

Chapter Six: Jesus' Sixth Saying

"It is finished."

John 19:30

"The Day He Finished What We Started"

Are you a person who finishes what you start? For a lot of us, life is full of projects we never seem to finish. The half read book. The remodeling project that we never seem to wrap up.

I don't know if the story is accurate, but last week someone told me that when Mozart was a child, his family obtained a new keyboard. A visitor stopped by to see the instrument, walked over to it, and played the first 7 notes of an octave. But he never finished the scale. Later, in the middle of the night, in the dark house, someone was heard shuffling through the house, and into the parlor where the instrument was. It was young Mozart. The tension of the unfinished scale ate at him, so he couldn't sleep. He walked over to the piano, played the final note, and went back to bed. He finished what his guest had started.

Do you know what happened on the cross of Jesus Christ? There on the cross, Jesus finished what we started. He finished the horrible problem that entered the world when our first forefather, Adam, sinned and brought the curse of God upon us. Jesus won the victory at the cross.

There is victory at the cross.

In the words of Eugene Bartlett, "I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from glory, how He gave His life on Calvary, to save a wretch like me. I heard about His groaning, of His precious blood's atoning, then I repented of my sins and won the victory. O victory in Jesus, my Savior, forever, He sought me, and bought me with His redeeming blood; He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him, He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood."

There is victory at the cross. Jesus finished the problem we started.

You say, "If Jesus finished the problem, why is our world still in such a mess?" That's a valid question. How do we know Jesus indeed finished the problem we started? How do we know there's victory at the cross?

We will find the answer in John 19:30. According to Jesus' sixth saying from the cross, there are two reasons we can know for sure that He won the victory at the cross.

Here's the first reason.

I. We can know that there is victory at the cross because of what Jesus SAID.

"It is finished!" (tetelestai)

It is finished. This is the sixth of the seven statements Jesus uttered while He hung on the cross. We have already examined the first five in the past 5 Sunday mornings, and we'll focus on the seventh next week. By listening to these sayings, we learn from Jesus' own lips what really happened on the cross.

With His murderers in mind, He prayed, "Father, forgive them." There was pardon at the cross. To the thief on the cross who called out for mercy, Jesus said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." Jesus guaranteed Paradise for His people on the cross. To His mother grieving at the foot of His cross, Jesus said, "Woman, behold thy son." Jesus gave us a Pattern of love at the cross. Following the 3 hours of darkness, Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Jesus took our Punishment on the cross. After

going through hell's fire on the cross, Jesus declared, "I thirst." Why? Because He took our Pain, the pain of the eternal torment we deserved, on the cross.

Oh, beloved, do you see what happened on the cross? The Pardon, the paradise, the pattern of love, the punishment, the pain. Ponder the cross. Think of the cross often.

Elizabeth Clephane penned these words with the cross in mind, "Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see, the very dying form of One Who suffered there for me; And from my smitten heart with tears, two wonders I confess--the wonders of redeeming love, and my unworthiness."

And now, we come to Jesus' sixth saying: "It is finished." Why did Jesus say that? What had He finished? What was "it"?

A. He finished His life.

V 28 "When Jesus had received the vinegar." He refused the drink earlier. But this time He accepts. Why? To moisten His parched throat? Why? So He could be heard.

"It is finished." At first, this seems like a cry of defeat. We use the word that way. Though he was once the heavy-weight champion of the world, if Mohammed Ali tried to make a comeback in boxing today, we'd say, "No way. He's past His prime. He's finished."

And certainly, when Jesus uttered this cry, it signified the end of His earthly life. The crowds that once applauded Him were gone. Though declared innocent by Pilate (19:6), He was being executed as a hardened criminal. On that horrid day, the King of kings died. He died in fierce torment. Outlived by His mother, He would go to His grave at the age of 33.

From the lips of a mere man, this would be a cry of defeat: "It is finished! It's over. I'm washed up. I've failed."

But this was no mere man. This was the very Son of God!

Please notice carefully that Jesus did NOT say, "I am finished." He said, "IT is finished." What did He mean? First, He meant He had finished His life.

I have chosen my words carefully. I did NOT say His life was finished. No, no. He would live again. I said that HE FINISHED His life. In a few moments, He would choose to die, and then die. He died when HE chose to die.

Then, and only then, He cried, "It is finished." He died when He had finished His life. There was something else He had finished.

