

It Is Finished

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[0 : 00] Well, as I said, tonight we are continuing our study on John's Gospel. We've come to the second half of chapter 19, and I want to read again the words of verse 30.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, it is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Our title comes from those three words that we have in verse 30. It is finished. That tiny statement is only recorded by John, but it's become one of the most famous statements that Jesus ever spoke.

In English, it's only three words. In Greek, it's actually only one word. It's the word, tetelestai. In Greek, you don't need to have separate words for things like it or I, or is.

It's all built into the way that the word is spelt. But that one word, that one word describes the most momentous event in all of history.

[1 : 02] And that's what I want us to think about tonight. And as we do so, I want to ask the very simple and very obvious question, what is finished? And our answer is going to be in three parts.

We're going to say that the suffering is over. The scriptures are fulfilled, God's salvation is accomplished.

So first of all, the suffering is over. These words are spoken by Jesus in the moments before he died. And that brought to an end a prolonged and intense period of suffering for him as he hung on the cross.

In fact, that was one of the aims of death by crucifixion. It was intended to be long and slow and as painful as possible.

Some of you are probably aware of this, but the basic idea of crucifixion is that the position that the cross suspends you in makes it very difficult to breathe. And in order to breathe, you have to pull yourself up.

[2 : 00] And so you're pushing against the nails in your hands and in your feet in order to lift yourself up enough to take an intake of breath. And every time you breathe, you have to do that again and again and again.

And as time goes on, the body becomes more and more tired, pulling yourself up becomes more and more difficult. Breathing becomes harder and harder and the person dies from asphyxiation.

And it's all intended to be long and slow and agonizing. And that's what Jesus experienced.

And as we think about that, there's two things that we need to always remember. The first is that for Jesus, the suffering actually started long before the nails went into his hands and his feet.

We've been studying the Gospel of John and as we've been reading through it, we've seen that in the hours leading up to this moment, he was mocked, beaten, betrayed, denied, abandoned, accused and condemned.

[3 : 08] And even before that, Jesus's public ministry had brought a constant stream of opposition, threats, temptations, criticisms and rejections.

The suffering started long before the cross. And of course, that's reminding us that when Jesus came into the world, he came to suffer.

He came as the suffering servant that had been prophesied in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, we have a magnificent description in Philippians 2 of how Jesus's journey into the world was all on a downward trajectory leading to more and more suffering.

Paul records it here in these verses. He says, have this mind amongst yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

So that's pointing us to the fact that the Son was with the Father from all eternity. And then it describes what happened when he came into the world. It says, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, being found in human form.

[4 : 15] He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. All of Christ's experience as he came into the world alongside us was in the context of this humiliation, this being brought low.

Jesus is moving further and further along a downward path, a path that takes him towards greater and greater suffering, and it all culminates here on the cross.

And so we've got to remember that the suffering didn't start right now in John 19. But the second thing that we need to remember is that the suffering of the cross involved far more than just the physical agony of a crucifixion.

Consider in the New Testament, John tells us that Jesus in dying on the cross is making atonement for our sins. He's dying on the cross for our sins in order to make atonement.

We'll think a wee bit more about that in a moment. But the key point here that we need to highlight is that when Jesus died on the cross, his suffering wasn't just in terms of the physical agony that he was experiencing.

[5 : 30] There was also the emotional agony of being mocked and betrayed and abandoned. And most of all, there was the spiritual agony, suffering as the Lamb of God, the one who's come to take away the sins of the world, the one who's suffering as God's holy wrath is poured out upon him.

And maybe the clearest way that we can describe the extent of that suffering is to recognize that on the cross, Jesus was suffering the agony of hell.

And John actually hints at that in something that he says. And I don't even know if he realizes that he hints at it. He may not have known that he was doing it. But he is very careful to tell us that Jesus was thirsty on the cross.

And as he does that, there's a potential link to something that Luke says in chapter 16 of his gospel, because here he records a parable that Jesus told.

The parable was about a rich man and about a poor man called Lazarus. The outcome of the parable is that both died. And the Lazarus is taken to be by Abraham's side in heaven.

[6 : 50] The rich man goes to Hades, goes to torment. And the way that that's described is in terms of agonizing thirst.

Now whether that link is deliberate or not, I don't know. And it's important for us to recognize that this parable is not intending to give us all the details about what hell does or does not look like.

But it's so interesting that as this man experiences the torments of hell he thirsts. And that's exactly what we see Jesus experiencing on the cross as well.

