

“It Is Finished . . . !”

Introduction

The Text

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30)

Good Friday for Easter Sunday?

- A. I should say up front here: I realize it may seem a bit odd to take up as my Easter text, these words which were here spoken while Jesus was yet still hanging on that cross.
1. “Aren’t we supposed to be talking about the resurrection?” you ask.
 2. “This text would have been well-suited for Good Friday perhaps, but not for Easter Sunday. After all, Jesus is risen!
 - a. Why are we going back under the cloud, back into the gloom, back on that tree, back to [John 19](#)? Take us to [John 20](#) and [21](#)!”
- B. Well, if that is how you feel, while I certainly understand the sentiment, I would offer this in my defense:
1. Just as the crucifixion means little without the resurrection (as we will later see),
 2. so too the resurrection means little without the crucifixion.
 - a. The two are inextricably intertwined.
 - b. They can be distinguished, yes, but never separated.
 - c. They are two cords so tightly interwoven as to form but one redemptive rope.

Proper Punctuation

- A. In an effort to help you see the relation between the two, especially as it pertains to this text before us now, you might think of the resurrection as God putting an exclamation point at the end of Jesus’ cry there in [v. 30](#): “It is finished . . . !”
1. Without the resurrection, we really wouldn’t know how to properly punctuate that statement.
- B. Remember, the earliest Greek manuscripts of the NT don’t supply the punctuation for us. So how do we know what to put here?

1. Should we put a question mark—by which we would be inclined to think perhaps Jesus isn't entirely done with his work of redemption, or at least he's not entirely certain he's finished.
 - a. "Am I done, Father? Is it finished?"
 2. Should we put a comma or a semicolon—by which we would be inclined to think perhaps Jesus still has more to say on the matter.
 - a. Sure, it is finished on his end, but maybe we still have to add in this or that on our end if we want to get right with God. We must mix in a bit of our own righteousness and merit or whatever else.
 - b. The sentence trails on. We're left a bit uncertain.
 3. Should we put a period there—by which we would be inclined to read Jesus' last words here perhaps as a remark of despondency: "It is finished."
 - a. "I tried, but I failed. I gave it my best go, but it wasn't enough. It is finished. I am finished. I'm done."
 - b. Surely, this is how the two on the road to Emmaus understood the statement in the days between the crucifixion and the resurrection: "[W]e had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' (Luke 24:21), but, alas, clearly, he is not. He's dead. It is finished."
- C. The fact of the matter is, again, until the resurrection, we really don't know how to punctuate it.
1. It's as if, after Jesus utters these words, God lifts his pen and sits on the matter for a few days. "What should I put? A question mark, a comma, a semicolon, a period?"
 2. And then on the third, at break of dawn, it becomes clear: The only way to properly punctuate this statement from Jesus is with an exclamation point—"It is finished!"
 - a. This is not a question. This is not some half-baked thought. This is not a word of despair.
 - b. This is a victory shout: "It is finished!"
- D. So the resurrection gives us the proper punctuation.
1. But, again, that punctuation means little to me if I don't understand what the sentence itself means—if I have no grasp on what was actually "finished" there at the cross.
 2. So that's what I want to look at with you this morning.
 - a. We'll close with a final word about the resurrection, this all-important exclamation point.
 - b. But I want to spend the great majority of our time considering the sentence itself.

The Most Significant Word(s) Ever Uttered

- A. I wonder what you would consider to be the most significant words ever uttered in human history?

1. Would you turn to the poets—some line from Shakespeare or Wordsworth or Dickenson?
2. Would you turn to the philosophers—men like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes?
3. Would you turn to the statesman or the politicians, to the scientists or the artists?

B. I'll tell you where I'd turn: [John 19:30](#): "It is finished!"

1. It's three words in the English, but only a singular word in the original Greek: [tetelestai](#).
2. I think that's the most significant word ever spoken.
 - a. But what does it mean—what does it mean for Jesus; and what does it mean for us?
 - b. Those two questions form my two main points for this morning.

(1) What Does It Mean for Jesus?

