm sure some of you are the same way—there are some thing we may never be able to get done. But thankfully, concerning our salvation, the work of Christ has been completed. It is all finished.

Does this mean, however, that all people will be saved? A lot of people teach that it doesn't matter how we live, that Jesus did everything that needs to be done, and all we need to do is to sit back and enjoy the ride. And yet as we look at the Scriptures, we find that only those who accept God's terms will be saved. The Bible teaches that we must believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we have to change the way we're living—we need to have a change of heart concerning how we look at sin—stop stealing, move out of your girlfriend's apartment, break off the affair, stop being mean to people, whatever it is—realize what our sins really cost. And then, following the Lord's command, we must allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of what we have done. At that point, we are born into God's family, and we dedicate the rest of our lives to living as God would have us to live.

For those of us who are already members of God's family, allow me to ask a question: How would you feel if someone came up and offered to pay off all of your debt and offered to take care of every expense, and every tax, and every bill that you will ever have for the rest of your life? That would be such an incredible relief! And yet that is exactly what the Lord has done for us in a spiritual sense. The debt of sin has been canceled once and for all! We react to that offer by living for Him. We can never pay it back, we will never deserve it, but it changes the way we live. We love our neighbors, we treat people the way we would like to be treated, we are faithful to God, and we tell others what the Lord has done for us. If you have lost the joy of living the Christian life and if you would like for us to pray with you about that, or if you are not yet a Christian and would like to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org