Now exactly what that involves and exactly what hell is like, I don't know and I don't really want to know or think about it. But the key thing here is that that is the extent of what Jesus is suffering.

He is experiencing the fullness of that agony and we must never forget that the clearest glimpse we will get of what hell is like is when you look at Jesus dying so that you don't need to go there.

[8 : 05] All of that's telling us that the life of Jesus, the mission of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus exposed him to desperate suffering.

And now at last that suffering is finished. And there's so much we could say here, there's just one thing I want to highlight.

All of this is reminding us of the fact that Jesus knows exactly what it's like to suffer. And that's so crucial for you to remember because I know that so many of you know what it is like to suffer.

So many of you suffer physically, whether that's through constant pain or whether that's through illness that you are repeatedly having to deal with or whether that's through exhaustion and fatigue that won't go away.

So many of you know what it's like to suffer physically. So many of you know what it's like to suffer emotionally. When dreams that you had in life have not turned out, when people you thought you could trust have hurt you, when things that you wish weren't ever going to happen have happened.

[9 : 14] And all of us know what it's like to suffer spiritually, to have fear about death, to have doubts, to struggle and wonder, to feel isolated, to feel that everybody else is in a better place than we are spiritually.

We all know what it's like to suffer. Jesus knows exactly what you're going through. In fact, Jesus has suffered more than we ever will.

And that means that he understands you. It means you can talk to him, you can lean on him, you can be comforted by him.

But as we say that, we've always got to remember that there's so much about the cross that we will never fully understand. Because Jesus was exposed to a level of agony and a depth of suffering that we will not have to face.

So what that means is that we will never say, I thirst in the way that Jesus said it. Because we'll never experience what he is experiencing on the cross.

[10:28] But if you are a Christian, or if you become a Christian, what that means is that in terms of your suffering, you'll never be able to say, I thirst like Jesus did.

But you will be able to say, it's finished. Because the day will come when your suffering will be over. The day will come when all pain and sorrow will be gone. That's what Jesus promises. That's what the Bible culminates in in the great words of Revelation 21, that Jesus will wipe away every tear from your eyes.

Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away.

The physical, emotional, spiritual suffering that this life will bring again and again and again with Jesus in his new creation, it's all finished.

[11:32] And it's so important that we remember that, because it's only Jesus that can give us that. It's only Jesus that can give us that.

Many people today think that the answer to suffering is just to distract ourselves. Other people, and especially in our own context today, think that something like assisted suicide is going to give us that experience of an end to suffering.

But it's only Jesus that can give us that conscious experience of suffering and pain being ended forever. And that's exactly what he's come to give us.

When Jesus cried, it is finished. Suffering was over. The second thing that's finished though is the second thing that this phrase highlights is the fact that the Scriptures are fulfilled.

And the interesting thing is that this is what John focuses on much more than the sufferings of Jesus. If you read John 19 again carefully, you'll see that he actually says, well, he doesn't say very much about the sufferings of Jesus, certainly not in comparison to the great lengths that he goes to, to show us that everything that's happening is fulfilling what the Old Testament Scriptures said.

[12:47] You see it again and again. In verse 19, when it talks about the soldiers casting lots for Jesus, that's fulfilling Psalm 22. As you can see there on the screen, they're casting lots here.

And that's exactly what the Psalm prophesied a thousand years before. 28 to 29, speaking about Jesus thirsting and being given sour wine to quench his thirst.

That's echoing Psalm 69, again prophesied hundreds of years beforehand. In verse 19, in chapter 19, verse 36, there's a great emphasis on the fact that Jesus' bones weren't broken in comparison to the other two who were being crucified beside him.

This echoes two verses in the Old Testament. Exodus 12 talks about how the Passover lamb was not to have its bones broken. Psalm 34 speaks of bones not being broken.

And then verse 37, we have the language of them looking upon the one whom they've pierced.

That's quoting from Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10, one of the Old Testament prophecies.

[13:55] In all of these, we've been shown that everything that's happening to Jesus is everything that God has planned. It's everything that the Scriptures had been expecting.

Now that's really important for a couple of reasons. First of all, it's important because it's showing us that although Jesus is being beaten, he's been mocked, he's been condemned, he's been executed.

Although all that stuff is happening to him, throughout it all, he is in complete control.

Once making it absolutely clear that as Jesus dies on the cross, as he cries, it is finished. He then bows his head and he gives up his spirit.

In other words, it's Jesus who decides when it's finished. And you see that in contrast to the other two who have been crucified, their legs are broken to accelerate their deaths.

