

Easter 2013

John 19:30

There is nothing quite so profound as a person's final words; especially when that person is aware that they are about to die.

Lady Astor was the first female member of the British House of Commons who used to tangle often with Winston Churchill. She was the woman in that famous conversation where she upbraided Churchill saying that if she were his wife, she'd poison his drink. To which Churchill famously responded, "And if I were your husband, I would drink it." As she lay on her deathbed at the age of 85, she awakened to find her bed surrounded by her entire family. She grinned and said, "Either I am dying, or this is my birthday."ⁱ

Frank Sinatra's last words were spoken to his fourth wife – he simply looked up at her and said, "I'm losing" – and then died.ⁱⁱ

Queen Elizabeth I brought England to its greatest world power; literature, education, fashion and glamour flourished under her 40 year reign which ended in the 17th century. As she lay dying, she gasped her final words, "All my possessions for a moment of time."ⁱⁱⁱ

John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln, was finally chased down and trapped in a barn. As soldiers set fire to the barn, Booth was spotted and fatally wounded. After they pulled him out of the barn and away from the fire, Booth lay there with moments to live – he held up his hands and said, "Useless . . . useless."^{iv}

O. Henry, the famous short story writer and outspoken unbeliever said just before he died, "Turn up the lights – I don't want to go . . . in the dark."^v

Contrast that to the last words of Charles Spurgeon, the London pastor from the 1800's who died with these words on his lips – Jesus died for me.

And in His dying breath, Jesus Christ will say just a few words – so profound that believers have read them and studied them and have been nourished by them and strengthened and ready to face life and death because of them.

Why? Because they were words that played out the glory of the gospel in living color – first, with words of agony and separation and suffering, but finally – as he spoke for the last time – words of victory and satisfaction.

We have time for one of Christ's seven final words or statements – let me invite you to the *Gospel of John and chapter 19*.

Verse 28. *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty." 29. A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. 30. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.*

If you compare the Gospel accounts, you discover seven things Jesus said during his crucifixion.

We'll take time for this statement here in *verse 30*.

The ancient Greeks were proud of the fact that their universal language was able to communicate so much with so few words.

"To be able to give," as one wrote "an ocean of matter in one drop of language."^{vi}

It is finished is only one word in the Greek language – *tetelestai* – one evangelical author wrote that this is the greatest single word ever uttered.^{vii}

In this one word is wrapped up the Gospel of God.

If you've ever wanted to know how to be right with God – how to know you're sins are forgiven – how to know that you can have heaven, guaranteed – it's bound up in this one word.

It is finished.

And by the way, would you notice that Jesus did not say, "I am finished", even though in less than 60 seconds he would.

He didn't say, "I am finished," but, "It is finished."

Which is remarkable on a number of fronts, isn't it?

How often can any of us say, "We finished something?"

I don't know about you, but my "to-do" list isn't getting any shorter – it's getting longer.

I'll never outrun it.

Think of how many times you've said, "I've started something" . . . but haven't been able to say, "I finished it."

I can remember as a college student, setting out in my spare time to be a salesman selling Amway products? How many others in here have a similar story of success?

I had identified a portable alarm system that you simply hung on the inside of your front door. Once you set the alarm at night, all someone on the outside had to do was touch that metal door handle, it grounds the charge and the alarm would sound.

It was a brilliant plan, and it offered at least \$30 back to me for each one sold. I had visions of paying my school bill, trading in my Volare – you remember that automobile?

So out I went into a wealthy neighborhood that Saturday, armed with my demo and a stack of brochures. Homeowner after homeowner turned me down, saying that really didn't need an alarm system. I couldn't believe it. I never even got to demo the thing.

But then I came to that house – I'll never forget that moment. The lady knew it was hot outside and I was standing there sweating. She invited me into the living room for a glass of water and then agreed to let me demo the world's most amazing portable alarm system.

So I got it all set up, hung it on that ornate bronze door handle . . . waited 30 seconds for it to set and then told the lady . . . "Okay, just ever so gently touch the handle on the outside. She did. Nothing happened.

I said, "Touch it a little harder." Nothing happened.

I said, "Here, let me" and I grabbed the handle . . . started shaking it. Not a sound. Turns out the door handle was made out of wood, painted to look like bronze.

I didn't know they could do that!

And that effectively ended my career as an Amway salesman.

I was about 23 years old . . . most people by the age of 33 are saying, "I've figured it out and I've got my life's ambition off and running." At the age of 33, Jesus said, "I finished mine."

