

CRIES FROM THE CROSS – A CRY OF VICTORY

Matthew 28:1-10, John 19:28-30

April 17, 2022

As we finish up this Lenten series on Christ's final words to us from the cross, no words give us greater satisfaction than Christ's last cry before he gave us His Spirit, ***"It is finished."*** After a major building project; after putting together a deal for a business transaction or major purchase; after writing that final exam or term paper; after paying off a house mortgage or car payments; after _____, saying those words *"It is finished"* give us the pleasure of accomplishment, and it did the same for Jesus, as He accomplished exactly what He set out to do!

It's significant on this Easter Sunday that we end this Lenten series *"Cries from the Cross"* with Jesus' cry of victory. Jesus' final words ***"It is finished,"*** are only recorded for us by the Apostle John, who was present at the foot of the cross on that Good Friday as he supported Mary the mother of Jesus through her time of grief watching her son die in such a cruel and barbaric way. The only disciple who heard these words from Christ's lips and recorded them for us, realizing how significant these words would be for future generations to hear. **John 19:28-30, *"Knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*** The first thing we need to realize is that Jesus' final words were spoken in the third person, which means that Jesus was not speaking about himself, but of something else. Jesus wasn't saying, *"I am finished,"* for that would mean He died defeated, indicating that His entire ministry was a total failure. Instead, Jesus died with a shout of confidence, with a shout of triumph and victory on His lips – declaring: ***"IT IS FINISHED!"*** With those words, Jesus wanted the whole world to know that this was not the end of Him. He would not be left in the tomb to decay and forgotten, but the beginning of a new chapter in His eternal existence, because after His resurrection and once He has ascended back home to Heaven. Jesus knew that He would take His seat beside His Heavenly Father to rule as King of kings and Lord of lords!

When we look at the Greek – what Jesus said here was actually only one word, it's the word *tetelestai* (te-tei-les'-ty). Archeologists have found this word in many Greek documents and writing from Jesus' time, and it was used in three different ways:

1. This word was used when a servant would return to their master and say *tetelestai*, meaning: *“I have finished the task that you sent me to do. I have completed the work.”*
2. This word was used when a store owner or merchant would place on the bill of sale the stamp *tetelestai*, meaning: *“The debt has been paid in full.”*
“The transaction has been completed; you owe nothing more.”
3. This word was used a third way when someone would bring a sacrificial lamb or animal before a priest at the Temple, who would inspect it to see if it was worthy to be sacrificed. If the animal didn’t have a spot or blemish, the priest would say *tetelestai*, meaning: *“This offering is worthy to be sacrificed. The animal has passed inspection and is perfect to pay the penalty for your sins.”* In Jesus’ case all these meanings apply!

With His last breath Jesus declared, ***“tetelestai.”*** What was finished? Here’s what was finished:

- 1) Jesus was saying that the work His Heavenly Father sent Him to do was completed. Christ, the humble, submissive servant, was returning to the master saying, *“Heavenly Father, I’ve finished the work that you’ve sent me to accomplish.”*
- 2) Jesus was also saying, *“Now, the debt has been paid in full. There is nothing left for you my followers to pay. Your sin has been paid for, it’s signed-sealed-and-delivered by my shed blood on the cross.”*
- 3) And lastly, Jesus was saying, *“Here I am, the perfect spotless Lamb of God that has been slain for the sins of the world. Mine is the perfect sacrifice, and now, no other animal sacrifices are required to pay for your sins.”*

And, because this verb is in the perfect tense in the Greek language, this Greek verb doesn’t look back to the past, saying *“This happened;”* instead, the perfect tense adds this point: *“This happened in the past and it is still in effect today.”* So, when Jesus cried out ***“it is finished,”*** His work of salvation was finished in the past, it is finished in the present, and it will remain finished in the future. Finished for all of eternity! The curse of sin has been abolished forever!

