



“It is finished.”

John 19:17-30

Text:28-30

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In every sermon, I try to relate whatever passage or topic I am dealing with to Jesus Christ and his mission of salvation. The reason for that is that Jesus and his mission is the core of the message of the Bible and nothing in the Bible is understood correctly unless it is understood in its relationship to him. Another reason for relating everything to Jesus is that when the Bible exposes our sins, it is intended to expose our need of Christ for forgiveness and when the Bible points out how we are to live our lives, the only way that we can grow in obedience is through the transforming power that is given to believers through faith in the one who died for us and who rose from the dead and who gave the Holy Spirit.

But much of the time, the sermon is not about the core of our faith which is Jesus and him crucified. We encounter a large number of subjects when we work our way through the Bible. Jesus is related to all of them, but he is not at the center of every text. So, it is good from time to time to focus our attention on the heart of our salvation and the heart of the message of the Bible which is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This evening in connection with Good Friday we will hear the Word of God from John 19:28-30 where John describes for us the last moments of Jesus' suffering on the cross.

Jesus is on the cross. His teaching and his claims had infuriated the majority of the religious leaders of the Jewish people. He had been popular with the regular people, at least temporarily. He had been critical of the leaders and of their religiosity. He had claimed to be the Son of God. It had become clear to the religious leaders that he was claiming to be equal with God. He called all men to follow him or perish.

Jesus was the kind of person you either believed and followed or hated and despised. Jesus was the kind of person who was divisive because of his claims. As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, you can't really be neutral about someone who claims to be God. Either you will accept his claim and bow before him, or you will reject his claim and consider him to be evil and dangerous.

Well the leaders of the Jews considered Jesus to be evil and dangerous. They loathed him. And so, they cooked up a plan to have him crucified. Their plan succeeded. Jesus was arrested, tried and crucified. He was nailed to a cross, the most cruel and inhumane method of execution, reserved for the lowest of the low. It was both agonizing and humiliating. To have someone crucified was an expression of contempt for that person. It was the ultimate in torture and degradation. The religious leaders of the Jews thought that it was an appropriate punishment for someone who went around claiming to be God and accusing them of hypocrisy. And so, there is Jesus hanging on a cross. He had been there for some time. The end was near. And this is where we pick up John's narrative. John 19:28, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), I thirst." Verse 29, "A jar of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth." Verse 30, "When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

First, we will consider the idea that Jesus was conscious of having finished something at this point.

Now there are different ways of speaking about being finished. They can be words of defeat. Someone who feels defeated might say – that's it – I've had it – I can't go on – I'm finished. That is not what Jesus is saying here. This is not a whisper of defeat. It is, in fact, an expression of triumph – of having completed something he had set out to do. The three words in English "It is finished" translate one word in Greek – *tetelestai* – which means, "I have fully accomplished something." It was used by a servant to his master when he had completed a task. "I'm done. I have done all that you asked me to do." That is the meaning of *tetelestai*. In the words of one author, "It's not the cry of a victim who's

caught up in events that are out of control. It's the triumphant announcement of someone who is fulfilling his mission, who sees that all the necessary steps have been taken and fulfilled."

But what exactly had Jesus finished? The answer to this question is found earlier in John's gospel. In John 4:34 we hear Jesus say, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." In John 9:4 he says, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work." In John 10:18 "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." John 17:4 "I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you have me to do." When Jesus said, "It is finished," this is the context. He was saying that he had accomplished the work that his Father had given him to do.

What was that work? What was the task that the Father had sent Jesus to accomplish? What was the mission that the Father had given him? There are lots of verses in John which spell this out. In John 1:29, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 3:17 says "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." In John 6:33, Jesus says, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." In John 10:10 Jesus says concerning his sheep, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Just before he went to the cross Jesus said in John 12:27 "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."