Now what exactly was He referring to here?

What was finished?

He still has to die . . . He still must rise again . . . and ascend back to the Father.

What did He finish?

Jesus is speaking with anticipation here.

The three hours of darkness is past, the cup of wrath has been drained, His blood has been shed and the wrath of the Father is satisfied.

It has yet to be ratified by His death and resurrection.

Jesus effectively sees the finish line and knows He's finished the word of atonement in his suffering and death, and just before He dies, He announces – not for the benefit of God – but for the benefit of mankind – "I finished it."

And then dies.

Let me give you four objectives that Jesus finished.

1. He completed the goal of Old Testament revelation

Old Testament prophesied, and Jesus completed it all:

- That He would be of the woman's seed (*Genesis 3:15*);
- That His mother would be a virgin (*Isaiah 7:14*);
- That He would be a lineal descendant of King David (*2 Samuel 7:12-13*);
- That He would be named before He was born (*Isaiah 49:1*);
- That He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (*Micah 5:2*);
- That His birth would bring great weeping to that region (*Jeremiah 31:15*); which it did when Herod ordered all the children killed under the age of 2 in an attempt to kill Jesus, who was born, King of the Jews (*Matthew 2:16-17* – and Herod did this, Matthew records, *so that what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet would be fulfilled*);
- Furthermore, the prophesies of the Old Testament specified that that the Messiah's parents would flee to Egypt and then return later to their homeland (*Hosea 11:1 and Isaiah 49:3-6*);
- That a forerunner would precede the coming Messiah (*Malachi 3:1* – fulfilled in John the Baptizer)
- That the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf and the lame will leap as a deer and the mute will sing (*Isaiah 35:5-6*)

The charismatic movement has distorted the healing power of Christ and His Apostles to mean nothing more than sick people got well and God doesn't want anybody to be sick. They not only distort His power, they destroy its true purpose.

Jesus didn't heal people because they were sick or lame or blind; If He did, then He was entirely cruel – because He healed a few lepers when He could have healed entire leper colonies; He raised Lazarus from the dead but not all the dead – why?

Because His healing power had a purpose. It was all a demonstration of his rightful claim to be the Messiah – *Peter preached as the New Testament church age opened – That He, Christ, was authenticated by God through miracles and signs and wonders (Acts 2:22)* . . . Jesus literally and effectively fulfilled the prophecies regarding the true Messiah.

- In addition, the Old Testament prophesied that He would be poor and needy – and He was – He had to borrow everything from the boats He rode in to the homes He ate in, to the tomb He would be buried in (*Psalms 40:17*);
- That He would speak in parables (*Psalms 78:2*);
- David prophesied that *He will cause the storm to be stilled and the waves of the sea to be hushed (Psalms 107:29)* – which He did more than once;
- That He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt (*Zecharias 9:9*);
- That He would be despised (*Isaiah 53:3*)
- That He would be rejected by the Jewish people (*Isaiah 8:14*);
- That He would be hated without a cause (*Psalms 69:4*);
- That His hands and feet would be pierced; that He would hang next to criminals; that the crowd would surround Him and mock Him and that his garments would be gambled by the casting of lots (all that and more in *Psalms 22*).

Jesus literally completed the goal of all Old Testament prophecies and, we could add, festivals and types and symbols – the Old Testament was filled with shadows and mysteries and innuendos which Jesus Christ brought out into the light of day and fulfilled.

Jesus not only completed the goal of Old Testament revelation, concerning the Messiah's death, that is; but . . .

2. He canceled the guilt of our rebellion

The Apostle Peter said that Jesus Christ *bore our sins in His own body on the tree – the cross (I Peter 2:24)*.

Isaiah put it this way – The Lord hath laid on Him – the Anointed One – the iniquities of us all.

Isaiah spoke of the cross-work of Christ, the Suffering Savior – 4. *Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried . . . 5. He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities . . . 6. But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*

In other words, the Triune God partnered together at the cross to place upon God the Son the iniquities – the transgressions – the sins of us all.

Imagine it this way – suppose my Bible represents the Book of your Life and Deeds – all the good things you did – that's this little section here – and all the things you did, thought and planned that you shouldn't have; and all the good things you should have done, thought, planned, carried out.

Imagine this opening page is your birth certificate and this last page is your death certificate.

Isaiah said that it *pleased the Father to bruise Him – to pierce Him – and He laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.*

Listen, if God the Father laid upon God the Son all your iniquities, then when you believe in Him, they are immediately and effectively and eternally no longer *on* you.

