

4. It is finished

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Date: 22 June 2011

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[0 : 00] Well, let us bow our heads together and I'll lead us in prayer. We've just sung to the Lord Jesus as we've pictured him upon the cross.

These eyes, new faith receiving from Jesus, shall not move. Whoever dies believing dies safely in your love.

We thank you, dear Heavenly Father, that the Bible draws a great and deep distinction between those who believe and those who do not. And calls all of us to turn, to repent and to come to you. And to put our trust in you and in your Son, our Saviour. The only Saviour. And we pray, dear Father, that as we consider more today what it means to put our trust in your Son, that you will give us assurance and open our eyes to understand new things from your wonderful book, the Bible. The Bible is precious to us, our dear Father, and we thank you for it. Thank you that without it we would understand nothing.

[1 : 28] We could only guess at what you're like. And yet with it we're able to see so much because you have graciously revealed yourself to us in its pages. We thank you that it is indeed like a rock beneath our feet and like a light or lamp that sheds light upon our path so that we can see how to walk through life and not be like blind men who stumble and have no idea of where we're going.

So may your words of Scripture come alive to us again today. Please especially lift up those who are bowed down and worried, who are feeling worn out because of life's difficulties and pressures, and encourage all of us, dear Father, to trust you indeed, to trust you and to go forth rejoicing that you and the Lord Jesus love us and that in him you have provided the world with a true rescuer. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, you might like to take your Bible, if you have a copy of it there, and if you have one of our church Bibles, let's turn together, please, to page 905.

John's Gospel, chapter 19, page 905. We're gradually working our way through this 19th chapter of John's Gospel on these Wednesdays in June.

Today we're going to be thinking of the words that Jesus spoke. It is finished, just before he died. And then next week we will look at the final paragraph or two of the chapter. But let me read today from partway through verse 16 down to the moment when Jesus dies in verse 30.

[3 : 22] So John, chapter 19, verse 16. So they took Jesus, and he went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of a skull, which is in Aramaic called Golgotha.

There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross.

It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city.

And it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priest of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write the King of the Jews, but rather, this man said, I am the King of the Jews.

Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, also his tunic.

[4 : 33] But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said to one another, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to see whose it shall be.

This was to fulfil the scripture, which says, They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. So the soldiers did these things.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son.

Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said, to fulfil 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.

[5 : 51] And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Amen. The words of the Lord. Well, today, I want to take simply those great words that Jesus uttered just before he died.

And you'll see them here in our passage at verse 30. It is finished. In John's Greek, that is just one word, the word tetelestai.

And it could equally well be translated, It is accomplished, or it is completed. The idea is not simply that something has come to an end, but that something has been brought to a good and satisfactory and even triumphant conclusion.

So I want to ask today what Jesus meant when he said, It is finished. Well, let me start at the very low level of our own life and experience.

There's something in human nature that wants to bring a task to completion. I remember when I was a very young boy, perhaps only aged seven or eight years old, my father used to din this into me.

[6 : 59] And he would say to me, if I was doing some simple little job, I might have been cleaning out the rabbit hutch or weeding a little flower bed. He would say to me, Edward, make sure you don't stop until it's all done.

A job worth doing is a job, you know that saying, I've forgotten it. It was that sort of idea anyway. Make sure you get the job done. Now there's something in all of us that finds satisfaction in doing a job thoroughly.

So for example, if you're making a rockery in your garden, one or two of you might be doing that, you'll be spending every Saturday for months doing it, but eventually the rockery's done, the plants are planted, and you sit back and you breathe a sense of satisfaction.

Or perhaps you're a woman who's skilled at making dresses. Maybe you're making a dress for a bridesmaid or a bride, and I imagine that the moment when the last stitch is stitched, you feel very happy about it.

Now where did this desire in us to complete a job, where did it come from? Surely it reflects something in God himself, because all of us are made in his image.

[8 : 02] We reflect his characteristics. So we learn to be workers because God is a worker, and we learn to complete our tasks because we're like him. We reflect his characteristics.

