**IT IS FINISHED**

March 25, 2018

John 19:16-42

Key verse 19:30 “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

The cross is the heart of Christianity. The theme of the cross then runs through all four gospels. They are all moving toward their conclusion, which is at the cross, and followed by the resurrection. The rest of the epistles of the New Testament describe the theology of the cross. The book of Acts chronicles the preaching of the cross. The book of Revelation ends the New Testament with the triumph of the Crucified One as he comes to establish his kingdom on earth, and then everlastingly in the new heaven and the new earth. May God help us to understand Jesus’ last words on the cross, “It is finished.”

**First**, Jesus’ crucifixion fulfilled Scripture. Look at verse 18a. “There they crucified him.” The cross is the climax of God’s redemptive work. But John mentions it in one line. John must have been tempted to write great details of Jesus’ crucifixion, just like in Mel Gibson’s movie, “Passion of the Christ,” since he was an eyewitness. If he did so, it must have greatly moved the hearts of those who would read his account. But God did not allow it. John must have cried and fasted when he thought about the cross of Jesus. But he could not but write, “They crucified him.” If he described the crucifixion in detail, the meaning of the cross would be confined in those details. After watching the movie, “Passion of the Christ,” we only remember the bloody details of brutality. But the meaning and depth of the cross is limitless. It takes lifetime of meditation and praise to grasp the meaning of the cross.

What John wants us to understand is not the physical suffering of Christ, but the spiritual suffering of Christ, that he was suffering for sin in our place under the wrath of God. Having said that, I do need to say there is no more terrible death than death by crucifixion. The Romans regarded it with a trembling and terror. Cicero, the Roman writer, declared it was the most cruel and horrifying death possible. It was certainly the most shameful way to die, because you were basically stripped naked and suspended by nails along a road to be stared at by people, picked at by birds and animals. It was a death reserved for slaves and prisoners of war and rebels. No Roman citizen could be crucified. It was a slow death; not only hours, but days sometimes. Eventually you succumb to blood loss, exhaustion, dehydration, and finally suffocation. John doesn’t look into that at all. What John wants us to understand is not the physical part of this, but the spiritual part. Namely, Jesus is fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Someone said that there are about 330 specific prophesies regarding Christ in his first coming, and did some mathematical calculation: All 330 to happen by chance would be 1 in 84, with a hundred zeros, chance. It is not possible. For comparison, the odds of winning a million dollars in lottery are 1 in 14 million. The odds of being killed in a terrorist attack while travelling is 1 in 650,000. The odds of being killed by lightning is 1 in 56,439. Everything that is happening in the crucifixion of Christ fulfills Scripture.

Look at verse 18 again. “They crucified him, and with him two others.” The other gospel writers describe them as rebels, insurrectionists. That too is a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah 53:12b says, “…and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” There was Christ, and then there was two other rebels - crucified like a criminal with others who were criminals. Look at verses 23-24. “When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, ‘They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.’ So this is what the soldiers did.” These Roman soldiers didn’t know anything about the Scripture. There was no effort on their part to fulfill anything. They were just doing what they normally did at a crucifixion, namely, according to the Roman tradition, the executioners got to keep whatever was left. They had no idea that they were fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 22:18.

Look at verses 32-37. “The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water…These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken,’ and as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced.’” During the crucifixion, the crucified person usually dies from suffocation. He has to use his legs to lift his body to breathe. If his legs are broken, he cannot lift his body to breathe and will die very quickly. That is what the soldiers did. But since Jesus already died, they did not need to break his legs. It fulfills Exodus 12:46, thus confirming the fact that Jesus is the Passover Lamb. But the soldiers wanted to make sure that Jesus was dead. So one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. It confirms the fact that Jesus died. It fulfills Zechariah 12:10.

**Second**, it is finished. Look at verse 28. “Later, knowing that everything had now been fulfilled, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” Even though Jesus was in intense suffering, he was very conscious of fulfilling Scripture. In this case, it was Psalm 69:21, “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.” Look at verse 30. “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” What does Jesus mean by, “It is finished”? Firstly, it means that the prophecies of the Old Testament about the Messiah have been fulfilled. The theme of the Old Testament is the coming of the Messiah. God promised to send the savior right after man sinned in Genesis 3. God renewed his promise of the Messiah again and again through Abraham, David and many prophets. Now God’s 4000 year grand plan was done through Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus’ death reveals that God is faithful. Secondly, it means that he accomplished God’s salvation work 100%. Since Adam sinned, man was cast out of the Garden of Eden and became restless wanderers. By his mercy God sent Jesus Christ as a guilt offering so that he could pay the penalty of sin 100%. Jesus did not say that it is almost finished, 99% finished. If it was finished 99%, 1% must be supplied by our righteousness. But we fail in obtaining salvation by our own righteousness. We are saved only by faith in Jesus Christ. We just accept that Jesus died for our sins. Our salvation is only by God's grace. We live by God’s grace and do the work of God by God’s grace.

