

Good Friday 2021

"What Does 'Finished' Mean to You?"

*Thou hast suffered great affliction and hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion, fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented that my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee. Amen.*
(TLH 151)

The texts that will form the basis for our meditation this evening are found in the Gospels of Mark and John:

ESV Mark 15:33-34 *And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

ESV John 19:30 *Jesus said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

ESV Mark 15:38-39 *And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Humbly asking our God to bless our Good Friday study of His Word, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Fellow Christians, I suspect many of you would agree that Good Friday represents arguably the most difficult of all Christian observances. "Difficult" in the sense that no other Christian celebration offers the same mixture of sorrow and joy; of pain and comfort; of horror and happiness – and all in connection with the death of our holy, innocent Lord Jesus. It can all be very confusing – which is not exactly what we are looking for in a church service or religious observance.

Perhaps the most difficult or confusing aspect of Good Friday and the death of our Savior is understanding just what emotions God deems appropriate for his children on this most solemn occasion. The dilemma is caused in part by the fact that though on this day we commemorate our Lord's death, yet we also know that he did not remain in the grave, having been raised by the Father on the third day. Our emotions are further confused by the fact that heaven's door was opened for us by our Lord's

innocent death on this night, which makes this morbid scene a true victory celebration for sinful and desperate mankind. It explains how and why on Maundy Thursday we can sing the words we do and mean every one of them:

*The death of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we celebrate with one accord;
It is our comfort in distress, our heart's sweet joy and happiness.* (TLH 163 s.1)

Yet the questions remain: What would our God have us do? Do we rejoice, or do we mourn? Are we to feel sorrow or joy? Thanksgiving or shame? Or are we supposed to experience all of these emotions in the course of our commemoration of Good Friday?

To rightly commemorate the most important elements of Good Friday, remember a rather simple rule of thumb: *Thank Jesus not so much for doing what we could have done for ourselves (though obviously unpleasant in the extreme) but for doing what we could not do. Give thanks to our Savior-God on this day for doing what no one else could ever have done.* You and I could have been punished physically. We could never, however, have offered a sinless life as payment for all the accumulated transgressions of mankind. What we see on Good Friday is the culmination, the grand finale, of the epic struggle between Good and Evil, between Jesus and Satan. We see Jesus, in other words, accomplishing for us that which we never could.

The devil however, as we were reminded yesterday, has been astonishingly successful in his efforts to pervert and undermine even the simplest and most basic truths of the Christian faith – including what exactly happened on Good Friday. No matter how clearly God spoke to us in his Word, still human beings are so easily confused and misguided. The most straight-forward thoughts and words that God communicated to us, in perfect clarity, we somehow miss, or misunderstand. Even the most basic Biblical facts need to be visited and revisited or their truths are lost to us.

So this evening we revisit Jesus' simple declaration at the moment of his death, and ask of ourselves: *What does "finished" mean to me?*

We should not need to devote any time at all to something so straightforward, but we do – in large part because the devil has waged such an effective disinformation campaign, and in part because we are so easily confused, deceived, and led astray. We are sheep that absolutely love to wander.

So we ask first what Jesus' simple declaration *could have been misconstrued to mean*, and for definitive answers we need only consult the world around us. They are, after all, those that have adopted these alternate meanings.

The first misunderstanding is that when Jesus said, "It is finished!" he meant simply that he recognized that his life, and therefore also his suffering, were about to end – he recognized his own impending, imminent death. This is actually a half-truth, and it serves as a perfect example of the evil represented by all half-truths. God knows "half-truths" by a different word: lies. There's a reason why even secular courts require witnesses to "*swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.*" This explanation of Jesus' words is a half-truth because *of course* Jesus knew that he was about to die, or, more accurately, that he was about to yield his life ("**bow his head and give up his spirit.**") The language here actually indicates that Jesus wasn't killed; he willingly gave up his life – which was why both the soldiers and Pilate were surprised at how quickly Jesus died. The lie is that that's all that Jesus was saying.