This is one reason why it's so frustrating and difficult to be unemployed, because unemployment frustrates this God-given desire to work and to get a job done. So God, in whose image all of us are made, is not only a worker, but he is one who completes the tasks that he undertakes.

Now in the Bible, there are many instances of God starting and completing various small or smallish projects or tasks, but there are three great moments in the Bible when God completes three great and wonderful tasks or works.

And those three moments come at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the great story of the Bible. The first is that moment when God finishes his work of creation.

Genesis chapter 1 tells us in some detail of the six days of creation, of everything that God did during them. And then Genesis chapter 2 begins like this.

[9 : 18] Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work and rested from all the work that he had done.

Now he rested, not because he was tired, but because the work was complete. On the seventh day, God finished his work. So that first great moment of completion comes right at the beginning of the Bible story.

We'll come to the second in a moment. But think of the third great moment of completion. That's going to come right at the end. The Apostle John puts it like this in the book of Revelation, chapter 21, verse 5.

And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. And he said to me, It is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

Now just think of those two great moments, the one at the very beginning of the Bible and the other at the very end. Bear in mind, of course, that that end one hasn't yet happened from our point of view, still in the future.

[10 : 29] But what is going on in those two great moments of completion? Well, to put it simply, at the beginning, God completed the old creation and at the end, God is going to complete the new creation when he ushers in the new world which will be inhabited by all who belong to him.

But the bringing in of the new creation or the new world to be populated by all of God's people will only be possible because of the second great act of finishing.

And that is the moment when Jesus cried on the cross, it is finished and bowed his head and gave up his spirit. And let me try and explain why the completion of the third great work depends upon the completion of the second.

We can be quite sure that God is never taken by surprise. He has always known the end from the beginning. So when God made the world and then the Garden of Eden and the first man and woman and he placed them in the garden, it was a grief to God but it was no surprise when they rebelled against him.

Do you remember he said to the man in Genesis chapter 3, where are you? But he knew where Adam was that he was in hiding from him. And he said to the woman, what is this that you have done?

[11 : 50] But he knew what the woman had done. And then in Genesis chapter 3 when God pronounces judgment and sentence upon Adam and Eve, he spells out the consequences of their sin.

And these consequences could hardly be more severe. The woman will not only experience great pain in childbearing, but her relationship to her husband will be damaged.

Wedlock, you might say, will become deadlock, a battle of the sexes for domination. As for the man, his work, which up to then had been delightful and pleasant to him, his work would now become toil and drudgery.

The very ground itself, the environment, would be cursed and would only yield food at the cost of great sweat and toil. God says to him, it will grow thorns and thistles and only wheat and barley at the expense of great hard manual labor.

Now, it's still like that because we're still in the old creation. But then, most severe of all, God condemns mankind to death in Genesis chapter 3. Death was not part of the original blueprint, but God imposed it upon the human race because of our defiance of his authority.

[13 : 08] The wages of sin has always been death. So God says to Adam, by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken.

Dust you are, and to dust you will return. Pulverization. That is God's sentence upon the rebel race. And we are still, all of us, physically reduced to dust after our death because we are still part of the old creation. So everything changes, everything, during the course of Genesis chapter 3.

Before Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve are living there in the Garden of Eden in paradise. Their relationship to God is a relationship of happiness and harmony and joy.

Their relationship to each other in their marriage is one of complete bliss and harmony. And the soil of the garden produces wonderful crops. Adam farms the soil, but his work is a delight and a joy to him.

[14 : 09] So you might say the man is in harmony with his maker, with his wife, and with his environment. But after Genesis chapter 3, mankind is expelled from the garden.

His friendship with God is shattered, his marriage becomes a war zone, his farming becomes toil, and the very environment becomes hostile and difficult.

And his life from then on is dominated by the approach of death, and that gruesome end overtakes him finally, as it has overtaken every man and woman ever since.

Now like Adam and Eve, after Genesis chapter 3, we too live in the old creation under this sentence of death. And we deserve that sentence every bit as much as Adam did.