The words “It is finished,” is the same as “Paid in Full.” In Greek, it is one word—Tetelestai. Tetelestai is the perfect tense and it means to bring something to a successful end or to its intended or destined goal. It does not mean just to complete a task but to carry it out fully, to bring it to the finish or to perfection. Tetelestai describes a PAST completed act with PRESENT effect, emphasizing that the past completed event of Christ’s death on the Cross has ongoing, even permanent effects. Jesus’ sacrifice may have occurred in time and space, but its results will last for eternity! In other words, when Jesus declared “It is finished”, he was saying that his mission to redeem sinners had reached its intended goal and that the benefits to the redeemed would last throughout eternity. It follows that Jesus’ cry of tetelestai is a word of finality. The idea is, “It is finished, it stands finished, and it will always be finished!” His work of redemption is complete and nothing needs to be done or can be added to it. Sin is atoned for (Heb 10:12), Satan is defeated and rendered powerless (Heb 2:14-15), every requirement of the Law has been satisfied and God’s holy wrath against sin has been satisfied (Ro 3:25). Redemption is eternally secured. We are reconciled in Christ's “fleshly body through death” that we might be presented before God “holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” (Col 1:22). Speaking of Christ’s cry of tetelestai, someone makes an interesting observation that “This divine self-satisfaction appears only twice, once in each Testament. When he completed the work of creation, he looked upon it and said that it was “very good,” when he completed the work of redemption, he cried with a loud voice tetelestai! It means the same thing in essence.”

Czar Nicholas of Russia often used to wander about his military camps, clothed as an ordinary officer, in order that he might know, without being known, what was going on. Late one night, the Czar was making one of these tours of inspection and noticed a light shining under the paymaster’s door. He opened the door quietly and stepped inside. There a young officer, son of an old friend of the Czar, was seated at a table, his head resting on his arms, and sound asleep. The Czar stepped over to awaken him, but before doing so, noticed a loaded gun, a small pile of money, and a sheet of paper with a pen that had fallen from the hand of the sleeping man. The light of the little candle let the Czar read what had just been written, and in a moment he understood the situation. On the sheet of paper was a long list of debts, gambling and other debts. The total ran into many thousands of rubles. The officer had used army funds to pay these reckless debts, and now having worked till late into the night trying to get his accounts straight, had discovered for the first time how much he owed. His only way out, so he thought, was to end it all with the gun, as he could not face the disgrace and shame which awaited him. Weary with sorrow and remorse, he had written below the terrible total: ‘Who can pay so great a debt?’ The Czar’s first thought was to have him arrested, and in due course brought before a court-martial. But as he remembered the long friendship with the young officer’s father, love overcame judgment. The Czar took up the pen that had dropped from the hand of the wearied, hopeless offender, and with his own hand answered the question with one word – ‘Nicholas.’ The young officer awoke soon after the Czar had gone, and took up his gun to end his life, but noticed the name, ‘NICHOLAS,’ below his own question. Joy and shame filled his heart as he thought of the fact that the Czar knew all about his sins, and yet was willing to pay his debt. The following morning the money arrived from the Czar sufficient to pay the last cent of “so great a debt.”

You and I have a mighty debt. We may well ask, “Who can pay it?” Thank God, love has provided an answer, and like the answer given by the Czar it is the word—“JESUS.” Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ knows all about your debt. He knows how great it is. He knows how you came by it. He knows all the shame of it. He knows the cost of payment, and in spite of such intimate knowledge of you and the debt, he has assumed the full liability of it himself. One word, “Nicholas,” set the heart of that young man at rest—even filled it with joy. One word, “JESUS,” has set my heart at rest and filled it with joy. Has that “one word,” that one blessed name, filled your heart with rest, peace, and joy? If you have a sin regarding which you find it difficult to accept the Father’s full forgiveness, let your mind dwell on the truth of “TETELESTAI,” and then put that sin on God’s account book and write “Paid in Full” next to it! That word TETELESTAI should give every believer great assurance, comfort and peace that all of our sin debt, past, present and future, is PAID IN FULL. There is nothing we must do to pay out debt. There is nothing we can do to pay out debt, except receive the “free gift of eternal life” by faith (Ro 6:23b). Jesus “having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.” (Heb 10:12) As the hymn writer put it “Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.”

**Third**, Jesus was buried together with our fear. Jesus died. Because the Sabbath was near, he had to be buried quickly. But the friends of Jesus were poor and could not give him a proper burial. Also all the disciples of Jesus ran away, except John. Two men came forward to offer their services. They were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. They were both members of the Sanhedrin. They were both rich. Joseph offered his new tomb. Nicodemus offered 75 pounds of spices. These 2 men of social standing bear witness to Jesus’ burial. This also fulfills the scripture from Isaiah 53:9, which says, “He was assigned a grave with the rich in his death.” Usually someone’s death brings us sorrow and sadness. But it is a mystery that Jesus’ death on the cross did not discourage mankind; rather, it has given bright sunshine to innumerable people throughout history. His death has given new life to many people. Joseph of Arimathea is a good example. He was a man of standing and wealth. He loved Jesus, but because of his social standing, he could not identify himself to be one of his disciples. He was so cowardly that he could not testify as to what he believed. But when he saw the death of Jesus, bright heavenly sunlight shone into his heart. As soon as the heavenly sunlight came into his heart, all the fear in his heart disappeared. As the fruit of his repentance, he boldly went to Pilate for Jesus’ body, and buried Jesus. Those who experience the cross of Jesus would bury their fear in the grave. Then they can live without fear of death. God did not give us a spirit of fear, but the spirit of power and self-discipline. I pray that you may experience this grace, grace to bury all your fears, and take up your cross.

Since the work of redemption is finished by and in Christ, the only thing we can do is believe. The more we grow in our Christian life, the more we grow in our awareness of God’s holiness and our awareness of sinfulness. As our understanding of our sin and of God’s holiness grows, the cross should grow bigger and bigger and become central in our lives. Our appreciation and love for Jesus should grow.