It is to all this that Jesus was referring when he said, "It is finished." He had finished the work of being the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He had finished the work of being the Saviour of the world. He had finished the work of bringing life to the world. He had finished the work of obtaining abundant life for his sheep. He had done that by living a perfectly righteous life and he had done that by suffering on the cross the wrath of God against the sins of his people.

The task that the Father had given Jesus is spelled out in all the OT prophecies concerning him. We gain greater insight into it from Jesus'

own teaching and all the connections he made with the OT passages concerning him. It was the task of winning the victory over all the enemies of God. It was the task of bringing the kingdom of God. It was the task of breaking the power of sin. It was the task of overcoming the power of evil in this world. It was the task of defeating death itself. It was the task of taking away the curse because of sin. It was the task of saving his people from their sins. This is what the Father had sent him to do. And it was to all of this that Jesus referred when he said, "It is finished."

It is exhilarating to reflect on these words of Jesus and their significance. The greatest negative in our lives is the fact that we are sinners. It means that we are doomed apart from a rescue. Sinners deserve to go to hell. That is an utterly gloomy prospect. Unsaved sinners live in the shadow of a very dark future. But here we have Jesus, saying, "It is finished" referring to the great plan of God to rescue his people and his creation from the devastation that is sin. These words mean that the greatest enemy of the human race has been conquered. They mean that we who believe in Jesus are free from the curse of sin that hangs over us all by nature. They mean that the heart of God's plan for the renewal of the whole creation has been completed. They mean that we live in the light of a wonderful future where all the consequences of sin will be banished. They mean that a time is coming when, for the people of God, there will be no more sorrow and no more pain and no more death and no more suffering. This cry of triumph are the most important words that the world has ever heard.

But it is very odd that they should be uttered by a man who was dying because he was hanging on a cross. A cross is not the usual platform for a cry of victory. You would expect that the last words of a man dying on a cross would have been words of defeat. From a this-worldly perspective Jesus' death on the cross was a defeat. From a this-worldly perspective, Jesus' death on the cross meant that his enemies had won. Jesus had been silenced. And his enemies were confident that he would soon be forgotten, and his followers scattered, like so many would-be messiahs before him had been.

And yet, this is a cry of victory and we know that because of the details of God's plan in earlier parts of the Bible and the explanations of the significance of Jesus' death in the rest of the NT. The verses that we have already surveyed from John's gospel about the work that the Father had given Jesus to do, tell us why Jesus' death was a victory rather than a defeat. God had sent him to be the lamb that takes away the sin of the world. Jesus had come to lay down his life for his sheep. Jesus' death was a victory because Jesus had been sent to die as a sacrificial lamb for the sins of his people. That is why his death was a victory rather than a defeat.

There is another part of this passage that we still need to consider. Verse 28 says, "After this, Jesus knowing that all was now finished, said, (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'" This is a very important part of the way that Jesus himself and the gospel writers who tell his story, help us to understand Jesus' significance. Again, and again we read of how Jesus fulfilled the Scripture. When we examine the Scriptures which he fulfilled, we are given insight into the significance of Jesus and his mission.

The Scriptures most often mentioned in connection with Jesus' words about his thirst are Psalm 22:15 and Psalm 69:21. Psalm 22:15 says "my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws." Psalm 69:21 says "for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."

Jesus said, "I thirst" because he knew that the soldiers would give him a sip of sour wine and the connection would be made between these references in the Psalms and Jesus and what he was going through. It is interesting that Jesus does not explicitly make this connection. All Jesus says is "I thirst." The claim that he said those words to fulfill the Scripture comes from John. John did not write these words until near the end of his life. John had pondered every detail of what happened on the cross for years and he had come to see by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had said those words "I thirst" to make the connection with Psalm 22:15 and Psalm 69:21 – to fulfill the Scripture.