A. For Jesus, there are so many layers of meaning in this statement. I'll give you three of them: (1) Mission Accomplished; (2) Scripture Fulfilled; and (3) Debt Paid.

Layer #1: Mission Accomplished

- A. All through Jesus' life on this earth, from the very early stages of it, we get this unmistakable sense that he has come with a purpose, on a mission. He's been given some great work to do by his Father. And he's always thinking upon it, only really giving himself to it.
1. So there beside the well in Samaria, in the heat of the day, when the disciples are wondering why he hasn't stopped to eat his lunch like the rest of them, he says: "[My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work](#)" ([John 4:34](#)).
 2. He refers to this work again and again as he goes along (cf. [John 5:36](#); [17:4](#); etc.).
 - a. He is a man on a mission, with a mission, sent from heaven for the sake of the world.
- B. And, of course, this mission, as Jesus well knows, wasn't just to come down and help humanity out a little here or there—feed this hungry crowd, give water to that desperate woman, heal this blind man, embrace that leper.
1. Those are all wonderful things. But they do not constitute the ultimate reason why he's come.
 2. He's not come to merely offer us a little aid. No. He's come to die.
 - a. All the way back in Bethlehem the shadow of the cross was upon him.
 - i. Why do you think the Son of God was born, not in a palace, but in a stable; not lain in a prince's crib, but in an animal's feeding trough—with no pomp or parade, with no glitz or glamour? Why?
 - (1) Because he hasn't come to be celebrated.
 - (2) He's come to be sacrificed.

b. Even back at Christmas, Jesus is already preparing for Good Friday and Easter.

C. This is why all through John's Gospel, we hear him talking about what he calls his "hour":

1. So to his mother in Cana he says: "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). The hour of what? The hour of his death.
2. John picks up on this in his own narration of the story and tells us, for example in John 7:30: "[T]hey were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come."
3. Likewise, later in John 8:20, he tells us: "These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come."
 - a. It's as if he lived out his days before the ominous glow and intermittent flash of a countdown timer. He could see it—how many years and months and days and hours he had left.
 - b. It's as if the soundtrack to his life on earth was the ticking of a clock. Like that crocodile in Peter Pan, swimming stealthily behind with open jaws and razor teeth.
 - i. He couldn't escape it. He didn't want to escape it. This is why he's come.
 - ii. Here was the drumbeat that he timed his mission's march to. Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

(1) Marching ever closer, ever nearer—from this hour towards the hour.

4. Until finally in John 12:23 he says to a few his unsuspecting disciples, no doubt with a tremor in his voice: "The hour has come . . ."
5. Listen in to the conversation he turns to have with his Father only a few verses later: " ²⁷ Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name" (vv. 27-28a).
 - a. And the Father thunders his approval from the heavens: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (v. 28b).

D. So the Son doesn't drag his feet. He doesn't kick and scream. He doesn't pound against heaven's decree. He doesn't shrink back from the encroaching shadow. He steps steadily towards it (just as he has from the very beginning).

1. And what an hour this would be!

- a. The betrayal of Judas.
- b. The chains of the soldiers.
- c. The denials of Peter.
- d. The kangaroo court of the Jews.
- e. The cowardice of Pilate.

- f. The venom of Satan.
- g. The wrath of God.
- h. The whips and the lashes.
- i. The sneers and the spit.
- j. The thorns and the nails.

i. All of it!

- E. So what does it mean for Jesus when, having passed through this wretched hour, he finally calls out at the end of it: **“It is finished!”**? It means: “Mission accomplished. Father, I did all that you sent me to do. The purpose, the work, the mission, it’s complete. We’ve taken on Satan, sin, and death . . . and won. It is finished!”

Layer #2: Scripture Fulfilled

- A. There is, of course, another layer of meaning to all of this for Jesus.

- 1. His victory shout is not just a reference to his mission accomplished.
- 2. It is also a reference to the fact that so much of Scripture was—in him, at that very moment—being fulfilled.

- B. As I have shared many times before, from the very opening pages of Scripture, ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, the whole of redemptive history has been moving towards this moment.