[14:57] Jesus has already died because he died according to God's timing, not humanity's. He's in control through it all. And the second thing that's so important to remember is that when Jesus says it is finished, it's not saying finished in the sense of failed.

Now that might seem very obvious to us because we know the outcome of the story, but it's so important to highlight this because to everybody watching Jesus die on the cross, it looked as though everything was ending in failure.

Because this is not the outcome that the disciples expected. And to the opponents of Jesus, him dying on the cross just confirms that they were right and he was wrong.

He wasn't the king. He wasn't the son of God. He wasn't the Messiah. And the disciples probably went home saying, it's finished.

In the sense of being utterly dejected because it looked as though Jesus' mission had failed. But of course, that's not what Jesus meant when he said it is finished.

[16:15] This cry is a magnificent declaration that he has completed what he has come to do. Because when he says finished, he doesn't mean failed.

He means fulfilled. It's a great reminder that everything that's happening here in John 19 is accomplishing God's great plan of salvation.

That plan has run right through the Bible. Phil brought so much of that out this morning that everything that's happening is an outcome of what God has planned throughout the whole Old Testament.

Again and again and again, the Scriptures are pointing forwards to this. And now Jesus comes and dies and he fulfills that plan perfectly.

And there's a key consequence of this. And it's highlighted by John in verse 35. It's all so that you might believe.

[17:12] And this is so crucial to think about. John's telling you what he saw. He was there. He saw it happening. And he is telling you that this is fulfilling what the Old Testament prophesied.

He's telling you that all of this is tying in with God's eternal plan. He's telling you that this is the culmination of everything that has been unfolded across the ages of history.

In other words, he's telling you that the Bible is not making stuff up as it goes along. And that's so crucial because it's reinforcing to us the fact that Christianity is not asking you to believe something that lacks credibility.

It's the very opposite. The message of the Gospel stands on eyewitness testimony. It's grounded on clear prophetic fulfillment.

It's founded on a stable, coherent, consistent plan that is foretold, fulfilled, outworked, perfectly by God.

[18:16] Why is that so important for us to think about? Well, it's so important because all around us, we see people who are responding to the biggest questions of life and death by just making stuff up as they go along.

All around us, people are doing it. They are making stuff up. So what's ultimate truth? People will say, look into your heart.

Where can we find hope? People will say, stay strong, keep the faith, feel the energy. What happens when we die?

People will say, we go to a better place. We'll be flying with the angels on the other side. That is just making stuff up.

It's just making stuff up as you go along. And there's a really interesting contrast to be drawn here between how people thought two, three, four hundred years ago.

[19:15] Two, three or four hundred years ago, the ordinary person like me and you, probably, I would say in general, when it came to medical care, when it came to scientific opinion, when it came to cultural analysis, most ordinary people made stuff up as they went along.

And people didn't have the widespread education that we have today. And so if they were trying to figure out what the stars were, well, they probably just made something up. Obviously there were others who knew what the stars were.

There were experts in universities, you know, happy for centuries. I'm just talking about ordinary, general people. They made stuff up about science, culture, medical care, or they tried to figure out things out without really being sure.

But they knew they had to think seriously about God, about death, and eternity.

Today we are the other way around. We think very seriously and clearly about healthcare, scientific discoveries, and cultural developments, but when it comes to the questions of life and death and eternity, we just make up stuff that sounds nice.

[20 : 35] And that is why the Gospel is so magnificent and why the Gospel is so desperately needed. It gives us a message that you can believe, that you can trust, that you can ground all your hope on.

It's a message that fulfills the plan of God. It's a message that stands on a coherent, reliable, trustworthy record. When Jesus said, it is finished, he's telling us that the Scriptures have been fulfilled.

So we're seeing that the suffering's over, the Scriptures are fulfilled, but most of all when Jesus says it is finished, he's telling us that God's salvation has been accomplished.

The whole Christian message arises from the fact that something has gone massively wrong. We were created by God, created to enjoy a beautiful relationship with Him, with one another, with the world around us, and sin has ruined that.

And we are responsible for that. We've rejected God, we've rebelled against Him, and it's left us and the world around us broken. And I've often said that as the easiest doctrine in the Bible to prove, because you just need to look at the world around us to see that there's so much brokenness.

[21 : 52] And the consequences of that are monumental. Sin has left us guilty before God, and we desperately need forgiveness. Sin has left us slaves so that we keep on getting sucked in by sin.

