

IT IS FINISHED
(A Sermon by Ron Harvey)

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

John 19:28-30

Often, before an execution is carried out, the condemned man is allowed some last words. And perhaps he uses the opportunity to ask forgiveness for his crimes. Perhaps he says sorrowful goodbyes to his family and friends. Perhaps he takes one more opportunity to curse his enemies or his god. Perhaps he pleads for his life.

As Jesus hung on the cross, near death, the Roman guards and other spectators watched to see what his last words might be. Would he cry out for God to save him? Would he curse God? Would he beg for his life to be spared?

At his last moment, Jesus said,

It is finished.

These were the last words to be spoken by the greatest man that ever lived. He was the greatest man by far. There was never a man like Jesus.

Never a man durst speak like this man, the Roman officers said.

When Jesus died, the Roman centurion said, *Surely this was the Son of God.*

When Jesus died, even the natural forces acknowledged his greatness because the sun was darkened and the earth quaked.

And this great man said,

It is finished.

Now when other men die, they utter words of resignation because they are resigned to the utter certainty and indignity of death. You see, death is the result of sin.

And when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin bringeth forth death.

Death is the penalty for sin. Life is a game that we all lose in the end. If it were a chess game, the dying man would turn his king over in resignation as if to say, I lose.

But, I want to show you something about the death of Jesus and I would suggest that when Jesus died, he declared, "I win."

Now you would think that Jesus was very weak at the point of death. He had been scourged and beaten all night. He had been nailed to the cross for three hours. He couldn't catch his breath because his lungs were stretched tight.

When Jesus said, *It is finished*, even though he was in utter physical weakness, the other gospels say he **shouted with a loud voice**, *It is finished*. Those words rang out across Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. The birds and the beasts of the field heard Jesus say, *It is finished*. The mountains heard him say it. The fishes in the depths of the sea heard him say it. The vail in the temple heard him say it and it was torn into two pieces. The ground beneath the feet of the Roman soldiers heard him say it and the earth shook. And the words thundered out across the whole universe.

I tell you, when Jesus shouted, *It is finished*, this was not a message of resignation whispered in defeat. Rather, it was a triumphant proclamation. And he crushed Satan's head with a mortal wound.

You see, the words, *It is finished*, were triumphant and joyous last words uttered by the greatest man to ever live.

Jesus uttered many profound words during his life. He commanded the waters to be still. He ordered the lame to walk and the dead to rise. He spoke the words of God like no one ever spoke them before. If you ever wanted a great bible teacher you should have sat in the temple and heard Jesus.

And who can say which words were his greatest words? They were all magnificent words. They were all utterly important, because they were words of God. But in some ways, he saved the most profound words for his last words. For when he said, *It is finished*, he uttered words that are as deep as the ocean in meaning.

But before we look into those words, I want to make sure you understand that those words were utterly jubilant words. They were not words of sorrow as many dying men speak, but words of sheer jubilation. And those words must have set off a jubilant ringing of the bells in heaven.

And the bible says the voices of the redeemed in heaven began to sing a new song.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Revelation 5:9

And so, a new song was gloriously sung in heaven in that moment when Jesus said, "*It is finished.*"

Example: If you have ever been to an orchestral concert, you know that there is a hushed anticipation before the orchestra begins to play. And everyone is waiting and it is perfectly quiet, and the maestro stands motionless and there is not a breath of movement or sound. And then, with a stroke of his baton, the entire orchestra erupts in fantastic and glorious music.

And it was the same at Calvary. As Jesus hung on the cross, there was an eerie stillness -- an uneasy quietness in the darkness at noonday. There was anticipation as the whole world waited. And then, the greatest of all Maestros, the One who conducts the affairs of the whole world, cried *It is finished*, bowed his head and the bible says, "*he gave up the ghost.*" And thus began the majestic concert in heaven.

Now the scriptures fittingly say, "he gave up the ghost," for no one took his life from him. There is not a man or a beast or a devil who could take the life of Jesus. Only Jesus could lay it down of his own free will. And this he did.

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

John 10:17, 18

And so, Jesus in full consciousness, deliberately and voluntarily gave up the ghost. And he did it joyfully for those he loved. And a new song was sung in heaven.

I tell you such majestic music was never heard in heaven before. This was the triumphant music of redemption. And this was a song of redemption written by Jesus himself. And there has never been a more beautiful song. And when it was finally time for the concert, he shouted, "*It is finished,*" and the music began.

