

Series: "The Puzzle of the Cross: Learning from Jesus' Seven Sayings"

Main Idea: On the cross Jesus finished what we started. How do we know that? According to John 19:30, there are two reasons we can know for sure that Jesus' redemption is complete.

- I. We can know that Jesus' redemption is complete because of what He *said*.
 - A. He finished His life.
 - B. He finished His work.
 1. He won the victory over sin.
 2. He won the victory over Satan.
 3. He won the victory over death.
- II. We can know that Jesus' redemption is complete because of what He *did*.
 - A. He died as a victor.
 1. He bowed His head.
 2. He gave up His spirit.
 - B. He conquered death as a victor.

Make It Personal: Let's consider two implications...

1. We must live in light of what Jesus finished.
2. There's no need for us to add to what Jesus finished.

The Seven Sayings of Jesus from the Cross:

Jesus' first words: Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)."

Jesus' second words: "Today you will be with Me in paradise (Luke 23:43)."

Jesus' third words: "Dear woman, here is your son... Here is your mother," (John 19:26-27)."

Jesus' fourth words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Matt. 27:46)."

Jesus' fifth words: "I am thirsty (John 19:28)."

Jesus' sixth words: "It is finished (John 19:30)."

Jesus' seventh words: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46)."

"This do in remembrance of me." We see these words every week as we enter this room, for they are etched into the front of our communion table. Have you ever wondered, why these words, and why here? These words, of course, were spoken by Jesus to His disciples during His final Passover meal with them, in what we now call the Lord's Supper, or the Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20). They remind us that whenever we "do this", that is, participate in communion (as we will later in this service), we are to do so in a very special way, with a very special aim in mind. *In remembrance of me.*

Remember me, said the Lord Jesus. When you come to this table, which you are to do regularly as my people, remember me. When you receive this piece of bread and drink this fruit of the vine, remember me. Remember who I am and what I did for you.

And I cannot think of a passage more suited to help us remember than the one to which we now turn our attention. This morning we come to the sixth statement made by Jesus while hanging on the cross.

Scripture Reading: John 19:28-30

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.

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message has been adapted from a sermon preached at WBC as part of a 1994 series on "The Seven Sayings of Jesus from the Cross."

I don't know if the story is accurate, but someone once 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 seven notes of an octave. But he never finished the scale. Later, in the middle of the dark night, 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 to the Lord Jesus on the cross? There on the cross, Jesus finished something. We might say, He finished what we started, that He finished the horrible problem that entered the world when our first forefather, Adam, sinned and brought the curse of God upon the human race. And while that's true, there's more to be said. It goes deeper.

Finished. It's a term often associated with accomplishment, as in, "I finished the race!" Jesus certainly did accomplish something, but even that term falls short. Jesus didn't merely finish His race. He won a tremendous victory when He crossed the finish line.

The song-writer, Eugene Bartlett, captured this thought in one of our favorites:

*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.*

Indeed, there is victory at the cross, for Jesus finished the problem we started. Definitely true. But it's not the whole truth. This sentence makes it sound like Jesus is merely responding to something we did, finishing the problem that *we* started. It doesn't go back far enough. What did Jesus finish? What did He mean when He shouted from the cross, "It is finished!"?

That's the question we want to answer this morning. That answer will prepare us to meaningfully and joyfully remember Jesus when we come to the table this morning. More importantly, that answer prepares us to meet Jesus when we leave this world.

What did He finish? He finished a task, an assignment, a work that His Father had designed and given Him to do. Throughout John's gospel Jesus has been talking about this work. For instance...

John 4:34 "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his **work**."

John 5:18 "My Father is working until now, and I am **working**."

John 9:4 "We must **work** the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work."

John 17:4 "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the **work** that you gave me to do."

What was this work that the Father gave Jesus to do, into which Jesus poured Himself? The biblical word is *redemption*. "Redemption," writes James Boice, "has to do with buying and selling. The word comes from two Latin words: *re* which means 'again' and *emo, emere* which means 'to acquire.' So redemption means to 'acquire again' or 'to buy again.'"

Then Boice adds that this doesn't capture the full meaning of the biblical term, and offers this definition, "Redemption is deliverance from the bondage of sin by Christ at the cost of his life—because he loved us."²

I believe this is precisely what Christ had in mind when He announced, "It is finished." He's declaring that, yes, He finished something we started, the problem of sin. But more than that, He finished the work His Father had given Him to do, the work of redeeming sinners from bondage. On the cross, He rescued a people who will enjoy, praise, and serve Him forever.