Above all else, this understanding dramatically trivializes what Jesus actually said. In fact it is a clever way to divert mankind's attention away from the work that Jesus came to carry out and to focus instead only on his physical suffering and death. It is the superficial product of those minds that know nothing *but* this life, and nothing at all of the life to come. It is something the "life well lived" and "bucket list" crowd might say, or those that believe that earthly suffering must be avoided at all costs, including ending your own time of grace. It is a trivial and superficial misunderstanding of exactly what a unique, amazing, life-changing event was taking place on Calvary.

Many who do recognize the spiritual component of Jesus' mission, nonetheless also misconstrue what Jesus said. Their explanation is that what Jesus actually meant was that *his part* was now finished or completed. This perversion of what Jesus actually said was necessary for them to be able to perpetuate their greater lie: that Jesus came to earth to do his part, now we must do ours. You are no doubt aware, for example, that many churchgoers are still taught that Jesus died to pay only for the sins with which they were born, and that the individual himself must, through good works, pay for the sins he himself has committed. For that to be true, Jesus would have had to say, "My part is finished."

This too is a half-truth, and a damning half-truth at that. The true part was that Jesus' work was completed when he died on the cross. The lie part is that Jesus' work was only part of the necessary sin payment. It was, in fact, all.

So much confusion. So many different "interpretations." What did Jesus actually say? What did he mean? How can we ever know for sure? Simple answer: *Let's look at what he actually said. Let's let Jesus himself tell us what he meant, and thereby also to learn how you and I are to understand his words.*

First of all, what Jesus actually spoke was not "words" but "word" – one word, not three, and it was pronounced "te-tël-es-tai". The grammar of this one word spoken by our dying Savior is critical to our correct understanding of exactly what he communicated to us. Make no mistake. He fully intended for the world to hear him. This was not something Jesus said only to himself – which would likely have been the case had he meant "*My life (or my suffering) is finished.*" In fact it is not unreasonable to assume that that is why he asked for and accepted the sour wine – to enable the world to hear from his parched throat and mouth the last two things he said: "**It is finished!**" and "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**"

What is it then that we learn from the grammar of that one word, "te-tël-es-tai"? The form Jesus used was very precise. For those interested in such things, he used a perfect, indicative, passive, 3rd person form of the Greek word which means "*to do or finish, to carrying out an action or objective.*"

Bear with me here, because this is exactly how we sift all error from the truth of God's Word. This is how we remove every vestige, every last shred, of man's opinion and let Jesus alone speak to us.

Since Jesus used the 3rd person form, rather than the 1st, he did not say "*I am finished*" but "*It is finished.*" The use of the passive tells us that "it" didn't finish itself, "it" *was* finished – obviously by Jesus.

Jesus also used the perfect indicative form of the word for "*do, complete, finish.*" This form tells us several things. It serves to intensify a completed action (*totally, absolutely finished or completed*), it indicates that the results abide into the present (*what I did still affects you today*), and it emphasizes the completion of that abiding result (*though it affects you still today, you can add nothing to it*).

What does that leave us with? A clear understanding of *exactly* what Jesus said and *exactly* what he intended to communicate to the world. "It" was the work he came to earth to do, and that work was to provide the perfect, sinless sacrifice for the sins of the world. He was the "Lamb of God" who came to "take away the sins of the world." At the moment of his death, that work was both completely finished and perfectly

complete. The results of his work extend or abide into the present. What Jesus did not only *was* complete, it *is* complete. Nothing need be added because nothing *can* be added. That's what complete means. Any attempt to add to what is already perfect and complete can only bring degradation and ruin. At the moment of his death, with this one word, Jesus assured us that the payment for the sins of the world had been paid for all time and eternity, and that that payment was perfect, whole, and complete in every possible way, and that you and I today are the beneficiaries. Quite a word.

