
“It Is Finished!”

“Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30).

As Jesus’ agony on the cross drew to a close, as He came out of the darkness of being sin for all sinners, He cried, “τετέλεσται” (“It is finished!”). While John tells us what He said, the other Gospel Accounts may tell us how He said it. At least two of His last three statements from the cross were uttered in a “loud voice” (Matthew 27:46, 50; Luke 23:46; see Mark 15:37). He seems to have gathered all His remaining strength to shout his final phrases.

Jesus’ single word “τετέλεσται!” has been translated in most versions of the Bible with three English words: “It is finished!” (John 19:30; NASB; KJV; ASV; NIV). The NEB has “It is accomplished.” The Greek word is the singular, perfect, passive, third-person form of the verb τελέω (*teleo*). The word itself carries the import of something being “accomplished, completed, or fulfilled.” The perfect form of the verb suggests action that has been completed and will stay completed for all time. The perfect tense is a past tense declaration that has a bearing on the present and all the days ahead. In order to express the nuance of the perfect tense more clearly, Young’s literal translation of the New Testament renders this word, “It hath been finished.”

Obviously, something of great importance, something of earth-shaking consequence, had been accomplished or completed. However, Jesus did not specify what it was. He just referred to the event as “it.” What was “it”?

His word meant a cessation from the pain of the cross. The long ordeal and travail of the cross was now over. Its shadow had been over Him from

the manger to the end of His earthly mission. Every day He had lived, it had been necessary for Him to carry the cross in His heart. No mortal can imagine the dominating pressure that the crucifixion had put upon Jesus as it loomed ahead of Him. He was never free from the realization that He would have to endure the awful judgment of sin until He cried from the cross, “It is finished!”

His word meant the completion of the predictions of the prophets. He was announcing for all to hear and understand that He had fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. God’s eternal purpose had been set out for Him, and He had accomplished it. When He met with His apostles and disciples the first Sunday evening after His resurrection, He began to tell them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). He had told the two disciples who were traveling to Emmaus, “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). By saying, “It is finished!” Jesus declared the fulfillment of all that the prophets had said concerning the cross.

His words meant conquest over the power of sin and death. His word is a word of victory. The pain of it was now over, the accomplishments of it were now realized, and the victory of it could now be announced. Oswald Chambers wrote, “Never build your case for forgiveness on the idea that God is our Father and He will forgive us because He loves us. That contradicts

the revealed truth of God in Jesus Christ.”¹ He was right, for God can only forgive our sins because Jesus took them with Him to the cross and paid the price for them in His death. God does love us far more than human words can express, but He can only forgive us through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus at the cross.

God declared that salvation had now been provided for all who would come to Him in obedient faith. He signaled the change in His dealings with mankind by rending the veil of the temple from top to bottom and by shaking the earth with a great earthquake. This earthquake opened tombs—and after Jesus’ resurrection, those who had been raised from the dead entered into Jerusalem.

No word spoken in the history of the world carries more far-reaching implications or more power than Jesus’ next-to-last words from the cross. “The death of Jesus Christ is the fulfill-

¹Oswald Chambers; quoted in *His Passion: Christ’s Journey to the Resurrection* (N.p.: Integrity Publishers, n.d.), 318.

ment in history of the very mind and intent of God. There is no place for seeing Jesus Christ as a martyr. His death was not something that happened *to* Him—something that might have been prevented. His death was the very reason He came.”² When He said, “It is finished!” He announced the cessation of the domination of the cross on His life, the completion of the declarations of the prophets, and the conquest of the dominion of Satan, sin, and death. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

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Because Jesus cried, “It is finished!” we can now utter with complete confidence the rhetorical questions that Paul voiced in Romans 8: “If God is for us, who is against us?” (v. 31b); “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” (v. 33a); “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” (v. 35a).

²Ibid.