But perhaps His work is insufficient. Perhaps we must add to His work. Can we be sure that Christ's redemptive work is complete? According to what Jesus said in John 19:30, the answer is *YES*, for two reasons. We'll spend the majority of our time on the first reason.

I. We can know that Jesus' redemption is complete because of what He *said*.

We're considering the sixth of the seven statements Jesus uttered while He hung on the cross. We have already examined the first five in the past five Sunday mornings, and there's one more to follow. In these seven statements, Jesus Himself is teaching us what really happened on the cross. I'll summarize with seven key words.

First, with His murderers in mind, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." There was **pardon** at the cross.

Second, to the thief who called out for mercy, Jesus said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." Jesus guaranteed **paradise** for His people on the cross.

Third, to His grieving mother at the foot of His cross, Jesus said, "Woman, behold your son," and then to His disciple John He said, "Son, behold your mother." In so doing, Jesus gave us a **pattern** of love at the cross, establishing the vital importance of the forever family in the church.

Fourth, following the three hours of darkness, Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He made it clear that He took our **punishment** on the cross, indeed, our place in hell.

Then, after going through hell's fire on the cross, Jesus declared in His fifth statement, "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 He accomplished on the cross? The pardon, the paradise, the pattern of love, the punishment, the pain. This is the work He accomplished, which is why we must 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.*

Now, we come to the sixth saying: "It is finished."³ He didn't merely *think* those words. He *said* them. He is revealing something. He wants those listening, and this now includes us, to think about two accomplishments.

A. He finished His life. Notice how John begins verse 30, "When Jesus had received the sour wine [AV, 'the vinegar']." What sour wine? Back up to verses 28-29,

² James Boice, taken from, *Our Savior God*, p. 139.

³ In this verse Jesus is the subject of four action verbs. He "received" the sour wine. He "said". He "bowed" His head. And He "gave" up His spirit.

“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.”

Six hours earlier, when they first nailed Jesus to the cross, they offered Him a wine mixture, basically a sedative, that He refused. He will accept nothing that might impair His faculties. But this time He accepts. Why? The answer, John seems to indicate, is because He wants to say something, and be clearly heard.

After what He’s just been through, the double scourging, the physical torment of six hours nailed to two pieces of wood, plus the unthinkable distress created by the experience of the wrath of God as He suffers in the place of sinners, He is indeed dehydrated. “I thirst,” He cries, and this time accepts some fluid. Why? He has something to say, and He must be heard.

“It is finished.” At first, this seems like a cry of defeat. We use the word that way. For instance, though he was once the best in the game, if Michael Jordan tried to make a comeback in basketball today, we’d say, “No way. He’s past His prime. He’s finished.”

And in truth, when Jesus uttered this cry, it did signify 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, as in, “It is finished! It’s over. I’ve failed.” But this was no mere man, but the very Son of God. And He most certainly did not fail.

Please notice carefully that Jesus did NOT say, “I am finished.” But rather, “*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. He would live again. I said that HE FINISHED His life. In other words, He died when HE chose to die. In just a moment, He will bow His head and give up His spirit.

So it’s then, and only then, that He cries, “It is finished.” He dies when He has finished His life. There is something else He has finished.

B. He finished His work. Notice again the timing, according to John, of when Jesus said, “It is finished.” When? Verse 30, “When Jesus, had received the vinegar (AV).”

John is the only gospel writer to record this sixth 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 tells us that at the ninth hour (around 3 pm), Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Right after that, according to Matthew, someone ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to Jesus (verse 48). Then after that, according to Matthew, here’s what happened. Verse 50 says, “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.”

That’s significant. Matthew specifically says that Jesus “cried out again with a LOUD voice.” Then, after that cry, He gave up His spirit and died (also in Luke 23:46). Here’s the question. What did Jesus cry? Matthew doesn’t tell us. But John does.

He cried, “It is finished.” And based on Matthew’s account, this was a LOUD cry. This was not the sob of a defeated victim. This was a victory cry!

So what made the change in tone, from “My God, my God,” to “It is finished!”? Why the triumphal note, and why now?

That’s a good question, a vital question, and John doesn’t give us the answer in this verse. But as we do a little research in the epistles, we soon discover the explanation. On

the cross, Jesus won a tremendous 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 this three-letter word. Sin. We were created to live for God, yet sin entered the world and death by sin. Because of sin, we enter the world going our own way. We live for self. Self rules. We are preoccupied with self. Self, self, self.

