

“IT IS FINISHED”

John 19:30

Intro: “It is finished.” These three words in English are the translation of one word in the Greek: Τετέλεσται. It is the third person singular perfect indicative passive of the Greek verb τελέω. It could be translated, “It has been completed.”

The perfect tense in the Greek is the tense in which the action described is completed. It speaks of some action which has proceeded through a process, but now exists “as a finished product” (Dana & Mantey, p. 200). It is true that the Lord had yet to die, to be buried, to rise again, and to ascend back to the Father, but it was all so certain that the Lord could speak of it as already completed.

Bishop J. C. Ryle made this comment about this one word in his commentary on John:

It stands here in majestic simplicity, without a note or comment from St. John, and we are left entirely to conjecture what the full meaning of it is. For eighteen hundred years Christians have explained it as they best can, and some portion of its meaning in all likelihood has been discovered. Yet it is far from unlikely that such a word, spoken on such an occasion, by such a person, at such a moment, just before death, contains depths which no one has ever completely fathomed. Some meanings there are, which no one perhaps will dispute, belonging to this grand expression... No one single meaning, we may be sure, exhausts the whole phrase. It is rich, full, and replete with deep truths (II, p. 584).

Spurgeon was equally impressed with this brief statement which our Lord spoke shortly before His death of the Cross. These are Spurgeon's words:

In the original Greek of John's Gospel, there is only one word for this utterance of our Lord. To translate it into English, we have to use three words; but when it was spoken, it was only one,—an ocean of meaning in a drop of language, a mere drop, for that is all that we can call one word. “It is finished.” *Yet it would need all the others words that ever were spoken, or ever can be spoken, to explain this one word* (italics mine). It is altogether immeasurable. It is high; I cannot attain to it. It is deep; I cannot fathom it. “Finished.” I can half imagine the tone in which our Lord uttered this word, with a holy glorying, a sense of relief, the bursting out of a heart that had long been shut up within walls of anguish.

“Finished.” It was a Conqueror’s cry; it was uttered with a loud voice. There is nothing of anguish about it, there is no wailing in it. It is the cry of One Who has completed a tremendous labor, and is about to die; and ere He utters his death-prayer, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” He shouts his life’s last hymn in that one word, “Finished.”

Once before the Lord had spoke of *His finished work*. That was in His high priestly prayer which is recorded for us in John 17. These were the words which He spoke at that time to His Father:

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do (John 17:4).

There He used the same verb, but a different form. I have often said that the Lord Jesus came to do a twofold work:

- 1) He came as the final and complete revelation of the Father.
- 2) He came to provide salvation for those whom the Father had given to Him.

The Lord had completed the former, and now He was completing the latter. Both of these words are glorious expression, and I agree with Bishop Ryle and Charles Spurgeon, that we will never be able to exhaust their meaning. But that should not keep us from seeking with the Spirit’s help to learn as much about them as we can.

Tonight I want to focus upon the latter. What can we learn from these immortal words of our Lord? I am sure that the more we know about them, the greater will be our thanksgiving that the Scriptures contain such a message.

First let me point out that:

I. THESE ARE THE WORDS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Thus, they come to us with the highest authority. If He said that His work was completed, then we should never pay any attention to anyone who says that His work was not complete, and so try to force upon us works for us to do to finish was He had not quite finished. It is inconceivable that our Lord would undertake any work that He did not intend to finish. He finished the work of creation in six days, and rested from His work on the seventh day. And by His coming into the world He finished, or fulfilled every prediction that any prophet ever made concerning His birth, life, and death. So knowing that He was, and is, the Son of God, we can take it on His authority, that He had finished the work of salvation which He had

come to do.

There is a second meaning that these words convey to us:

II. THE LORD HAD FINISHED THE WORK THAT THE FATHER SENT HIM TO DO.

There are many things that we can say about the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, but surely the outstanding thing that the Lord had done was in doing His Father's will. He left nothing undone which the Father had sent Him to do. The Father was glorified in the life and ministry of our Lord in a way that surpassed the obedience that would ever be rendered to the Father by anyone else. The Apostle Paul referred to this in Phil. 2 when he wrote in verse 8 that our Lord "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Many of the saints of the OT were obedient to God "unto death." But none rendered to the Lord perfect obedience. Nor did any die like the Lord Jesus died, making His soul a sacrifice for sins. We need only to remember what took place in the Garden of Gethsemane to learn a little bit of what the Lord experienced in His death when He sweat great drops of blood. And then it was that He prayed,

Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done (Luke 22:42).

