

It is finished

John 19:28–30

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reflection

The New Testament begins with four biographies of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. But in many ways these gospels are simply four extended introductions to the last seven days of Jesus' life. Jesus lived on earth for thirty-three years, three of which he spent in public ministry. But it is the last seven days of Jesus' life that the gospel writers are most interested in. They're telling us that if you want to understand the life and teachings of Jesus Christ then it's these last seven days that make all the difference. Luke dedicates one fifth of his gospel to the last seven days of Jesus' life. For Matthew, they represent a quarter. Mark one third. And for John as we've seen, almost one half of his entire gospel consists of the last sev-

en days of Jesus' life – the Passion week, the week that ends with Easter.

Today Jesus dies. He gives up his spirit, but before he does one final triumphant cry breaks the dark silence, just one word in the Greek, Τετέλεσται, rings out in the darkness, 'It is finished.' Τετέλεσται, a victory cry shouted loud enough – we read in Mark – to make your heart leap in your chest at this unnatural scene.

It's three o'clock in the afternoon, Good Friday. Jesus has been hanging on the cross for the past six hours. His body is broken and ruined, he's on the fringes of death. For the first three hours, Jesus had been mocked mercilessly; by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law but also by the relentless tide of

passers-by, representative of all humanity. Until, that is, as we read in the other gospels, the sun reaches its midday high and all the mockery stops dead in its tracks. Jaws drop, mouths open wordlessly, the superstitious amongst them reach into their pockets to grab hold of lucky charms which were prevalent in the ancient world. Universally, a deep sense of foreboding fills every heart – as would happen in any land, and in any time and place in history, when the blazing midday sun ceases to shine, and darkness covers the whole land.

Some have claimed a great windstorm, others a solar eclipse but neither of these could account for the complete darkness, a darkness you could feel. This was a supernatural event. They're killing the Son

of God. The light of the world is about to be extinguished. What better way to mark his passing than all of wicked humanity plunged into the dread of darkness? The Jewish religious leaders have lost their swagger, some of them even look deeply disturbed. They can't leave, they have to see him dead, but what to make of this darkness? The Romans guarding Jesus are tense, there's sweat on their brows, expert executioners, they'd killed many but none of them had died like this man. Setting these uneasy feelings aside they scan the darkness, as professional soldiers they sense the risk of ambush; after all, men had been known to live when taken down from the cross and if this man lived it was Roman policy that their lives would be forfeit.

Three unnerving hours later their hearts lurch in their chests as one final triumphant cry rings out in the dark silence. A Roman centurion gives his life to Jesus because of it. Hundreds of millions would follow. Τετέλεσται, 'It is finished.' Charles Wesley,

Tis mystery all! The immortal dies: Who can explore his strange design?

Let's try. 'It is finished.' Three words. Three points. It – Is – Finished.

Firstly 'It'. What is it? What is finished? Τετέλεσται in the Greek means a little more than simply 'finished'. More like accomplished. What has been accomplished? What is finished? How far do we reach back? Does Jesus mean that his sufferings have finished? Do we reach back

twenty-four hours to the beginning of the Passover meal, his grief at his departure and betrayal by one of his closest friends, followed by the physical and emotional agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the horrors of the cross? Is this what Jesus means when he says 'it is finished?' Or do we reach back further? Perhaps to the start of Jesus' ministry on earth? Is that what Jesus is talking about? Today he's accomplished what his Father sent him into the world to do. Or do we reach back still further? What about the prophecies? What about the promises? It is finished. How far does this 'it' extend? How far back do we go? The answer is right back to the very beginning – to before the beginning of time when God set in place his perfect plan of salvation for humankind who would turn their backs on him through sin. What's

‘it’? ‘It’ is the greatest love story ever told. It’s the story of impossible love. The unrequited love of a holy God for a sinful people who turned their backs on him, and willingly condemned themselves to death and punishment. How could there ever be reconciliation? How could the Fall be undone? How could the world ever be set right again? The answer is ‘it’ – the greatest love story ever told. Which makes this moment the climax of the ages. It make this moment the climax and centrepiece of all human history. It makes this moment the hinge on which all eternity swings. There is no more important moment and there is no more important truth.

It ‘is’. My second point ‘is’. Now I don’t want to get overly technical, but the verb Τετέλεσται is in the perfect tense in the

Greek, not the present tense, but the perfect which means not 'it is' but 'it is and always will be.' This is and always will be humankind's most important truth. It is finished and always will be finished because of this moment. Even 2,000 years on there is no more important truth. Acts 4:12 tells us why,

Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Or in Jesus words from John 14,

I am the way the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.

It. Is. Finished. My third point. And this is the best part. Jesus has done it. He's done what we could never do. He lived the perfect life, he was tempted and did not sin, making him the perfect holy sacrifice, our Passover Lamb without blemish, the only one qualified to lay down his life in exchange for ours. He's done it. Through faith in him we're saved, by grace. Grace. The most precious word in the English language. What does it mean? It God's free and undeserved gift to us, forgiveness and eternal life purchased for us by the blood of Jesus. Grace. What does it mean? It means that because of Jesus, there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. Let this sink in, it's hard to even fathom in our achievement orientated culture where we work

relentlessly to attain. Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

Think & Pray

Meditate over the greatest love story ever told this morning. For God so loved the world that he graciously gave his one and only Son to live the life we couldn't live, and die the death that we deserved to die, so that we might be saved. It is finished. By grace. Not by our works which could never save us but by grace. As Tim Keller says, grace changes everything. Has grace changed everything in your life? Are you experiencing new freedom? New joy? Lasting hope and meaning? A new shape to every day? The pressure's

off, you can rest in his grace today and forever.

Life isn't about us, it's about him. Bringing glory to him, enjoying his good gifts and carrying on his mission on earth in response to his precious gift to us while resting in, and drawing strength from the fact that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

Thank God today for his unconditional love in Jesus' name.