How many have read the Calvin & Hobbs comic strip? I used to get a kick out of self-centered, egotistic Calvin. The reason is because he's so much like us! In one particular episode, he walked into the family room to talk to his dad, who was reading the newspaper. The dialoge 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."

This is why the world is in the shape that it's in. Because of sin, we are born into this world enslaved to self. Self rules. We want what we want. We do not love God with all of our hearts as we ought, nor our neighbor. We love ourselves. This is sin.

And this is what Jesus accomplished at the cross, victory over sin! How do we know? Listen to Romans 3:23-24, "For all have SINNED and come short of the glory of God [there's our problem], being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus [there's what God did about our problem, through the *work* His Son accomplished at the cross]."

We are all sinners. Yet God justifies sinners (declares them to be righteous). How? Through the redemption of Christ Jesus. On what basis? On the basis of merit? No. By grace alone, through faith in Christ and His redemptive work alone. We who have put our faith in Christ have been set free from sin at the cross.

But there's more. Listen to Romans 6:6-7, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin."

Freed from sin? Is that true? Yes, because Jesus won the victory over sin at the cross. He died to set us free from sin, so we can now love God and others. The penalty for sin is paid in full, and the power for overcoming sin is now ours to experience.

Some here today are in the clutches of sinful habits. Right now you may be thinking, "I feel like a slave to my passion, my addiction. I can't escape. It's too late. Are you saying that there hope for me?" Yes! Why? Because you have what it takes within you? No. You are not the solution. He is. At the cross, Jesus won the victory over sin. It indeed is finished!

"Well, how do I experience this victory?" you say. Here's how. You must put your total trust in Him and the work He did for you. And then you must do precisely what He says about your sin. You must kill it, by His power, by using the means of grace He has provided for you, including His Word, prayer, and meaningful participation in His church.

But there's another great enemy that Jesus defeated at the cross.

2. *He won the victory over Satan.* At the cross, through His own death, Jesus delivered the death blow to the forces of evil, and one in particular.

Listen to Hebrews 2:14, “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

How did Jesus destroy the devil? Notice those words, “through death.” Through His death on the cross, says this text, Christ defeated the devil who until that moment held the power of death.⁴

But what about the resurrection? Isn't that part of Christ's redemptive work? Yes. Certainly the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all involved in the resurrection, but in a special sense, the resurrection is particularly the work of the Father.

Acts 2:24 “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

Acts 2:32 “This Jesus God raised up, and we are witnesses,” says Peter.

Acts 3:15 “You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.” (see also Acts 4:10; 5:30; 10:40).

Romans 6:4 “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.”

So in one sense, Christ finished His work when He died. And then He entrusted Himself wholeheartedly to His Father, saying, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

The New Testament typically uses passive language, saying that Christ “was raised from the dead.” Christ gave His life on the cross, that was His work. And He trusted His Father to raise Him from the dead, which He most certainly did!

One of the great leaders of the past 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.”⁵

History proved Churchill to be right. But what Jesus did (and said) on the cross goes much further. He didn't just predict victory. He achieved it, and announced it to be so. There on the cross, Jesus defeated sin, yes, but also our crafty enemy, Satan, who is still our enemy, but a defeated enemy.

3. *He won the victory over death.* We know all too well about this foe, called death. Death is a separation. In physical death, there's a separation between body and soul. In spiritual death, there's also a separation, between the creature and the Creator.

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 six hours on the cross, Jesus became a curse in our place (Gal 3:13). He thus experienced spiritual death as our representative. He did battle with our greatest foe, death itself. And He won! He knew He had won, even before He left the tomb!

Listen again to Hebrews 2:14-15, particularly, “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that *through death* he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*”

⁴ See also Colossians 2:13–15 “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

⁵ Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Finest Hour, Vol VI*, Houghton Mifflin Comp, 1983, p. 21

Notice again the connection. When Jesus died, indeed *through His death*, He delivered us from the bondage of death! When He said, “It is finished!”, He was making it clear, “If you believe in Me, you need not fear death, for I have conquered it!”

I’ve waited until now to talk about the word John records in verse 30. In our English Bible, it’s three words, “It is finished.” In the Greek, it’s but one word: *Tetelestai*. What a vivid word.