Both of those Psalms are Psalms in which David is lamenting that he is suffering unjustly. They are both known as Psalms of a righteous sufferer or of an innocent sufferer. In their OT context, that does not

mean perfect righteousness, but rather that the Psalmist is being unjustly attacked by his enemies. In Psalm 69, David speaks of “those who hate me without cause.” Jesus, by identifying with these Psalms, is claiming that he is the ultimate righteous sufferer. While it is true that there is a sense in which Jesus was not righteous because the sins of his people were upon him, there is also a sense in which he was perfectly righteous because he himself had never sinned and those who crucified him were doing so unjustly.

So that is the significance of the fact that Jesus said, “I thirst” in order to fulfill the Scriptures. By speaking those words, Jesus triggered the action of the soldiers to give him a sip of sour wine. That action and the thirst that initiated it, made the connection between Jesus and Psalms 22 and 69 which speak of the righteous sufferer. Those Psalms described the experience of someone who was being attacked by enemies unjustly. Jesus by showing the connection between himself and those Psalms was highlighting the fact that he was the ultimate righteous sufferer. He was truly righteous and yet he was being crucified. He had done nothing to deserve crucifixion. He had done nothing to deserve any kind of punishment. He was the only person who had ever lived who had lived without sin. And yet there he was dying on the cross.

There are at least 4 points that follow from this idea of Jesus fulfilling Scripture as the righteous sufferer. First, this was necessary for our salvation. In order for Jesus to save us he had to suffer as a righteous person. If Jesus had not been righteous, he would have had to suffer for his own sins. No one who is a sinner can suffer for the sins of another. He is worthy of death for his own sins. Jesus here is highlighting the fact that he is suffering unjustly. They had crucified him without cause. He was perfectly righteous. This was necessary for him to be our substitute. Had he suffered a penalty he deserved, he could not have suffered for us.

Second, this is a reminder that those who are righteous should not be surprised when they suffer at the hands of the ungodly. Now no servant of God is perfectly righteous as Jesus was, but it is possible to be righteous in a certain situation in the sense of being hated and attacked without cause. That was the experience that led to the Psalms of the

righteous sufferer. The righteous servants of God were often hated and persecuted unjustly. That is what was happening to Jesus. And that has continued to happen to many of the followers of Jesus through the centuries.

This goes with the territory of being righteous in a sinful world. As saints of God we are not perfectly righteous in ourselves, but we are being sanctified so that we are righteous to some degree by the grace of God. That attracts the hatred of sinners. This is behind persecution.

Righteousness attracts the hatred and loathing of sinners. That is why God's people are so often persecuted. We see this principle in operation on the cross. On the level of his relationship with the leaders of the Jews, Jesus suffered, not because he was sinful, but because he was righteous. And we are seeing that more and more in our society as Christians are excluded and despised exactly because they confess the righteous truths of God's word in a world that detests the righteousness of God's word. And of course, there are Christians all over the world who are suffering for righteousness in ways far more cruelly than anything we know in our part of the world. They are following in their master's footsteps.

Third, Jesus, by connecting what he was going through with the Psalms of the righteous sufferer, was also expressing confidence that in the end he would be vindicated – that is – in the end he would be shown to be righteous and those who persecuted him would get their due. Both Psalm 22 and Psalm 69 end on a note of triumph and victory. Psalm 22:24 says “For he [God] has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.” Psalm 69:30 says “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.”

The Psalms of the righteous sufferer end on a note of hope. And Jesus by making the connection between himself and these Psalms was expressing that hope. He was dying on the cross. And yet he knew that he still had a future. Death would not be the end. He would yet be vindicated. He would be declared righteous. He would be rescued from his enemies.

We know how that happened in Jesus' case. On the third day after his crucifixion Jesus rose from the dead. Death was not the end for him. Jesus was vindicated by his Father. He was shown to be righteous by his resurrection from the dead. There is a hint of that here as Jesus was dying. By making the connection between himself and Psalm 22 and 69, Jesus was expressing his confidence that he had a future – a glorious future – where he would be acknowledged for who he is and where he would rejoice in the presence of his Father.