- 1. Every promise and prophecy, every symbol and type of the Old Testament, it’s all been preparing us for and pointing us to him and his work on the cross!
 - a. This is why Jesus would say in the Sermon on the Mount: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”** (Matt. 5:17).
 - b. This is why he rebukes those resistant Jews in **John 5:39**, saying: **“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me”** It’s all about me!
 - c. This is why J.C. Ryle says: **“Take away the cross of Christ, and the Bible is a dark book.”** To which I would add: **“But put the cross of Christ back in at its center, and the Bible is full of light!”**
- 2. This is what makes sense of it all. This is what brings fulfillment to it all. That’s why Jesus says: **“It is finished!”** The Scripture is fulfilled.

Explicit and Implicit

- A. This comes out here in our text both explicitly and implicitly . . .
- B. Explicitly, John just comes right out and says it there in **v. 28**, if you noticed. He says all this stuff is happening with Jesus there on the cross **“to fulfill the Scripture”**

- C. But I am particularly struck by the implicit fulfillment that's happening here.
1. For this, I am thinking about that little seemingly random detail John gives us here about the particular plant stalk used to bring the sour wine to Jesus' trembling lips.
 - a. The other Gospel writers just tell us the sponge was put on a "reed" of some sort ([Matt. 27:48](#); [Mark 15:36](#)).
 - b. But here John identifies it in particular as a "hyssop branch" ([v. 29](#)).
 - i. Well, maybe John simply has an affinity for plants. Maybe he's got a "green thumb" or something. Maybe that's why he points it out.
 - ii. I don't think so. I think he has other reasons for drawing our attention to this . . .
 2. You see, hyssop—a small shrub with blue flowers and fragrant leaves—it was used by the Jews particularly in purificatory ritual (cf. [Exod. 12:22](#); [Lev. 14:4](#); [Num. 19:6, 18](#); [Ps. 51:7](#)).
 - a. The most notable example, of course, is what we're told in the book of Exodus.
 - i. Do you remember—in the very first Passover, when God was rescuing his people out from the house of slavery there in Egypt—what was it that he said they must use for the steaking of the blood of the Passover Lamb over top the doors of their homes? Hyssop ([Exod. 12:22](#)).
 3. I cannot help but think that the mention of hyssop here is meant to bring such a history to mind and lead us to the inevitable conclusion that here again, yet this time in all its fullness, we have our Passover Lamb.
 4. Indeed, if such a thing is but a whisper here in [v. 29](#), it reaches the volume of a rooftop shout down in [v. 36](#), but, sadly, I don't have time to look at that with you.
 5. Suffice it to say, this is why Paul, reflecting on the cross of Christ, would later write in [1 Cor. 5:7](#): "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."
 - a. All that the Passover stood for at the climax of the Exodus from Egypt, has been realized in Jesus!
 - b. His is the blood over the doorposts of our heart.
 - c. Here is how we are protected from the angel of death, the wrath of God, and freed from house of slavery, destined for the land of promise.
- D. So when he says: "It is finished!"—what does he mean? Scripture is fulfilled.

Layer #3: Debt Paid

- A. But there is one last layer we must bring out at this point. This word in the Greek (*teleō*), as we've seen, it can mean to finish or complete; it can mean to realize or fulfill; but do you know what it can also mean? . . . "to pay what is due" (BDAG) (cf. [Matt. 17:24](#); [Rom. 13:6](#)).