We can't simply blame it all on him and his disobedience, because each one of us is responsible. Each one of us has personally defied God and wanted to assert our independence of him.

[15 : 12] In Psalm 99, the only psalm in the book written by Moses, Moses reflects on the events of Genesis chapter 3, and he says this to God, You sweep men away as with a flood.

They're like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed, in the evening it fades and withers. For all our days pass away under your wrath.

We bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are 70, or even by reason of strength 80, yet their span is but toil and trouble.

They are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

Now friends, is that not a question for Moses to ask? Who considers the power of your anger? Who considers it?

[16:16] The shopper who's hurrying up Buchanan Street at this very moment to Boots or to John Lewis looking for a handbag or perfume is not considering the power of the anger of God.

The 15 year old school boy who's waiting for his standard grade results at this moment is thinking of many things but he's not thinking about the anger of God and yet the power of God's anger is the determining factor in that school boy's life.

It's the inexorable force that will turn his work into toil and which will bring him at last to his coffin.

This is the plight of man that we live out our 70 or 80 years under the anger of God.

Our fundamental problem is not economics. or politics. It's not social justice. It's not climate change. Our problem lies in the words that God spoke to Adam.

In the day you eat of it you shall surely die. And it was because of that problem that the Son of God had something to do.

[17:23] Something to finish. To bring to completion. What was it then that Jesus came to do and to finish? Well let me try to show how in John's Gospel Jesus' task or work is described.

Now there were many things that Jesus is recorded as doing in John's Gospel. There were times when he called people to follow him. Come follow me. There were miracles of healing.

There were miracles of power over nature. There were extended teaching sessions. And there were rows. Blazing rows you might say with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. But there was one thing.

One tremendous moment towards which Jesus focused all his attention and his mental energy. And he described it in John's Gospel as the hour or my hour.

Let me just give you some examples of this. There's no need to turn up these references unless you'd particularly like to. But the first time comes in chapter 2. That's the incident of the wedding at Cana of Galilee where Jesus turned the water into wine.

[18:32] And you remember the situation? His mother Mary comes to him and says to him they have no wine. And he says to her woman what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.

A bit later on in chapter 7 Jesus is having an uncomfortable difficult conversation with his brothers in Galilee and his brothers are urging him to go down to Judea to Jerusalem.

But he says I'm not going to this feast in Jerusalem because my time has not yet come. There's something he's driving towards. But a year or two later when we get to chapter 12 to the final section of John's Gospel it's now only six days to go to Passover.

And Jesus says to his friends the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. and he immediately gives us a clue about what he means because he goes on to say truly truly I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone.

But if it dies it bears much fruit. So this hour that he's talking about is the hour of his death and it's the moment of his glory and his death he says is going to be very fruitful.

[19:48] We learn a bit more from the beginning of chapter 13. John writes this in chapter 13 verse 1. Now before the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end.

So the hour is not only his death it's his departure when he's going to leave this world and return to his Father. And then in chapter 17 verse 1 Jesus prays to God the Father.

This is the Thursday evening and he says this Father the hour has come glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.

And then he says in verse 4 I glorified you on earth now listen to this next phrase I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

Now that prayer was spoken on the Thursday evening just a few hours before the crucifixion. The work wasn't going to be finally completed until mid-afternoon on the Friday when Jesus breathed his last.

[20:58] But so certain is Jesus of carrying it through that he's able to say on the Thursday evening that he's already accomplished or finished the work that has been given him by his Father.

And it's rather wonderful to see throughout John's Gospel how the evangelist portrays Jesus' purposeful steady approach to the cross.

His work his mission was not going to be completed until he had laid down his life and the laying down of his life is a purposeful intentional act over which he had full control. Now that's not normally the way in which death comes to human beings. The normal thing is that death overtakes us and we're powerless to resist it. You and I can't decide that we're going to die in April or in October or in this year or that year.

But Jesus purposefully laid down his life at the time of the annual Passover sacrifice because he knew that he was the Passover Lamb. It was all purposeful on his part.