Fourth, by making it clear that what he was going through was in fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus is demonstrating and emphasizing that his death was at the center of God's plan for the salvation of the world. All of these passages which show the different ways that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures do not only give us insight into the meaning of Jesus and his death, they also give us insight into the meaning of history itself. These connections to the Old Testament all are making the point that history is the unfolding of God's plan that is centered on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. The fact that there are all these prophecies and foreshadowings of Jesus and his mission in the OT teaches us that all the history prior to Jesus was leading to Jesus and his mission. So, the Psalms of the righteous sufferers revealed a pattern that would be fulfilled in Jesus and his experience of righteous suffering. The fact that God, hundreds of years before Jesus was born, inspired David to write of his own righteous suffering in Psalms 22 and 69 so that Jesus could fulfill those Scriptures shows us that God had planned for Jesus' death on the cross as a righteous sufferer and that he was moving history toward that goal.

This is very important for our understanding of the meaning of history. And by pointing out these fulfillments again and again, Jesus and the New Testament writers are teaching us that God is the Lord of history and he is working towards the goals that he has foretold by way of prophecy and typology. And what this passage shows us is that the death of Jesus is the key of all of history.

This passage shows us that Jesus' death was the event that secured God's goal of undoing the curse of sin. Jesus' death finished something. That is why this passage twice uses that term in connection with Jesus'

death. Everything that had happened since God first promised to bruise the head of the serpent by the seed of the women was leading up to this moment when Jesus said, "It is finished." Jesus obviously did not mean that the whole plan was finished. 2000 years later we still await the culmination of God's plan for the renewal of the creation. But Jesus' death did finish something. It was the event that overturned the curse of sin. It was Jesus' death which paid the penalty for sin and so broke the power of death. All the history that followed Jesus' death is the unfolding of the fact that Jesus has won the victory over sin and death and Satan. What Jesus finished by dying was **the thing** that had to be done if there was going to be salvation for the world.

This then is **the pivotal event** in all of history. It is the heart of the meaning of history. What this all means is that all of history is about the defeat of sin and death and Satan. This is why there is any history beyond the fall. If had not been for God's plan to defeat sin, there would have been no reason for him to allow the world to continue after the first sin. The reason that history continued after the first sin is that God had planned to undo the curse of sin. And the moment that Jesus died on the cross, that was accomplished. That is why Jesus said, "It is finished." And the reason that the gospels make so much of Jesus fulfilling the Scriptures is so we will understand all of history as the unfolding of God's plan to conquer sin and death and Satan.

The world also has its understanding of the meaning of history. Actually, there are many different understandings of the significance of history. One of them that is common in our society is that history is about mankind progressively improving. There are challenges of course, but many of our fellow citizens think in terms of progress towards a better world. That is the significance of the phrase being on the right side of history. Being on the right side of history, according to many of the people among whom we live and work, is to be progressive and accept the narrative of the progressive agenda of what is good and liberating and inclusive. Being on the right side of history is to support the progressive ideas of diversity and inclusion and liberation. Being on the wrong side of history is to be against things like gay marriage and the celebration of all manner of perversions and disorders. Behind all that is a way of looking at history.

But this passage teaches us the biblical perspective on history. Good and evil is defined by the character and law of God. God himself is the greatest good. Defying God's law is the greatest evil and leads to death. The plan of God that drives history is the defeat of sin and death. And Jesus death on the cross is THE EVENT that accomplishes that goal.

The rest of history is the working out of the victory over sin that Jesus has accomplished. It is about the coming of the kingdom of God which is God's will being done on earth as well as heaven. This is also the meaning of our lives if we are Christians. Our lives are about working out the victory of Jesus' death in our lives, by receiving the forgiveness that he has earned for us and working in his power to defeat sin in our lives and grow in the obedience that is life as it was meant to be lived.

When Jesus said, "It is finished," he was saying that his death is the key to history and the event upon which any hope is based. Because of what Jesus finished on the cross, we who believe are embraced by God, and we become the beginning of the new creation that God is working towards.