On the cross – Jesus has finished all the difficult work that is required for us to come back to God, so all that is left is for us to do is to choose for Him or against Him – will I place my faith in Jesus Christ by accepting Him as Lord and Saviour or not! Jesus has done His part, now it’s up to us to do our part! Throughout His 3 years of ministry, Jesus kept reminding those around Him why He came to this

earth, ***“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*** (Matthew 20:28 & Mark 10:45). When Jesus was born that day in Bethlehem and wrapped in swaddling cloth (His grave clothes), this hour on the cross was already set on God’s clock, and all the days of His short 33 years of life were moving towards this moment, when He would finish the task that He was sent to do.

When Jesus spoke those final words from the cross – He was telling the world as God’s servant that I have done everything perfectly and obediently according to the plans of God, that were set in motion before Him since the beginning of time, because God knew Adam and Eve would fall into sin. So, Jesus lived His entire life on this earth knowing that over His head hung these horrendous hours of pain and suffering that He would face one day. And whenever Jesus walked by one of those crucifixion scenes it would have reminded Him once again of where He was heading, but it would have also reminded Jesus that what He was about to do would be the completion of the greatest plan of salvation that God has ever devised for mankind, a plan that would catch Satan completely off-guard, and strip from the devil all authority, leaving him completely defeated and powerless!

What John’s Gospel was telling us in those final moments on the cross – is that Jesus spoke for the very last time, because He knew that nothing else needed to be said or done to accomplish the fulfillment of Scripture. **John 19:28, “Knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled,”** – God would now allow Jesus to go ahead and tell the world with His dying breath, ***“It is finished.”*** Everything in the Old Testament that pointed to Jesus has taken place: the types of Christ found within the pages of the Old Testament – the symbols of Christ found throughout the books of the Old Testament – the holy priesthood, the Temple, the altar, the animal sacrifices – the bloody trail of the sacrificial victims over the centuries – every lamb, every goat, every bull, and everything else that had been offered in that river of blood flowing from the altar at the temple – now flowed right up to the foot of the cross on that Good Friday when Jesus cried out, ***“It is finished,”*** and that crimson stain ended with the precious blood of Jesus that has the power to cleanse everything it touches as white as snow!

In this hour, everything that Jesus had said in His years of ministry came to fulfillment according to God’s timing and God’s plan. It has all happened just as

Jesus told us when He spoke these words in the Sermon on the Mount, ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”*** (Matthew 5:17-18). And on that Good Friday and on that Easter Sunday God kept His word, everything was accomplished within His timeline perfectly, right down to the second!

Back in Jesus time – the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were responsible for making sure the people kept the Law perfectly. They had Moses Ten Commandments, plus all the other laws found within the Old Testament books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They also had hundreds of manmade interpretations of the Law that governed everything they did, everything they ate and touched, everywhere they went, and who they ate with and who was allowed to worship and who wasn't. The life of a Jew was highly regulated by all of these rules, and these Laws over time became a great burden on the people, a heavy yoke upon them, because to come before a holy God the people had to be clean and undefiled in every way, but it was impossible for anyone, except Christ, to keep the Law perfectly. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law always butted heads with Jesus because He wouldn't play by their rules, by their manmade manipulations and modifications of God' Laws to suit their purposes. That's why Jesus told these religious leaders that it would easier for prostitutes and tax collectors to enter Heaven than those who see themselves as religious – as keepers of the Law.

Now, here on the cross – in His final words, Jesus was telling these religious leaders that He had fulfilled all of the requirements of God's Law perfectly. He has broken the heavy yoke that they had placed on the people, so now everyone can come before God in confidence because His shed blood not only ended the animal sacrificial system, but also put an end to all of the other dietary and Sabbath Laws that were such a heavy burden on the people. From the cross Jesus was declaring – ***“THE OLD HAS GONE, THE NEW HAS COME.”*** This is a lesson the church today still has a hard time learning, we still like our rules and laws for holy living. Unfortunately, there are religious Pharisees within every congregation making sure the people who come to church have clean hands and clean lives. These modern gate-keepers need to be reminded about Jesus final words from the cross, ***“It is finished,”*** reminded that the old system of rules has been abolished for the new way of love. Our lives are now governed by love, not by keeping a set of rules that no one can keep!