You're free . . . you're forgiven . . . your guilt is gone. The debt has been entirely canceled.

Now there is still sin *in* you, for in our flesh dwells no good thing. Paul wrote that as part of his personal testimony in *Romans 7:18*.

Even after coming to faith in Christ, you know full well that sin is *in* you and it keeps crawling out of you.

But the record of sin is effectively no longer on you.

One author illustrates this truth by writing, "When a judge passes sentence on a criminal, he places him *under* the sentence of death. In like manner, everyone apart from Christ has the sentence of God's condemnation resting upon them; but when they believe in the Lord Jesus, they are no longer under condemnation, because sin is no longer on them – and because sin is no longer on them, they are no longer under judgment."^{viii}

And that's why Paul can end his personal testimony of sinful struggles in *Romans 7* by praising God in chapter 8 – "Therefore there is now

no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

Jesus Christ died for, had transferred to His body, completely paid for, ahead of time and for all of eternity, your record of sin, effectively canceling the guilt of your rebellion from the record of God.

Spurgeon preached in the 1800’s, “For Jesus Christ lifted the cup of our guilt to His lips and He drank our damnation dry.”^{ix}

Do you know what that means? It means the cross of Christ is the grave of your sins. They are canceled, forgiven, buried and they will never be resurrected.

It is finished!

Jesus completed the goal of Old Testament revelation; Jesus canceled the guilt of our rebellion; and ...

3. Jesus crafted the guidelines for our redemption

Warren Wiersbe commenting on this text wrote, “Some years ago there was an evangelist whose name was Alexander Wooton. A man came to him one day and asked, rather sarcastically, “So . . . what do I have to do so that I can get saved.” Knowing the man was not serious – but looking for a way to mock the gospel, and the evangelist – Wooton replied, “It’s too late.” The man sobered up – became rather alarmed – and said, “Wait a minute . . . what do you mean it’s too late for me . . . tell me what I’ve got to do to be saved!” And Wooton replied, “It’s too late . . . it’s already been done.”^x

In Jesus Christ’s final cry of victory – He provided the guidelines for personal salvation.

Now this word in the Greek language – *tetelestai* – was a common word in Jesus’ day.

It has been found in numerous archaeological sites – written on numerous Greek documents. And the way it was used, adds nuance upon nuance to the guidelines communicated through Christ – and consistently through His apostles.

The word was used by servants. A master would tell his servant to go do something and when the servant had completed the task, he would report back and say, “Tetelestai” – I’ve finished the task you assigned me.

The word was used by the Jewish priests who inspected an animal sacrifice brought by someone for offering to the Lord. After examining the sacrificial animal, if there was no blemish or

disqualifying mark, he would pronounce it “perfect”, using a Hebrew or Aramaic equivalent to *tetelestai*.

Even artists used the word after completing a painting – they would step back, lay down their brush and announce *tetelestai* – the portrait or painting is completed.

Merchants in the market place would write on receipts for people who paid in full for their items this same word, *tetelestai*.^{xi}

Jesus finished the portrait of salvation by grace through faith in Him alone (Ephesians 2)

Jesus finished the task of redemption in His body.

Jesus was the perfect, unblemished sacrifice.

And Jesus paid the complete price for redemption through His blood – redeeming us from the market place of destruction.

In other words:

- You can’t improve on the portrait He painted;
- You can’t add your nickel to the price that He paid;
- You can’t contribute your works, to the finished work of Christ.

You simply can’t improve on what is finished.^{xii}

The great [and unique guideline] of our gospel is not “do”, it is “done.”^{xiii}

Jesus completed the goal of Old Testament revelation; Jesus canceled the guilt of our rebellion; Jesus crafted the guidelines for our redemption; and...

4. Jesus crushed the grip of heaven’s rival

The Gospel account records that Jesus didn’t whisper this final word, He shouted it!

Arthur Pink wrote, “When Jesus Christ shouted *tetelestai* – this was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr; this was not the last gasp of a worn-out life. No, this was the declaration on the part of the Redeemer that all for which He came from heaven to earth to do, was now done; that all that was required by the law before sinners could be saved had now been performed; that the full price of our redemption was now paid. To be sure, as Jesus spoke these words, He was not yet dead; but His death was only moments away and He speaks with the anticipation of the work now done.”^{xiv}

Tetelestai is a shout of joy. He finished it. ***Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2) – He endured the cross for the joy of winning His bride – redeeming His beloved!***

He has won!