Even before the Lord when crucified, when Judas came with a band of men from the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest the Lord, Peter took out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. And the Lord rebuked Peter with these words:

Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? (John 18:11).

So, before we say anything else about the meaning of this expression, we must speak of His desire to do the work of the Father, and to finish it for the Father's sake.

But there is a second meaning that follows closely behind the first. And this is why we are here tonight.

III. THE LORD HAD FINISHED THE WORK NECESSARY FOR OUR REDEMPTION.

I hope you noticed that I said that He had finished the work necessary for our salvation. He did not just finish His part, and now all that remained

was our part. I am sure that you all understand that we do not have a part. He did it all. He left nothing undone. Everything that was required for the salvation of every sinner for whom our Lord died, was “finished” when our Lord died on the Cross. If He had not finished it all, He could not have said that it was finished.

As sinners we do not understand this until the Holy Spirit shows us the truth of the Gospel. When man learns about his sin, and that he is accountable to God, the first thought that comes into his mind is what his part is in this salvation. I repeat: We don’t have a part! Salvation is a work of God, and it is ours as a free gift. Salvation is by grace. What could we possibly do that would earn salvation for us? What could possibly undo all of the sins which we have committed. The Scriptures are very clear. It is

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

And earlier in his epistle to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul wrote these words of the Gospel known and loved by the people of God everywhere:

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:4-9).

That is why we can sing,

Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

But there is another way in which it was a finished work.

IV. IT ENDED THE LONG PERIOD THAT THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR THE PROMISED REDEMPTION.

Ever since the Lord spoke those words of judgment to the Devil in the Garden of Eden, the chosen people of God in every generation have been waiting for the fulfillment of that promise:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

And that promise, repeated over and over again by God directly to His people, or through the messages of His prophets—that promise has been the only hope of salvation that anyone before Christ ever had. For example, Isaiah anticipated the finished work of the promised Savior when He, by the Spirit, wrote the words which we find in Isaiah 53:6,

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And not only was that long period of waiting finished, but so were all of the types and sacrifices.

V. THE WORKS OF THE LAW WERE FINISHED.

At the present time all of us who are reading through our Bibles on the schedule we provide every year, are reading the book of Hebrews. And it was actually that reading which made me think about those words of our Lord, "It is finished."

When the Lord died on the Cross, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, signifying the end of all of the sacrifices and ceremonies which were offered year after year after God gave the Law to Moses. All of those sacrifices were types of the coming Redeemer, but they were nothing more. None of them could ever take away a single sin. And so we read in Heb. 7:19,

For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

And then we read this in Hebrews 10:

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more con-

science of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

And then farther down in the same chapter we read this about the Lord Jesus Christ Who came to do the will of God:

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:10-14).

There is so much more that could be said about this wonderful word, "Finished," which our Lord uttered, but let me add just one more before we observe the Lord's Supper.

VI. IT WAS FINISHED IN THE SENSE THAT IT NEVER WILL NEED TO BE REPEATED.

And for this let me read to you from Hebrews 9, verses 24 through 28:

24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Concl: And so as we come to the Lord's Table tonight in remembrance of His work on Calvary's Cross for us, let us remember the love of the

Father Who sent Him, and the love of the Savior Who came, to provide salvation for us who deserved to go to hell, and who could make no provision for our salvation. So the Lord took our penalty upon Himself, doing all the work by Himself which necessary to save us, and which will never need to be repeated, fulfilling all of His promises and all of the shadows of Christ contained in the Law, that we might be forever free.

If anyone here tonight is without Christ, you are without hope. And I plead with you to seek from God the faith to believe that Jesus Christ died to save sinners from their sins, its power and its penalty, and that He has promised to save all who will come to Him through Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself said,

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).