B. He finished His Work.

Notice when John said that Jesus said, "It is finished." When was it? V 30 "When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar."

Did you realize that John is the only gospel writer to record this 6th saying? Matthew did not. Nor did Mark or Luke. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us something that John does not. Let's look at Matthew's account. Matthew says that right after they gave the wine-vinegar to Jesus (27:48), this happened. Mt 27:50 "Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit."

Matthew says that Jesus "cried again with a LOUD voice." Then He gave up His spirit and died (also in Lk 23:46). What did Jesus cry? Matthew doesn't tell us. John does. "It is finished."

Please realize this was a LOUD cry. It was not the sob of a victim. It was the cry of a Victor! "It is finished! I have won the victory!"

Do you see, my friends? When Jesus cried out, He was declaring that He had finished His work on the cross. He had secured victory!

You say, "Victory over what?" That's a good question. John doesn't give us the answer in this verse, but as we do a little research in the epistles, we'll discover the explanation. On the cross, Jesus won the victory over three great enemies that have plagued mankind since the garden of Eden.

1. He won the victory over Sin.

Our biggest problem in life is one 3-letter word. Sin. We were created to live for God, yet because of sin, we live for self. Self rules. We are preoccupied with self. Self, self, self.

Like the Calvin & Hobbs comic strip I read recently. I get a kick out of self-centered, egotistic Calvin. The reason is because he's so much like us! In this episode, he walked into the family room to talk to his dad, who was reading the newspaper. The dialogue went like this:

Calvin: "I've decided I suffer from low self esteem."

His father: "Is that a fact."

Calvin: "From now on, my goal is to feel good about myself."

His father: "You're going to work harder at everything and build some character?"

Calvin: "No, I'm going to whine until I get the special treatment I like."

Calvin: "I've found that immediate gratification is the only thing that helps me."

His father: "I wonder if anyone else is as scared about the future as I am."

Because of sin, we are born into this world enslaved to self. But at the cross, Jesus won the victory over sin! How do we know?

Rom 3:23-24 "For all have SINNED and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

We are all sinners. Yet God justified us (declared us to be righteous). How? Through the redemption of Christ Jesus. We were set free from sin at the cross.

But there's more. Rom 6:6-7 "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin."

Freed from sin? Yes. Jesus won the victory over sin at the cross. He died to set us free from sin. "It is finished!"

Some here today are defeated by sinful habits. Right now you are thinking, "I feel like a slave to my passion, my addiction. I can't escape. It's too late. Is there hope for me?" Yes! At the cross. At the cross, Jesus won the victory over sin.

But that's not all. At the cross, Jesus defeated a second enemy.

2. He won the victory over Satan.

At the cross, Jesus did in the forces of evil. And one in particular. Heb 2:14 "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death {at the CROSS} He might destroy Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." (also Col 2:14-15)

One of the great leaders of this century was Winston Churchill. He was a man who could see what others could not see. On September 9, 1939, Churchill wrote a letter to the French ambassador in London, Charles Corbin. With the powerful threat of Hitler's armies staring in the face of the British, here's what Churchill wrote: "We have a hard struggle before us, but if there is full comradeship I cannot doubt our victory." (Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill: Finest Hour, Vol VI, Houghton Mifflin Comp, 1983, p. 21) History proved Churchill to be right.

There on the cross, Jesus defeated our crafty enemy, Satan. Do you hear the Lord's shout! "He is finished!" The devil is still our enemy, but a defeated enemy.

3. He won the victory over Death.

A holy God must cast sin from His presence forever. He must vent His wrath against the rebel who would defy His law. The wages of sin is death--physical death, and spiritual death.

In those 6 hours on the cross, Jesus became a curse in our place (Gal 3:13). He did battle with our greatest foe, death itself, and won! Heb 2:15 "And deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

When Jesus died, He delivered us from the bondage of death! He said, "It is finished! You need not fear death, for I have conquered it!"

I have waited until now to talk about the word John records in v 30. In our English Bible, it's 3 words, "It is finished." In the greek, it's but one word: Tetelestai. What a vivid word.

The same word appears in v 28 translated "accomplished." A cry of completion. The cross was a great trial to our Lord, yes, but it was also a place of Triumph.