“It is finished” is not the cry of a victim, but a victor.^{xv}

To every human observer, the cross looked like the devil’s greatest triumph and God’s greatest failure. But in reality, the cross was the crushing of Satan’s power over death and the grave.

By the way, contrary to corrupted church tradition, Jesus will not descend into hell to suffer at the hands of the Devil – he doesn’t become the helpless plaything of demons for three days and nights . . . the Devil and His demons were crushed at the cross.

They are howling in utter defeat – their doom is now sealed.

Jesus isn’t heading for some painful ordeal in hell; He will accomplish a number of things upon dying – which are for another study.

But we’re told in the Gospels that in His next and last breath, Jesus will ***commit His Spirit into the Father’s hands*** – which means there is no longer separation between Father and Son; 3 hours of darkness and silence have transacted the punishment upon Christ and all of that is now over; God the Father and God the Son are now in sweet communion again; the justice of the Father is satisfied . . . the price of redemption has been paid and received – and Christ will return to the glory of heaven and the fellowship of His Father.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews informs us that ***after Christ offered one sacrifice for sins forever, He sat down at the right hand of God the Father (Hebrews 10:12)***

He ascended to glory and, we’re told, He sat down in the place of God’s own authority – His right hand.

But don’t miss this. Jesus sat down!

There were no chairs in the Tabernacle or Temple where priests could sit – there was no chair for the High Priest to lounge upon in the Holy of Holies.

They never sat down in there because their work was never finished.^{xvi}

Jesus Christ sat down? Why?

- Because the crushing of Satan’s power through death and the grave were finished;
- Because the payment of sins was finished;
- Because the atoning work was completed.

The prophecies are now history. The guilt is now canceled. And the guidelines are now confirmed.

The crushing of Satan time and time again – both at the cross and every time someone accepts the payment of Christ to their own account, and is saved – the grip of the enemy is crushed open and the believer is set free.

Hudson Taylor, the man who opened China with the gospel in the 1800’s was a moral young man, raised by believing parents, taught to read the Bible, knowledgeable of basic doctrine, yet personally unconverted – a skeptic and an unbeliever. His time working at a city bank had surrounded him with other skeptics who fed his unbelief. Besides, he had come to believe, religion was too hard to attain, or keep up with.

He would write sometime later, “I happened to have a holiday, and in the afternoon looked through my father’s library to find some book with which to while away the unoccupied hours. [I was unaware that my mother was presently praying for my conversion to Christ and that my 13 year old sister had committed to praying 3 times a day for my salvation as well.]

There I was in my father’s library . . . and nothing interested me; I turned over a basket to pamphlets and selected from among them a Gospel tract that looked interesting, saying to myself; ‘There will be a story at the beginning and a sermon at the end; I will read the former and leave the latter for those who like it.

While reading it, I was struck with the phrase: ‘The finished work of Christ.’ Why does this author use this expression, I questioned. Why not the atoning work of Christ? Or the satisfying work of Christ.’

The words of Christ – “It is finished” came to my memory. But, what was finished? It became clear as I read that the debt was paid for our sins – a full and perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin.”

Then came the thought to my mind, “If the work was finished and the whole debt has been paid, what is there left for me to do?”

And with this dawned the joyful conviction, as light flashed into my soul, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on my knees and accept this Savior and His salvation and then praise Him for the rest of my life.^{xvii}

And that’s exactly what Hudson Taylor did.

Have you done that?

Are the last words of Christ your victory cry? Is the finished work of Christ your only hope? Is He your Savior today?

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/31/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from Ray Robinson, Famous Last Words (Workman Publishing, 2003), 15
- ii Ibid, p. 161
- iii Ibid, p. 101
- iv Ibid, p. 11
- v Ibid, p. 58
- vi Arthur W. Pink, The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross (Baker, 1958), p. 102
- vii James M. Stalker, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ (Zondervan, 1966), p. 149
- viii Pink, p. 114
- ix Adapted from Charles H. Spurgeon, Christ's Words from the Cross (Baker, 1984), p. 94
- x Warren W. Wiersbe, Jesus' Seven Last Words (Back to the Bible, 1981), p. 64
- xi Word usages adapted from Wiersbe, pp. 58-62
- xii Spurgeon, p. 100
- xiii Warren W. Wiersbe, Jesus' Seven Last Words (Back to the Bible, 1981), p. 64
- xiv Pink, p. 102
- xv Pink, p. 102
- xvi Wiersbe, p. 65
- xvii Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor: The Growth of a Soul (OMF International, 1996), p. 67