

Seven Last Words Part 6

This is the last Sunday morning message of our Seven Last Words series. I will be sharing the seventh word as part of our Good Friday service this Friday evening. I hope you can attend this special service and then of course, next Sunday is Easter. Come and celebrate with us the resurrection of the Lord.

Turn with me to John 19 as we examine the sixth word from the cross. When we read the gospel accounts of the crucifixion, (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) we get differing views of the event. Think of it like four photographers taking pictures of the same event but from different angles and vantage points. They emphasize different things that happened or different words that were spoken. Matthew and Mark tell us Jesus give a loud cry before he died, but they don't tell us what was said. Luke tell us Jesus committed his spirit into the hands of his Heavenly Father as he breathed his last. John tells us Jesus said, "It is finished." Together, the four gospel writers give us a panorama of all that was happening on the cross.

You recall from last Sunday Jesus said "I thirst" and was given a sponge soaked in vinegar. John then tells us, **"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John 19:30.** Three words in English. Perhaps the three most significant and important words ever spoken by anyone. "It is finished." But look at the circumstances for a moment.

Try to picture in your mind Jesus hanging upon the cross. Battered, bruised, bleeding. Something seems out of focus, like the image itself is distorted. Then we realize our image is accurate. His body is distorted. His arms are dislocated from their sockets as the weight of his body pulls painfully down. He is no longer recognizable as his anguished face is covered with blood, sweat and tears, reflecting the agony of slow death on a cross. After hours of torturous pain we hear him say, "It is finished."

It is finished. What does it mean? It looks as though it would be more accurate if he had said, "I am finished." That's how it appears. Beaten. Defeated. Dying. "I'm finished. Spent. Done. I surrender." (Remember when we used to pummel someone until they said "uncle"?). Jesus, say uncle. You're done in. Finished.

Jesus came announcing "the kingdom of God is at hand." The signs and wonders he performed aroused the Messianic hope of the people. His teaching inspired and encouraged the

multitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” But now it all comes crashing to an end here, at the cross. What kingdom is this? Where is the kingdom of heaven to be found in any of this? Where is the comfort? Where is the inheritance? The hopes of the people that Jesus is the Messiah appear to be finished because he is finished, at least it looks that way from here. It is finished and we aren’t comfortable with the finish are we? Our Savior is dying on the cross and all our hopes are dying with him. But perhaps we’ve misunderstood this sixth word from the cross.

It is finished doesn’t mean it’s over. Finished means consummated. It means fulfilled, brought to perfection. It is finished means mission accomplished. When Jesus said it is finished, it wasn’t an acknowledgment of defeat, it was an announcement of victory won. It’s done, the plan carried out.

In the Greek “It is finished” is merely one word, taken from the root word “teleo” which means brought to an end. If something is teleological it means it is moving towards its predetermined end, its ultimate and final purpose. Everything had been moving toward this moment. Jesus said earlier in the week, **“What shall I say? ‘Father save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.” John 12:27** This was the moment he had been living for, the completion of his life’s work. Jesus said in his prayer in John 17 **“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” John 17:4.** It is finished means that for which he was born has been accomplished. His work, the work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in bringing salvation and redemption to us was settled here, at the cross.

It is finished. It doesn’t mean all our problems are over. There is still sin and evil and sickness and tragedy and death. Injustice still reigns in the world. Innocents still suffer. It isn’t over, but it is finished. Jesus has done what had to be done to right the wrong for our sakes and for the whole world. It is finished doesn’t mean it’s over, yet, but it means sin and sickness and death and evil do not and will not have the last word. Richard Neuhaus wrote, **“It is finished means it is settled, decided, certain, complete and incontestable. Nothing can happen now to undo it. Now there is absolutely nothing to fear.” ...Richard Neuhaus** It is finished, settled, nothing can undo it and there is nothing to fear. It’s all going to be all right.

Let's consider a bit further what "it is finished" means for us.

"It is finished" means His suffering has ended. I think we have to acknowledge that Jesus was glad to have done with the brutal suffering of the crucifixion. We know in the Garden of Gethsemane he had prayed that this cup be removed from him. He had asked the Father if there was another way for this to be accomplished, but he submitted to the will of the Father and now that he had emptied the cup, now that this was over, I have to believe he was glad to say, "It is finished."