Tetelestai was a business term used in the market place. Archaeologists have discovered papyri tax receipts with the word "tetelestai" written across them. The word means, "Paid in full."

April 15 is only a couple of weeks away. Our tax returns are due. Why do we pay taxes? Because we owe.

More than a few of us make monthly payments, car payments, house payments, credit card payments. Why? Because we owe. How we long to see and hear those words, "Paid in full!"

When Jesus shouted from the cross, "It is finished!" He was saying, "I've paid your debt in full. Tetelstai. I've finished the problem of sin, Satan, and death!" We can know there is victory at the cross because of what Jesus SAID.

Objection: "Wait a minute. People SAY lots of things. Talk is cheap. How do we know that what Jesus said, what Jesus claimed, was true?" What Jesus SAID is the first reason. There is also a second reason.

II. We can know that there is victory at the cross because of what Jesus DID.

Jesus revealed He was a victor by two things He did. What were they?

A. He died as a Victor.

Remember, the apostle John was there. He saw firsthand what Jesus did.

1. He bowed His head.

2. He gave up His spirit.

Notice that. Jesus did not die like other men. He did not die in anguish. There was no struggle. He died with the confident assurance that His task was done.

He was in control of His death. He simply willed to die, and He died. Many victims hung for days on their crosses. Not Jesus. He determined the time of His death. He finished His work, and chose to die.

He died as a Victor. As great as this was, Jesus did something even greater.

B. He conquered death as a Victor.

Listen. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He knew His work was done. All of it. True, His Body would be in the tomb 3 days, and true, the world thought He had lost! But in Jesus' sovereign mind, while still on the cross, He knew His work was as good as done--His resurrection, His ascension, His sending of the Spirit, His second coming. He guaranteed it all, from the cross!

Death did not take Jesus. Jesus took death! He willed to die, and He died. And three days later, He conquered death as a Victor!

Conclusion:

Jesus won the victory at the cross. He finished what we started. How do we know? Two reasons--because of what He SAID, and what He DID.

What are the implications for us? Allow me to highlight two.

1. We must live in light of what Jesus finished.

There's something critical to note about the word Tetelestai. It's a perfect tense verb. That means it's an activity that happened in the past that has continuing implications in the present. If I drop a pebble in a pond, it hits only one time, but the results go on and on. The waves leave the point of the splash, glide to the shore, bounce off, and cross the pond, over and over.

You may wonder, "If Jesus won the victory over sin, Satan, and death, why do we still struggle? The problem is not with Jesus' provision. The problem is with us. We need to learn to live in light of what Jesus finished.

How do we do that? Lehman Strauss is right (100), "The religion of the average person is a 'do' religion, but true biblical Christianity is a 'done' religion." Every day I must affirm my need for Jesus and His finished work.

2. There's no need for us to add to what Jesus finished.

Jesus' redemption is complete, and sufficient. We need not add to it.

Yet, do you know what is tragic? Church pews are full of well-intentioned people this morning who don't believe that. You may be one.

I read a story this week about Ebenezer Wooten (Jones, 84). Wooten was an eccentric evangelist in England many years ago. He conducted some tent meetings at Lidford Brook. On the last night, after the service, as the crowd was leaving, a young fellow came up to the evangelist. The man asked, "Mr. Wooten, what must I do to be saved?"

In a matter of fact manner, Wooten glanced at the man and said, "Too late, my friend, too late."

This startled the fellow. "Oh, don't say that, Mr. Wooten! Surely it isn't too late just because the meetings are over?"

The evangelist looked him straight in the eye, and responded, "Yes, my friend, it's too late! You want to know what you must DO to be saved, and I tell you that you're hundreds of years too late! The work of salvation is done, completed, finished! It was finished on the cross; Jesus said so with the last breath that He drew. What more do you want?"

What more do YOU want? There's no need to add to what Jesus finished. Are you trying to? Are you depending on your good works to get you into heaven? Or have you said, "What Jesus did for me on the cross was enough!"

"Man of sorrows, what a name for the Son of God who came ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Savior! Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood; sealed my pardon with His blood: Hallelujah, what a Savior! Guilty, vile, and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He; full atonement! can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior! Lifted up was He to die, 'It is finished!' was His cry; Now in heaven exalted high: Hallelujah, what a Savior!" (Philip P. Bliss)

Jesus Christ finished what we started. There is victory at the cross. Are you on the victory side?