[22 : 03] He said back in John chapter 10 I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sake of the sheep. In the same chapter he says now listen to these words no one takes my life from me I lay it down of my own accord and I take it up again of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. His death didn't just happen to him it was he who organised its timing.

It appeared to be happening to him but it was he who was causing it to happen. So let's come back to our chapter 19 and verse 28.

At verse 28 we're just a minute or so before his death and look how John puts it here in verse 28.

After this Jesus knowing that all was now finished said to fulfil the scripture I thirst.

So he knew it was finished he knew the task was completed but his throat was so dry from the bodily torture and asphyxiation and perhaps the heat of the day and he needed something to moisten his vocal cords so that he could give expression to this final great word.

[23 : 22] So he managed to say I'm thirsty. Somebody took pity on him got some of this sour wine up to his mouth and he managed to drink just enough to give him the voice power to cry out it is finished.

Matthew and Mark both record that just before he breathed his last Jesus uttered a loud cry but they don't say for what he cried. John of course was standing right there beside the cross so he heard the very word finished accomplished done.

What then has Jesus accomplished? Let me put it in the form of three very simple points. First he had overcome the world.

He said to his apostles back in chapter 16 in the world you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world.

Now the world means human life in the grip of the evil one. Human life defying God and resisting his loving authority and the world in that sense would have power to bring us down to condemn us eternally but Jesus has achieved victory over the power of the world.

[24 : 41] Secondly when he said it is finished he means that he had absorbed fully the anger of God. God settled righteous antagonism towards human rebellion.

rebellion. Now that was always our problem our rebellion. God was angry with the human race. He always loved the human race more than we can grasp but he had to bring it to the bar of his judgment.

But the accomplishment of Jesus is that Jesus representing the human race stepped forward and to use the Bible's language drank the cup of God's anger so that God's anger was spent and exhausted.

So when Jesus said I thirst it may have been not simply that he was thirsty but that he knew that he had to drink down the cup of God's anger against human sin.

And then thirdly he bore the penalty of our sins in our place. The wages of sin is death and on the cross Jesus received those dreadful wages.

[25 : 49] we deserved to receive them but Jesus stepped up and took them for us in our place so that we should not have to. So friends this wonderful cry it is finished is a great thing for the world to be able to hear.

It gives us assurance from Jesus' own lips that the thing he came to do this death is something that has been accomplished and it's because of his work on the cross that the final work the third great it is done can also be completed this work of bringing in the new world populated by all for whom Christ died.

You see if Jesus had not accomplished his task on the cross we could never be forgiven our sin could never be dealt with we would still be under the anger of God with no future but to be returned to the dust but his work is accomplished he has overcome the world he has absorbed fully the anger of God against our sin and he has borne the penalty of our sin in our place now friends I

know that most folk here are Christians you know these things are true well be reassured he has done it the great transaction is done as one of the hymns put it it has happened this is true if on the other hand you're not yet a Christian and you're trying to understand these things then let me suggest that perhaps this very day in your heart and mind you kneel down before that figure who hangs on the cross and listen to him again as he says it is finished and as you hear him say those words will you thank him for dying in your place so that you could be free and forgiven and so that in the end you could be part of the new world the new creation to come to him like that and to thank him and to place oneself in his hands that is to become a Christian let's bow our heads and we'll pray together it is finished accomplished in our moment of prayer now

I'm going to say a very simple prayer which gives expression to the thoughts or the words of somebody who wants to come to the Lord Jesus for the first time and to put their life in his hands and to submit gladly to his lordship with a thankful heart Lord Jesus I picture you today hanging on the cross absorbing God's righteous anger and bearing the full penalty of my sins I deserve to die and I confess it because the wages of sin is death and I'm a sinner I've been a rebel I've sought to please myself and to serve myself but today Lord Jesus I lay down the arms of my rebellion and I come to you thank you so much for finishing your work please accept me today please give me a new life make me one of your people so that

I may serve you and I ask it for your name's sake Amen to Minister 2018