We desperately need to be redeemed. Sin has accrued a massive debt that desperately needs to be paid in full. Sin has provoked God's righteous and holy wrath that needs to be poured out. Sin has left us alienated from God and in need of reconciliation. Sin has left us lost and disorientated, desperately need of rescue. Sin has left us battered, desperately needing healing. Sin has left us under the relentless power of death, and we desperately, desperately need to be saved. And the whole of Jesus' mission is grounded on the fact that He has said, I am going to fix all of that.

I am going to fix it all. But fixing it meant leaving heaven. Fixing it meant coming into the world as one of us.

[23 : 02] Fixing it meant being laid in a manger in poverty and obscurity. Fixing it meant being despised and rejected by the very people He created. Fixing it meant the Garden of Gethsemane.

Fixing it meant betrayal. Fixing it meant that His hands and His feet were nailed to a cross. Fixing it meant the shame and humiliation of public condemnation and execution.

Fixing it meant taking all the punishment that our sins deserve. Fixing it meant crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Fixing it meant death, even death on the cross.

And in the councils of eternity, Jesus said, I'll do all of that.

And now, now that He is about to bow His head and give up His Spirit, now at last, Jesus can see it is finished.

[24 : 10] And He did it all for you and for me.

And there's two crucial points that we have to recognise and we have to close. I'm still in American time, so just ignore that it's seven. So there's two crucial points we have to remember.

The first is that we've got to recognise that there are so many times when God could have said, it's finished. So many times when God could have turned His back on us forever.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed Him in Genesis 3, God could have walked away and said, I'm finished with them. When God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt and they responded by constantly complaining and by making a golden calf to worship God, could have walked away and said, I'm finished with them.

When Jesus came to His own people and they rejected Him, He could have said, I'm finished with them. And without the Son of God to be crucified, He could have walked away and said, I'm finished with them.

[25 : 14] When humanity rejected God and decided that we know better, He could have walked away and said, I'm finished with them. But He doesn't.

And this is where we see how unrelenting God's love for you really is. Jesus will only cry, it is finished.

When He has paid the price for every mistake that you and I have made, when He's atoned for every sin that you will ever commit, and when He has broken every last ounce of power that death has over you.

For God, it is only ever finished when your salvation is fully and irrevocably accomplished.

In other words, when Jesus left heaven to come into the world, He could only ever return when He could take you with Him.

[26 : 19] And that raises the second crucial point that all of this teaches us. It's so important to think about this because when it comes to faith, when it comes to salvation, when it comes to the great questions of what happens when we die, when it comes to the question of whether or not we are really saved, when it comes to all of that, for centuries humanity has been plagued by the question, have I done enough?

And so many people have struggled with that question, have I done enough? And so many of the world's religions are crushing people with that question.

Are your good deeds going to outnumber your bad deeds? Have you remembered to pray five times a day? Have you given enough of your money? Have you tried hard enough? Have you reached the standard that we're expecting of you?

And we can approach the gospel in the same way. We can think, have I done enough to be saved? Do I know enough? Have I experienced a spectacular enough conversion?

Is my faith strong enough? Have I done enough for God to like me? That question can plague us as seekers, thinking, I know that I need to be saved and I want to be a Christian, but I just don't know if I've done enough.

[27 : 44] And it can even plague us as Christians because we think, well, I haven't done enough to keep God happy. I haven't done enough to stay where I should have been.

I've made too many mistakes. I've wandered too much. I've been distracted by work and life and money and family and all the other things that can fill our attention and we think, I haven't done enough.

And all the time Jesus is saying, stop asking that question. Because when it comes to everything that is needed for saving you, Jesus says, it is finished.

It's done. And that means that if you are trusting in Jesus or if you start trusting in Jesus, you never, ever have to ask the question, have I done enough?

Because he's done it all. And that's why every time we doubt, every time we're afraid, every time we feel like we're a total let down to God, every time we feel like we are nowhere near good enough, we can come back to these three amazing words.

[29 : 08] It is finished. And these words are what makes it possible for the gospel to be a message of grace, a message that's a free gift.

Salvation is a free gift, fully accomplished, eternally effective, utterly perfect, all because Jesus finished everything.

And we can pour all our hopes and all our fears, all our struggles, all our insecurities into these three words and rest in the fact that Jesus has done it all.

And the thing that I want you to remember more than anything else is that he did all of that for you. He did all of that so that you can be saved.

And whether you've been following him for years and years, and whether you're early on in your journey as a disciple or whether you've maybe never been sure if you've taken that step, these words are inviting us all to come and rest in the finished, perfect work of Jesus.

[30 : 17] Amen. Let's pray.