Example: Recently I helped my son Tyler work on a research paper. Tyler would do research and bring it to me and we would organize it. And he would do more research. And we would make our outline. And he'd write a little bit and he'd bring it to me and we would try to flesh it out. And there would be weak parts of the paper and we would work some more. And it seemed there would be no end to Tyler's pain and suffering. And he would ask, "Are we finished yet? And I would say, "Not yet." But after many days of work, we finally put the last stroke on that paper. And Tyler would say, "Are we finished?" And finally I said, "It's finished." And I've never seen Tyler so happy. His work was done and he had done a good job. And he ran upstairs to show his Mom his paper. And he told his mom, "It's a miracle." You see when you begin a hard work, it seems like it is almost impossible. But when you put your mind to it and you finish such a hard work, it is such a great feeling.

And this is the feeling that Jesus had when he finished his hard work. It was a feeling of great accomplishment and great joy.

Now I want to suggest to you this morning several things that were finished when Jesus bowed his head and gave up the ghost. And I hope your heart is comforted by these wonderful things. First, when Jesus said, *It is finished*, he must have said so with a sense of great relief, because,

I. There was an end to the hurt and the pain which his enemies inflicted upon him.

Example: I don't know if you watched the movie, *The Passion of Christ*, recently produced by Mel Gibson, but it was extremely graphic and terrifying. And it showed the great agony of Jesus throughout the whole ordeal. And as you watched the torment go on and on you thought it would never end. And if you were like me, you found yourself wishing they would hurry along to Golgotha so that the misery would finally come to an end.

And in one sense, this is what Jesus meant when he said, *It is finished.*

The infliction of pain had come to an end.

He had suffered the final agonies. He had paid the uttermost farthing. Every sin of his people had been accounted for. Your sins and my sins paid in full -- every stripe, a judgment upon sin. And it must have seemed to Jesus as though the infliction of pain would never end. Even in his last moments, when he whispered, "I thirst," the soldiers tormented him by dipping a sponge in vinegar and forcing one last bitter taste to his lips.

And then, Jesus bowed his head and shouted, "*It is finished.*"

The spirit of Jesus left his body behind and Jesus entered into his glorious rest in heaven where no man can ever hurt him again. And there was a glorious end to his hurt and his pain and his suffering. He would hurt no more and there would be no more tears and no more indignities.

What a relief for Jesus to finally shout out, "*It is finished.*"

But, when Jesus cried, "*It is finished,*" he also must have meant that,

II. He had completed every bit of suffering for sin that had been ordained by the Father for him.

You see, no man could hurt Jesus, except the Father should allow it. That's why the Bible says,

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Acts 2:23

That is, every pain that Jesus suffered was ordained of God. Every stripe on his back was ordered up by the Father. You see there was a cup of suffering that was ordained for Jesus to drink. Now Jesus prayed in the garden, "*If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.*" And when he finished the last drop from that bitter cup, he shouted, "*It is finished.*" Essentially what Jesus was saying was, "*I have done your will, O Lord.*"

And Jesus performed the will of the Father perfectly, and he suffered every pain that was ordained for him. And how much suffering was necessary to pay for the sins of the whole world? I tell you, no man ever suffered like this man. But Jesus ran the course and he finished the race.

And then he checked his list to make sure he had completed his work. He checked every stripe off the list, every slap, every thorn in the brow, every nail through his hands and feet, every heartache of rejection by his friends and by his own heavenly Father, and when he had completed it all, he cried out triumphantly to the Father, "*It is finished.*"

So you see, it was finished first of all in that it was the end of his hurts and his pains. And it was finished secondly in that he had completely performed the Father's will.

And we see next,

III. He finished fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies about his life and his sufferings.

You see, the Old Testament Scriptures foretold in great detail about the life of Jesus. All the types and all the prophecies of the Old Testament were accomplished one by one by Jesus. The Old Scriptures foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. And in due time, he was born in that tiny city. They foretold that he would live in Egypt for a time and that he would live in Galilee. Check. They foretold that he would exert authority over the temple and he opened his public ministry by marching in and overturning the money tables. They foretold that he would triumphantly enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey. They foretold that he would be mocked, that he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. They foretold that his hands and his feet would be pierced; that his garments would be divided. And many other things the Scriptures foretold about Jesus. And Jesus suffered each indignity and checked each one off the list. But as he hung on the cross there was one scripture remaining unfulfilled.

They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.
Psalm 69:21

You see, when Jesus hung on the cross, even then, he was thinking about fulfilling every single Old Testament scripture.

Look what he said in verse 28 of our text:

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

And they filled the sponge with vinegar and gave him to drink. And that being the last Scripture to be fulfilled, Jesus bowed his head and shouted for joy, "*It is finished.*"

Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures, and this he did in every single detail. But also, when Jesus said, *It is finished*,

IV. There was a finishing of the ceremonial law.

There was a part of the Old Testament which was not a moral law for all men, but rather, a ceremonial law only for the Jewish nation. Now when God said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," there is a moral quality to that law that applies to all men throughout all ages. "Thou shalt not steal," is a moral law for all to attend. But there were many rites and rituals and ceremonies that had no moral quality to them whatsoever. They were simply pictures of the coming Christ. And these rites and rituals, detached from that connection, were seemingly arbitrary acts.