We all know Jesus' greatest commandment, ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...Love your neighbour as yourself”*** (Matthew 22:37-40 & Mark 12:30-31). However, has it penetrated our heart to the point that we would reach out to everyone with love, compassion, and acceptance? So, we need to remember that Jesus not only died for us here at SCCC, but He also died for all of those outside of our doors and we are called to reach out to them with the same grace and love that Christ has shown us. From the cross Jesus spoke those final words to the religious Pharisees in the crowd that day, and He continues to speak those final words to the religious Pharisees within every church today as well. Because it's only when we have come to love the Lord our God with heart, mind and soul and love our neighbours as ourselves, that we have truly heard those words from the cross, ***“It is finished,”*** and are committed to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Jesus' audience that day – were not only those gathered around the cross in the physical realm, but those within the spiritual realm as well. The angels in heaven would have heard Jesus speak those words, ***“It is finished,”*** and praised and worshipped God because Jesus had finished His work on earth, and the angels couldn't wait to welcome God's Son back home to Heaven and worship and praise Him for His sacrificial act on the cross. Then, I wonder if that cry from the cross wasn't also uttered towards hell itself, where Satan and his demons were most likely covering their ears, because those words, ***“It is finished,”*** would have been deafening as it reminded them of their defeat and ultimate fate. And those words would have especially reminded Satan of that day in the Garden of Eden when God said, one day the Seed of the woman would triumph over the serpent and his seed. Now that hour has finally arrived, Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, has struck the serpents head with a fatal blow. As Jesus said in **John 12:31-32**, ***“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And, I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”***

On the cross a cosmic battle was fought – the devil was there, God was there, Christ was there, and we were there, and the victory belonged to God. On that day, the sentence was passed onto Satan and his demons, they were found guilty of rebellion against God, they were defeated and disarmed, and now all that remains is for that day when they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and no longer tempt us and bring evil upon God's good creation! The Garden of Eden will be restored!

When Jesus said *Paid in Full* – Christ stripped away Satan’s accusations against us and pronounced us FORGIVEN. Thanks to the defeat of Satan, we have switched kingdoms, ***“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves”*** (Colossians 1:13). Being part of the kingdom of the Son means Satan can’t destroy us with guilt. We are protected by the blood of our Saviour, but the devil can still destroy us with fear, particularly the fear of death if we let him gain a foothold into our lives. This is one area in which the church must not fall into Satan’s trap of deception, we must always-always-always claim victory over sin and death, by constantly reminding ourselves that we have been accepted by God, and Christ has forgiven all sin, past-present-future sin, and we are covered with our Lord’s precious blood. So, there’s nothing to fear as we await our resurrection!

This is one area in which the church continues to be weak – many believers continue to live defeated lives when they don’t have to, because they tend to forget Christ’s final words of victory from the cross and start listening to the accusations of the devil: *“God will never forgive you! You aren’t good enough! Are you really saved? Look at the way you live! Look at the way you act and the words you speak!”* Let me ask you this question, *“How many of our sins were future when Christ died?”* Obviously, all of them, so what about the sins you will commit tomorrow and the next day – will they be forgiven? The answer of course is YES, as the cross keeps reminding us that the work of Christ is finished, and over every sin has been stamped the word, *tetelestai*, ***“Paid in Full.”***

How can we be assured that Christ’s work is finished?

- **First**, it’s because the tomb is empty! On that Good Friday, Jesus’ body was laid in a burrowed tomb belonging to a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea; however, three days later, we are told – **Matthew 28:1**, ***“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb, the body was gone.”***
- Then, when the risen Christ appeared to His disciples over the next 40 days, we have the **second** proof that Christ’s work is finished – eyewitnesses. When His disciples came to realize that Jesus was alive, that He had risen from the dead, just as He said He would, they came to believe. Even Jesus’ brother James came to believe. This was all the proof His followers needed, they believed and turned the world upside-down. The resurrection is the proof that God accepted the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. The

resurrection is proof that all of those final words spoken from the cross point to Jesus as the Son of God who was exalted to the right hand of God, and there in Heaven Jesus currently reigns, interceding for us at the judgment seat of God, all because of what He accomplished on the cross on that Good Friday.

