

It Is Finished
THE SIXTH WORD FROM THE CROSS

John 19:30

Introduction. Death came quickly to Jesus on that black day. It usually took twenty-four to forty-eight hours, sometimes more, for crucifixion to claim its victims. But the long night of abuse and the weight of the world on his shoulders had so weakened Jesus that he died after just six hours on the beams. All four Gospels report that, just before he died, Jesus uttered a loud cry (Mt 27:50, Mk 15:37, Lu 23:46), but it was left to the Fourth Gospel to tell exactly what Jesus said in that cry. Tetelestai! he shouted. It is finished!

That was probably what everybody on Calvary was saying. It was finished for the soldiers. Their job of execution was over and they could go back to their barracks. It was finished for Mary and John and the poor women who loved Jesus to the end. They could go back to a world that would never be the same, a world that had been shattered by Roman hammers and nails. It was finished for the jeering priests and Pharisees. They had been plotting his death for a long time, and now they could go home gloating over their victory (Stewart Life and Teaching 170). But for the man on the middle cross It is finished! meant something different. Some may think that I make too much of this brief cry, only one word in the original language, but I am far more likely to err by making too little of it. It will take eternity to unfold everything in it.

What was finished? Finished was

I. HIS SUFFERING

It is finished! was a sufferer's cry of relief.

Jesus' whole live had been hemmed on all sides by suffering, but his final hours had been worst of all. Scourged and beaten by brutal soldiers! Fastened with iron spikes to splintery beams! Abused by priests and thieves and calloused crowd! The Father's face hidden by awful darkness! Parched lips and burning throat! Abandoned and abused, betrayed and beaten, cursed and condemned! On the cross the cup of suffering from which he had drunk so often was placed in his hands one last time. It was blacker and more bitter than ever, but he never flinched. To the last drop he drained it, then flung it empty from him.

It is finished, Jesus said,
 Ended was his agony,
Aching wounds and burning thirst,
 All the woes of Calvary (cited in Skeath 72).

No more pain! No more agony! In death he had found release. His suffering was finished!

II. HIS SERVICE

It is finished! was a worker's cry of achievement.

There had always been a divine urgency about Jesus' life. When his mother found him in the Temple at age twelve and rebuked him, he turned to her and said, Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business? (Lu 2:49). Even then he already knew that his heavenly Father had given him a task to do. He set himself to it and refused to back down and never gave up. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me, he said to his disciples. Night is coming, when no one can work (Jn 9:4). His work proved to be thankless, grueling, and even gruesome, but Jesus saw it through to its bitter end. Then, from his cross, he cried, There. It is finished! He had carried out his assignment. He had left nothing undone.

What a mighty example Jesus left his followers by finishing his work. Too many people leave life with ragged edges and half-done tasks. Joshua had lived a long and useful life and served God well as a great leader, but when he came down to die the Lord said, You are very old, and there still remain very large areas of land to be taken over (Josh 13:1). Unfinished! Kipling built one of his stories to a point of great suspense, laid down his pen, and died, and no one knows how the tale was meant to end. Unfinished! Raphael left his great painting, The Transfiguration, just half done. Unfinished! Dying in Africa years ago, Dr. Cecil Rhodes, the South African statesman who wrote his name across that continent, murmured, So little done, so much left to do! Unfinished! (Illustrations from Allen Seven Words 101).

I pray for grace to finish the job heaven has granted me! I dare not slack, give up, or turn aside! And I pray the same for you. See it through! Finish it!

III. HIS STRUGGLE

It is finished! was a conqueror's cry of victory.

All his life long Jesus had dueled with demons (whom he took seriously, even if modern men do not). Over and again he unearthed the satanic and undid it. But all of those skirmishes with the Devil and his demons in which he exposed the power of evil and exorcised it were only preludes to the main battle on the cross.

The finest painting of the cross cannot capture what really went on there. A painting can show a man suffering on beams of wood, but it cannot show that the cross became a cosmic battleground. At Calvary the Lord of Lords took on the Prince of Darkness and all the demons and devils of hell in combat and stripped them of all authority and power. The earth shook with the force of that conflict. The cross may look like a loss, but it was a win! On the cross, Jesus destroyed the works of the devil (I Jn 3:8). He cast out the prince of this world (Jn 12:31), that is, dethroned him, and brought him to naught (Heb 2:4), that is, neutralized him. Openly and publicly Jesus stripped principalities and powers, the forces of hell, of their rank and their arms (apekdusamenos, so Ladd ATNT 435) and led them all captive in triumphal procession thriambeuo Col 2:15).

The serpent struck the Savior's heel, but the Savior smashed the serpent's head! The intended Victim came away Victor! In some unexplained way the cross was the

scene of Satan's decisive defeat at the hands of Christ. It is finished! he cried, head bloody but unbowed in victory!

It is finished! The battle is over!
It is finished! There'll be no more war!
It is finished! The end of the conflict!
It is finished! And Jesus is Lord!

The resurrection should not be separated from the crucifixion, for they belong together. But when they are separated, the New Testament puts the emphasis on the cross! It is the greatest event in the history of salvation, even above the resurrection. The cross is the victory; the resurrection, the triumph; but the victory is more important than the triumph, although the latter necessarily follows from it (Sauer, Triumph of the Crucified 32).

IV. HIS SALVATION

It is finished! was the Savior's cry of accomplishment.

It is finished meant that Jesus had finished all that needed to be done to save men. Some years ago a Christian farmer became deeply concerned about an unsaved carpenter friend. The farmer tried to explain to his friend that God saves men through faith alone, but the carpenter insisted that he had to do something himself toward his own salvation. One day the farmer asked his friend to make him a gate for a fence on his farm. When the gate was ready, the man carried it off to the farm and asked the carpenter to come by on Saturday to see the gate as it hung. When the carpenter arrived, he was flabbergasted to see the farmer with a sharp ax in his hand. What are you going to do?, he asked. I am going to add a few cuts and strokes to your work, explained the farmer. But there is no need to do that, cried the friend. The gate is just right the way it is. I did everything that was necessary to it. The farmer paid no mind, but lifted his ax and slashed and hacked and chopped away until the new gate lay in pieces. Now look what you have done! cried the carpenter. You have ruined my work! Yes, I have, replied the farmer, and that is the exact same thing you will do when you try to add the finished work of Christ! (Pink)

Do you believe that? Or are you trying to add something of your own to his finished work of salvation? The religion of the average person is still one of two letters, DO, but the religion of the cross is a religion of four letters, DONE! Christ has already done all that God requires for salvation. Nothing is left but to accept it! It is finished!

Conclusion. No wonder the first Christians began to insist very noisily that the Eighteenth Year of the Emperor Tiberius was the world's most important year. And no wonder they called this black Friday on which he died GOOD Friday! It was on this day in that year that Jesus set his strong shoulders to Heaven's gates and did all that was necessary to open them wide forever. Now, whosoever will may come, and all who choose may enter!