Example: The sacrifices, the feast days, the festivals, the washings and purification ceremonies; all the religious services which had to be performed in exact detail; the daily rituals of the priests; the garments to be worn by the priests and the high priest. All of these were pictures of Jesus. Some foods were clean, some were unclean. All of this had meaning, but only as a pre-figurement of Christ. Apart from their attachment to Christ, these ceremonies were merely empty and burdensome rituals. Other nations must have observed all of these religious doings with a good bit of humor. If they were not prefigures of Christ, then they were nothing but a heavy weight to be carried around from day to day.

But, the ceremonies were pictures of Jesus, although shadowy ones.

Example: When you stand outside with the sun at your back, you see a shadow of yourself cast in front of you. If someone were to look at your shadow, they would not know exactly what you looked like. You see, a shadow is not a perfect representation of you and it doesn't give a perfect picture of what you look like, but it gives a dark semblance.

And this is the way it was with the ceremonies. They pictured Christ, but only a dark semblance of Christ.

Example: Picture history as a timeline with Christ and his cross at the center. There is a giant spotlight shining on Christ from the New Testament side of history. We see Christ in the light of day. We have full revelation. We have eye witnesses who have told us about him. And we marvel at his greatness. But the light shining on Christ casts merely a shadow back into Old Testament history. And Old Testament saints studied these shadows and wondered about Him. They tried to interpret these dark images. And these dark shadows were all the types and ceremonies that prefigured Christ.

Now these images were not Christ himself. They were the shadows of Him. But when he came in the full light of the substance of his person, the shadows were done away. Why would we look at shadows, when we can look at the person himself.

Before Christ, when they sacrificed a lamb, they were acknowledging that the real lamb has not yet come. And when the people served the Lord through human priests, they acknowledged that the real Mediator between God and man had not yet come. But when he did come, then, those old shadows were done away.

So, when the redemptive work of Jesus on the earth was complete, the ceremonies were abolished. And it is a great and condemning sin to reject Christ and to cling to the ceremonies.

Listen to the writer of Hebrews.

Then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein: which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God, He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

Hebrews 10:7-9

And I want you to notice the phrase, *He taketh away the first*. That is, he takes away that old covenant. Stop offering lambs my Jewish people. Jesus is the lamb of God. Stop all the priestly services. Jesus is the Great High Priest. Stop the feasts. Jesus is your feast. Stop the washings. You have been washed by the blood of the Lamb.

And it seems to me that even the place of worship has changed. Formerly it was that city Jerusalem. But even that was a type. And after Jesus died,

The Jewish people, like the Samaritan woman, might have asked, should we continue to worship in the temple of Jerusalem only. And Jesus answers,

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

And so, Jesus bowed his head and cried in a loud voice, "*It is finished.*" And that old ceremonial law was thereby abolished. In essence, when Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" this was a command. No more types and shadows. No more ceremonies. "They were mere shadows, but I am the substance. And those ceremonies gave way to a better hope.

Notice by this the greatness of Jesus. In his last three words before he died, he commands an end to an entire system of worship – that old Mosaic economy. And he says, "*It is finished.*"

But, when Jesus says, *It is finished*, he also says that,

V. The greatest and most important life of all time has come to an end.

His birth was barely acknowledged by the world – A star in the heavens, a few magi, a couple of angels.

His early years are barely noticed. Only one occasion of his youth is mentioned in Scripture when he amazed the scribes and the learned men in the temple.

But when he was 30 years old he set the world on its ear. He marched into the temple at Jerusalem and with a scourge ran the moneychangers out and overturned their tables. And by

doing so he announced to the world that this was His temple and he would exercise authority over it.

By the time he came to Jerusalem for the last time, he was so famous that the multitudes swarmed him wherever he went. They brought their lame and their sick and he healed all their diseases. And he was very famous. People like Zaccheus climbed trees just to see him. And the people would have made him king,

But, Jesus didn't come into this world to live like a king. He came to die like a criminal.

And so the greatest story ever told had a last chapter. The greatest journey ever traveled by any man had a last mile. A heart that first beat in Mary's womb stopped beating at Calvary.

And so, Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" and his heart stopped beating.

But, there is one last thing that was finished when Jesus died. And that is,

VI. He finished his work of redemption.

And perhaps this is the overriding meaning of the phrase, "*It is finished,*" because Jesus came into this world to save his sheep. And there was work to do. It was hard work. It was work that only Jesus could do and so it was lonely work. And it was painful work. But it was necessary work for there was no other hope for sinners except that Jesus could do the work of redemption. Were it not for the work of Jesus, every human being that ever lived would die an eternal death in hell. But Jesus came into the world to do the work of redeeming his people. And he did it so beautifully and so thoroughly. Though it was a bitter work and a bitter cup, he drank it all. And when the work was finally done, he bowed his head and joyfully shouted, "*It is finished.*"

And here is what Jesus accomplished by his finished work of redemption.