And then to make sure that we could not *reasonably* misinterpret or misunderstand, God offered to mankind one last object lesson: ***And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*** (^{ESV} Mark 15:38-39) The temple curtain prevented entrance into the inner sanctum of the temple (the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place). It represented sin, which had separated us from our God. The tearing of that curtain was God's visual evidence that that sin barrier had been removed by Jesus' death. This would not, *could* not have happened if Jesus had only accomplished *part* of our redemption (his part, but not ours), for sin would still remain and therefore also the barrier. The torn curtain was irrefutable visual evidence that what Jesus said was this: *"The full and complete payment for man's sin stands for all time and eternity as having been paid in full."* Even the Roman soldier understood: ***And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"***

So then all that remains is for you and me to answer the question for ourselves: *"What does finished mean to me?"* It means that Jesus has done all, also for you and me. Our sin has been removed forever and therefore can never be used as evidence to condemn us. Jesus did that. It means we need have no fear of being called before God's throne on the Day of Judgment. All of our sins have not only been paid for, God has promised us that he ***"remembers them no more."*** It means that every time the devil tries to discourage or accuse me, I can point to Jesus' simple word of completion ("te-têl-es-tai!") and the devil is robbed of any and all power over me. It means that I need add nothing to what my Savior has done, I can only place my confidence and trust in what he has already done for me, and seek to thank him with the time of grace that he allows me. In short, this one word from my Savior means everything to me, for this life and the next. Amen.

(Hymn 177, Verse 9)

9. Whoe'er, by sense of sin opprest,
Upon these words his thoughts will rest,
He Joy and hope obtaineth
And, through God's love and boundless grace
A peaceful conscience gaineth.

The Sermon – Text (Printed on the bulletin insert)

"What Does 'Finished' Mean to You?"

The Post Sermon Hymn – 172 (Stanzas 1-2, 4, 9-10)

"O Sacred Head Now Wounded"

The Prayer of the Day, followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: **Amen, Amen, Amen.** (Sung by all)

The Closing Hymn – 179

"On My Heart Imprint Thine Image"

Silent Prayer

=====

As is our Good Friday custom, the congregation will be ushered from the sanctuary in silence following the closing hymn. Those in attendance are asked to leave the church quietly thereafter. We observe this custom in solemn commemoration of the death of our Lord, and yet we do so not as those who mourn without hope. We commemorate this solemn event as those who recognize that the debt for our sins was paid in full by our Lord Jesus on this night. There is a time to mourn and a time to rejoice. So also we solemnly observe the death of our Savior this evening (a time to mourn) but in full expectation that our Lord will turn our mourning into the joy of the empty tomb on Easter morning. All are therefore invited to gather here again on Easter morning for that greatest of all Christian celebrations.



Good Friday Service

**St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, ND**

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave.

Bismarck, ND 58501 (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson – President Angela Pfennig – Organist
Michael Roehl – Pastor

Good Friday Service – April 2, 2021

The Opening Hymn -#143- (Verses 1-7)

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Congregation: *(Spoken) Amen.*

Confession and Absolution

P: *On this most solemn occasion we acknowledge that it was also our sin that caused the death of our Lord, and we therefore confess our sins in the words of the 51st Psalm:*

Psalm 51 *(Supplement page 28)*

P: *Jesus Christ, our Lord, paid the penalty for our sins upon Calvary's cross. Because of that sacrifice, I, according to His authority and by His command, announce to you that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

All: Hymn 779 (Stanzas 1 & 3) *(Brown Hymnal)*

Redeemed, restored, forgiven through Jesus precious blood,
Heirs of His home in heaven oh, praise our pard'ning God!
Praise Him in tuneful measure who gave His Son to die;
Praise Him whose sev'n-fold treasures enrich and sanctify.

Dear Master, Yours the glory of each recovered soul.
Ah, who can tell the story of love that made us whole?
Not ours, not ours the merit; to You alone the praise!
Give us a thankful spirit to serve You all our days.

The Scripture Lessons *(Printed on the bulletin insert)*

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is sitting at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Words of Christ from the Cross

(Hymn 177, Verse 1)

1. Our blessed Savior seven times spoke
When on the cross our sins He took
And died lest man should perish.
Let us His last and dying words
In our remembrance cherish.

(A Compilation from the Gospels) ^{ESV} Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** And they cast lots to divide his garments. ¶ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, **"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."** ¶ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, **"Woman, behold, your son!"** ²⁷ **Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!"** And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ¶ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, **"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"** that is, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

¶ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), **"I thirst."** ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

¶ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, **"It is finished,"** and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

¶ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"** And having said this he breathed his last.