- B. Admittedly, this third meaning, at least in the context of John, is a bit further off in the background. Nevertheless, if you know your Bibles at all, you know that it is in fact bundled up with the first two.
1. For, after all, what is it that the Father sent the Son to do?
 2. And what is it that all the Scriptures and the redemptive plan and promises of God had been pointing to?
 - a. Is it not this? That the Son would come and pay the ransom for our release, pay the penalty for our sin, pay the debt owed by us to a holy God?!
 - b. That is what all of this has been about has it not? As Jesus himself said: “[T]he Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
- C. Paul tells us that every man or woman forgiven under the Old Covenant dispensation, was forgiven, as it were, on credit.
1. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins (Heb. 10:4).
 - a. God didn’t institute the sacrificial system and all this because it was sufficient in itself.
 - b. No. He instituted it so that the people of Israel and through them the nations would be trained to look for the coming One, the only One, who truly can sufficiently pay such a debt.
 2. In mercy, Paul says, God had “passed over former sins” (Rom. 3:25).
 3. But at Calvary that bill came due. And Jesus, on that cross, would pay it all!
 - a. As the author of Hebrews puts it: “[H]e has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26).
- D. “It is finished!” The debt is paid. Your debt is paid. My debt is paid.
- E. A.W. Pink sums all of this up powerfully for us when he writes: “‘It is finished.’ This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr; it was not an expression of satisfaction that the termination of his sufferings was now reached; it was not the last gasp of a worn-out life. No, rather was it the declaration on the part of the divine Redeemer that all for which he came from heaven to earth to do, was now done; that all that was needed to reveal the full character of God had now been accomplished; that all that was required by law before sinners could be saved had now been performed; that the full price of our redemption was now paid” (Seven Sayings, 118).

(2) What Does It Mean for Us?

- A. Now we transition to that second question: What does it mean for us? So much. More than I could ever say. But just as I gave you three layers of meaning for Jesus, let me briefly give you three layers to this for us: (1) Open Door; (2) Solid Ground; and (3) Certain Hope.

Layer #1: Open Door

- A. By “open door” I’m simply referring to the fact that, because of Jesus, that iron door that has long been shut with dead bolts running all along its side, that door that has stood like an impenetrable wedge between sinners like us and a holy God, it is now flung open wide!
- B. We have access to God. We can have saving relationship with God.
 - 1. It doesn’t matter who you are. It doesn’t matter where you’ve been. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done.
 - 2. Jesus has paid the price of your admission. All that’s left for you to do is walk through.
- C. And if, by chance, there happens to be stationed a bouncer by the door that day and he asks you who you think you are to dare come so brazenly into the Almighty’s presence.
 - 1. Don’t worry. Don’t fret. Don’t turn and run.
 - 2. Just point your finger to that terrible heap of a man hanging on the cross, the only beloved Son of God given for the sins of the world, and say with the utmost confidence: “I’m with him!”
 - a. And that shall suffice. There’s nothing more to say than that. It is finished.
- D. This, after all, is the meaning of the torn curtain of the temple. Do you remember? It happens right as Jesus is declaring his work to be finished and yielding up his spirit. Matthew tells us: “[B]ehold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51).
 - 1. This is that great, majestic, awesome curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple of God.
 - 2. It was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide, heavily embroidered, massively significant.
 - 3. Only the high priest could ever tread beyond it; and even then only once a year on the Day of Atonement; and even still, no doubt, he would come in trembling with terror, lest some sin be found on him and he drop dead before the Holy One of Israel.
- E. That’s the curtain! That’s the curtain that tore as Jesus breathed his last.
 - 1. And it didn’t just tear merely.
 - 2. Matthew goes out of his way to make sure we know it tore “from top to the bottom.”
 - a. The implication is plain: the tearing didn’t start with us, from the ground up.
 - b. Oh no, it started with God. This is his doing.
 - i. We are not saved by our own works, but by his grace.
 - ii. We are not admitted on the basis of our own merit, but on the basis of Christ’s.
 - (1) He’s made a way. He’s torn the curtain. He’s opened the door.

- F. As Peter puts it in 1 Pet. 3:18: “Christ . . . suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God”
- G. Oh, listen, I don’t care how sinful you’ve been, how unworthy you are, how bad you feel . . . so far as this door is concerned, because “it is finished” it is open . . . to you!