A. He satisfied the justice of God. You see the justice of God is a great and wonderful thing. But it is also a terrible thing, because it demands the payment for sin. God's very nature is to be just and because we are all liars and cheats and sinners, then God must treat us like liars and cheats and sinners. But Jesus came as our substitute. And God treated Jesus like a liar and a cheat and a sinner. And God let that count for us. And so, God's justice being satisfied, God is now free to smile on us and forgive us. Except for the sufferings of Jesus, He would not have been free to do so.

The Bible calls this being propitiated. The sufferings of Jesus satisfied the just nature of God and they propitiated the Father and changed God's countenance toward us.

And because God was satisfied in the suffering that He inflicted on Jesus, the Bible says,

B. We were reconciled to God by the death of Jesus. (Romans 5:10) Whereas we were enemies before Christ died, we are now reconciled to God. Just as he once smiled on Adam in the garden before sin came into the world, he now smiles on us because Jesus has paid for Adam's sin. And he has paid for all the sins of his people.

And,

C. We were justified by the death of Jesus. (Romans 5:9) Justification is a judicial act of God, in which he declares on the basis of the righteousness of Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner. You see, before the death of Jesus, God had a legal matter against us. And his justice required him to say, guilty, condemned to hell. But after the death of Jesus, God made a legal declaration concerning all those who were "in Jesus". And that declaration is guilty, but forgiven.

Note: I'd like you to note that the death of Jesus effectively did something for the people of God. It says we were reconciled by the death of His Son; and, we were justified by his blood.

You see, many think that Jesus died merely to pave the way – that it was a general death that didn't actually do anything, but made salvation possible for all men. But I say to you that his death did something, not for mankind in general, but for his people in particular. It reconciled them and it justified them. Theologians call this **particular atonement** – that when Jesus died his intent was to save particular persons. And his death was effective for those particular persons. And that's what I believe the Scriptures teach. If his death was not effective for me in particular, then I am yet in my sins. There is no such thing as saving people in general. Either God saves me in particular, or he doesn't save me at all.

Now, when Jesus finished his redemptive work not only did he satisfy the justice of God and reconcile me to God and justify me, but his death opened up a fountain of grace that flows continually and never ends.

Did you know that there is grace flowing from that cross on Calvary where Jesus finished his work? And that grace began flowing even before he died when it flowed sideways to the thief on the cross. And Jesus said, "Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise."

Now grace chooses which way it flows and it flowed to one thief but not the other.

And when Jesus cried, "*It is finished,*" there was a fountain of grace that opened up and it began gushing down the cross and it touched the heart of the Roman guard and he said, "Surely this was the Son of God."

And that grace may have touched many who were at the foot of the cross. Perhaps it saved even the ones who drove the nails in his feet and in his hands.

You see, grace seeks out God's sheep and changes them and forgives their sins and is often pleased to forgive even the vilest of sinners.

And that flood of grace and mercy flowed down that dreadful hill of Calvary and it rushed into the city of Jerusalem and saved thousands in the city. Three thousand were saved on the day of Pentecost alone. And the Bible says God added to the church daily such as should be saved. You see, it kept finding the sheep.

And that fountain kept flowing and when it had done its work in the city of Jerusalem, it flowed out the city gates into Judea and Samaria and grace found sheep there and they were saved.

And the flood spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. And everywhere his grace flowed like a river and searched out the people of God. And when it found them, it washed over them and cleansed them from all unrighteousness.

Example: Sometimes after hard rains, there are flash floods. And the flood waters rush down the sides of mountains and chase into the cities and people run for their lives.

But the thing about this flood from the fountain at Calvary is that it is a good thing. It is salvation from sin and from hell itself. And though sinners often run from it, it will overtake them in due time. If Jesus died for you, then his grace will overtake you every time.

It has been 2,000 years since Jesus cried, "*It is finished,*" but that fountain of grace still flows. They have taken the cross down but they haven't been able to shut off the fountain that Jesus opened up on that day.

And there is grace from that fountain flowing even in our church. And grace flows down this pulpit and runs out into the congregation. And God's grace seeks out his people and saves them. It has done so for 2000 years. And it will continue to flow as long as there are sheep to be found.

Now if that grace has softened your heart and you feel that sorrowful pain of the conviction of sin, you may be asking, "What must I do to be saved."

And I can only say what Phillip said to the Ethiopian, "If thou believe with all thy heart, thou mayest be baptized."