- Then the **third** affirmation of the finished work of Christ – is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He told His disciples to wait for the promise of the Father. So, what if those 120 disciples who gathered in the Upper Room praying, waited-and-waited-waited and nothing ever happened, the promised Holy Spirit didn't come? What then? For one thing, we wouldn't be worshipping here this Easter morning, because Jesus would have just been another wandering Jewish Rabbi, forgotten over time. However, on the Day of Pentecost, Luke tells us that God delivered on His promise *“A sound like the blowing of a violent wind that filled the whole house...They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues”* (Acts 2:2-4). The coming of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was another affirmation of the truth of Jesus' final words from the cross, *“It is finished.”*

Jesus accomplished what no human being can accomplish in all of eternity, and that's to save themselves. All those in this world that think they can save themselves, those who think they can one day stand before a holy God on the basis of their own good record, will have nothing to stand on, for the Bible clearly tells us that all of our good works are nothing but filthy rags. Which means that all those who don't acknowledge Christ's work on the cross will only be able to say this: *“It is not finished,”* as they are cast aside at God's judgment seat from His presence. So as the church, we gather together every Sunday – because every Sunday is resurrection Sunday, as we proclaim to the world that Jesus is alive and currently reigns in Heaven and will return one day to judge the living and the dead. Every Sunday that the church gathers together we proclaim the Good News of the resurrection, that the Lord is risen indeed! Proclaiming that the tomb is empty, and because the tomb is empty there's victory for those who put their trust in Christ. Those who have chosen to put their hope and faith in the risen Christ can also say, along with Jesus, *“It is finished,”* having the assurance of their resurrection and the gift of eternal life!

That day on the cross – Jesus finished strong! Jesus died without regrets! Jesus finished the work His heavenly Father had for Him to do! And Jesus knew the exact hour and manner of His death. You and I are not fortunate enough to know exactly how and when we will transition from this life to the next. But, ready or not, death will overtake us one day, whether gradually or suddenly – every human has an expiration date, and on that day the unavoidable questions will be: *“Did we finish what God intended for us to do, or did we pretty well live as we pleased, with only a passing glance in God’s direction when we had the time or needed help.”* *How many of our God given opportunities did we waste, and how much did we leave unfinished? And what did we do in this life that will stand and pass the test of Judgment Day?”* These are sobering questions that we all wrestle with, especially as our expiration date gets closer-and-closer, because I’m sure we all want to finish well, and finish strong.

Jesus short ministry of three years was enough to start a new movement that has survived 2000 years and will not die out until Christ returns. So, Jesus didn’t need more time to preach one more sermon, or heal one more paralytic, or cast out one more demon, or perform one more miracle. Jesus was given thirty-three years to spend on this earth, and it was enough time to finish all of His God given responsibilities down to the last letter; thirty-three years was enough time to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Anything more would have been beyond God’s calling upon His life. At death Jesus had lived a fulfilled life!

On this Easter morning – here’s the question I want to leave you with: *“do you have any unfinished business to take care of before your expiration date? Can you sit back and look at your current accomplishments in life and say with satisfaction, **“It is finished,”** or is there more that needs to be done?”* If the Holy Spirit is speaking to you this morning, asking you to quit dragging your heels, and take the risk by stepping across that line called commitment. Then I urge you to commit in taking a step in that direction right now, even if it’s a baby step. A baby step is still better than no step at all! **Hebrews 12:1-3** says it best, ***“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”***

Many in the church, especially during this long season of COVID and all of it's challenges have grown weary and have lost heart and are struggling with their faith. If that's you, then you need to know that God wants you to finish well, and we have been given the Holy Spirit to help us, all because of those final words from the cross, "*It is finished,*" and because "**HE IS RISEN.**" And we have also been given the gift of each other, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who can come alongside of us to encourage us and help us run the race set before us. So, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the help of our fellow believers, let's make that commitment today to finish strong, so that we can say with confidence along with Christ with our last dying breath, "*It is finished!*" May today be our commitment to stay in the race set before us and not grow weary or lose heart, so that we will finish well!