The same word appears in verse 28, “After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now *finished*.” The cross was a great trial to our Lord, yes, but it was also a place of triumph. This is a cry of completion.

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

We understand this reality. April 15 happened a few weeks ago. Our tax returns were due. Why do we pay taxes? Because we owe.

More than a few in this room make monthly payments, car payments, house payments, credit card payments. Why? Because we owe.

How we long to hear those words, to see them on an official piece of paper, “Paid in full!” My friends, we are hearing those words right now. We are seeing them on an official piece of paper given to us by God Himself. When Jesus shouted from the cross, “It is finished!” He was saying to all who would believe in Him, “I’ve paid your debt in full. *Tetelestai*. I’ve finished the problem of sin, Satan, and death!”

My non-Christian friend, I have a question for you, one posed by the song-writer...

*Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

So there’s the first reason. We can know that Jesus’ redemption is complete because of what He *said*.

“But wait a minute,” you may object. “People say lots of things. Talk is cheap. How do we know that what Jesus said, what Jesus claimed, is true?” That’s a valid question, and it brings us to our second reason.

II. We can know that Jesus’ redemption is complete because of what He *did*.

Jesus revealed the sufficiency of His redemptive work, not just with words, but action, indeed two actions. What were they?

A. He died as a victor. We touched on this earlier, but notice carefully. How exactly did Jesus die? What did He do at the very end. Remember, the apostle John was there. He saw firsthand what Jesus did, and tells us what He did. He concludes verse 30, “And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

1. *He bowed His head.*
2. *He gave up His spirit.*

Is that significant? Yes. 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.

Who can do that?! Who is in control of when and how He dies? Jesus the Christ can, and He did. And the fact that He did indicates that we can put our full confidence in what He just said.

He died as a victor. And as great as that was, He was about to do something even greater. And what's that?

B. He conquered death as a victor.

When Jesus said those words, "It is finished," there was absolutely no question in His mind what was coming next. He knew His work was done. All of it. He knew His body would be in a tomb where it would remain, sealed behind a large stone, until the third day. He knew that His critics would conclude that He died as a failure, a fraud.

But He knew better. In His sovereign mind, while still hanging on the cross, just moments before He takes His final breath, He knows that His work is as good as done. All of it, including His resurrection, His ascension, His sending of the Spirit, His second coming. And He guaranteed it all by this triumphal announcement from the cross.

Death did not take the One who had a work to do. Jesus did the work, and then Jesus took death. He willed to die, and He died. And three days later, He conquered death as a victor!

Earlier I mentioned that the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and He did. The Scriptures indicate that the Holy Spirit participated in this triumph as well (see 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 1:4; Romans 8:11). And so did Jesus Himself.

Listen to His prediction in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Verse 22 says, "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken."

Later Jesus announced in John 10:17-18, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Indeed, the resurrection is the work of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son Himself. And this work makes it clear that what He said was true. It truly is finished! He finished what we started. He finished the rescue work His Father gave Him to do.

Make It Personal: Let's consider two implications...

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 which has continuing implications in the present.

If I drop a pebble in a pond, it hits the water 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.

Perhaps you're wondering, "If Jesus truly finished His work, if He indeed won the victory over sin, Satan, and death, why do we still struggle? That's a good question. There are several facets to the answer, but I want to zero in on one, the most important. My friend, the problem is not with the work Jesus did. The problem is with us. We need to learn to live in light of what Jesus finished. This is what *faith* is. Faith is believing in Him, and then living in light of what He did for us.

Lehman Strauss said it well, "The religion of the average person is a 'do' religion, but true biblical Christianity is a 'done' religion."⁶ Every day I must affirm my need for Jesus, and my trust in Jesus and His finished work (see Gal 2:20).

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.

⁶ Lehman Strauss, p. 100.

Do you know what is tragic? There are a lot of sincere people all around us who don't really believe that. You may be one of them.

Ebenezer 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?"⁷

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 acknowledged to God and others that what Jesus did on the cross is 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!⁸*

Closing Song: #175 "Hallelujah, What a Savior!" (all five verses)

Communion

Brothers and sisters, our Savior finished what we started. This is why we have hope today. He finished the problem that we sinners started. He fulfilled the plan that His Father designed to rescue undeserving sinners like us.

And He's given us a special way to remember what He has done, to remember Him, and what He did to finish our problem. If you know Christ as your Savior, this table is for you. Let's do this in remembrance of Him.

⁷ Jones, p. 84.

⁸ Philip P. Bliss