Layer #2: Solid Ground

- A. Lodged down deep somewhere in the heart of every man and woman, regardless of whether they are outwardly religious or not, is this nagging sense that we must somehow prove ourselves.
 - 1. We all feel like we’ve got to earn our keep; show our worth; get God to like us; and, if not God, then at least others; get someone to tell us we’re good.
 - a. We feel it. We can’t shake it.
 - b. And no matter how hard we try, we never really get there, we never really arrive.
 - 2. It’s as if we go about our day with some invisible ruler always pressed up against us, measuring our size and our stature.
 - a. Am I tall enough. Am I significant enough. Do I matter? Do I “measure up”?
 - 3. It’s as if our lives play out in some cosmic courtroom, before an ever-observing jury. And they are taking notes, gathering data, preparing their verdict: Are we worthy?
 - a. Are we good enough, successful enough, productive enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, strong enough, holy enough?
 - b. We spend so much anxious energy trying to make our case, to sway the jury, to get the verdict: I’m good. I’m alright.
 - 4. It’s as if life is one arduous race, and we’re running and striving and looking desperately along the horizon for a finish line that never comes into view.
 - 5. It’s like we’re all trying to push up on quicksand. The more you strain the more you sink—and more weary and anxious and despondent you become.
 - a. (I wonder: Is that you today?)
- B. But then, from there on that rugged cross, we hear Jesus speak over striving: “It is finished!”
 - 1. And, with those words, suddenly, beneath our feet there is solid ground.
 - 2. We can push up, we can breathe, we can truly live . . . we’re free!
 - a. He stands before that invisible ruler for me. He measures up in my place.
 - b. He steps into that courtroom. He makes the case for my acquittal on the basis of his life and death.
 - c. He runs the race. He alone has the strength and stamina to cross that finish line.

- i. And as he is elevated there on the podium, with the gold medal around his neck, he invites me to come up and stand with him, to share in his triumph.
 - ii. Even though I didn't run, I didn't earn, I didn't win.
- C. Do you realize this? The Christian life begins where Jesus' life ends. Our starting line is his finish line. Do you know what I mean?
 - 1. No longer are you running a race where you hope at the end of it: I will be loved, I'll be accepted, I'll be enough. No!
 - 2. Now, because of Jesus, you start the race with a sense of this love as already yours from God.
 - a. Any running you do from this point is not to earn or prove. It's already been earned and proven for you.
 - b. Now you can run free like a child in a field of flowers, basking in the warm sun of your Father's affection.
 - i. You don't run to get.
 - ii. You run because you already have. So there's an effervescence and a joy to it.
- D. In one sense, then, it is finished; but, in another sense, it's only just begun!

Layer #3: Certain Hope

- A. I took my family to see a movie in the theaters the other night.
 - 1. And in it there was this very sad scene. I'm glad the place was dark because I was crying.
 - 2. And I look over at one of my daughters. And I'm thinking: "Man, if I'm crying like this, I'm sure she's going to be crying too." But she was fine.
 - 3. And I asked her afterwards how she was able to keep it together like that. And do know what she told me? She said: "Dad, it's because with movies I know that, no matter how bad it gets, it has to have a happy ending."
 - 4. And, do you know what? She was right. It did end well.
- B. But, don't you see? This is what Jesus gives us.
 - 1. Because "it is finished," we have certain hope of a happy ending.
 - 2. No matter how hard things get here, no matter how rough the go . . . if we're with him, we're going to be okay.

Conclusion

How Do We Know?

- A. But now I'd like to close with this simple question that brings us back to where we started: How do we know? How do we know "it is finished"?

1. It's one thing to say it as Jesus does on that cross,
2. but it's another thing for it to truly be so.
 - a. Anyone can say it. How do we know it's for real?
- B. Well, there are many answers we could give at this point, but the most essential is this—how do we know? Because, after he was crucified, he was raised.
 1. If he stayed dead we could never be certain. Was it enough? Is it paid in full or is more still owed?
 2. Because he was raised up from the grave never to die again, Paul says in [1 Cor. 15](#), we can know for sure: we are no longer in our sins (cf. [v. 17](#))!
- C. If the crucifixion is the payment of our debt, the resurrection, you could say, is the receipt.
 1. It's as if God rang the register, he cashed the check, and he found there to be sufficient funds in the account of Christ.
 2. And the resurrection is the proof of it, the proof of purchase if you will.
- D. As Leon Morris has put it: "The cross is the victory The resurrection is the public display of [that] victory, the triumph [or 'triumphal procession'] of the crucified one."
 1. Or as we put it all the way back at the beginning of this sermon: Jesus' resurrection is God's exclamation point put at the end of this most significant sentence ever uttered: "It is finished!" It really is.