Think of it: Jesus would never suffer again! Ever. The reason why is because his sacrifice on the cross was a once and for all sacrifice! It's not just good news for Jesus, that he won't have to go to the cross ever again but it is good news for us. It shouts to us of the certainty of our salvation! As Neuhaus said, "it is settled, decided, certain, complete and incontestable. Nothing can happen now to undo it."

The writer of Hebrews wrote, **"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all...to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."** Hebrews 9:24-28

When Jesus said it was finished, it meant he would never suffer again because his suffering and death on the cross was more than sufficient to take away our sins and provide salvation for us. It is finished and for Jesus there would be no more pain, no more dying, no more fatigue and weariness. But not only for him. His words, "It is finished" offer hope for us that by his saving grace our suffering too will end someday as well. We are expecting him to come a second time Hebrews 9 says. This time not to bear our sin on the cross, but to bring salvation, meaning to take us to heaven where we too can say "it is finished" and we will be in his presence where there will be no more tears or sorrow, parting or pain. It is finished means salvation and an end to suffering is coming for all of us that trust in Christ!

“It is finished” means the Word of God has been fulfilled. John has pointed out these things happened “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, clear and dramatic prophecies were given of his birth, his life, his death by crucifixion. The Scriptures declared he would be born of a virgin, of the seed of Abraham, a descendant of the lineage of David. He would be named before he was born, born in Bethlehem of Judea. His birth would mean sorrow for others, that he would have to flee to Egypt and return to Israel. It was prophecied he would bring light to the gentiles, the blind would see, the lame would walk, the deaf hear. He would teach by parables, he would have no place to lay his head, he would enter triumphantly into Jerusalem, he would be despised, rejected, betrayed by friends, crucified, his hands and feet pierced, mocked by the crowd passing by. We could go on and on. Scholars say there are 333 prophecies in the Old Testament that deal with the Messiah and 456 specific details of his life and death. 456 details with the final fulfillment expressed in his words, “It is finished.”

The Psalmist said, “forever O Lord your word is settled in heaven.” It is finished means not only can we trust the word of God to be fulfilled in Jesus’ life, we can trust that God’s word will be fulfilled in our life as well. We can trust when Hebrews says “he will appear a second time” to bring salvation, He will come again! His “it is finished” testifies to the reliability of God’s word.

“It is finished” means the mission of salvation has been accomplished. The Scripture tells us that Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10); “to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15); “to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5); to “give himself as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). All of this and more was accomplished and completed at the cross. The lost could only be found here at the cross, a place of death. The sinners could only be saved by one who would take their place and bear their sin on the cross. All of us held captive by sin could only be ransomed by the one able and willing to pay the price. All of this was finished at the cross.

Arthur Pink wrote, **“It is finished. This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr... it was not the last gasp of a worn out life. No, rather was it the declaration on the part of the divine Redeemer that all for which He came from heaven to earth to do was now done; that all that was needed to reveal the full character of God had now been accomplished; that all that was required by the law before sinners could be saved had now**

been performed; that the full price of our redemption was now paid.” ...Arthur Pink

Do you get that? All he came from heaven to earth to do has now been done! Everything that was needed to reveal the character of God, his love, his mercy, his desire to save us and give us eternal life – that was accomplished through Christ and his death on the cross. Everything that was required to save us had been performed. The full price of our redemption had been paid, once and for all. It was settled and finished at the cross! There is nothing more for him to do.

Let me say it again. This was the plan. This wasn't an accident. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said of Jesus, **“This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” Acts 2:23**

Quoting Richard Neuhaus again, **“The triune God conspires for our salvation. The entire plan is love from beginning to end and the fullness of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is engaged every step of the way. It is not an angry Father punishing an innocent Son, with the Spirit on the sidelines helplessly watching. No, it is the Father, Son and Spirit conspiring together to save us from ourselves.”Richard Neuhaus**

Think of that – Father Son and Spirit conspired together to save us. It was ordained. John would write in the Revelation that Jesus was the Lamb of God that was slain from the foundation of the world. Jesus asked the men on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, **“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Luke 24:26.** It had to be, his love reaching across the universe to this place, this planet, this cross and now loves' work is complete. He suffered for us once and for all and when he said “It is finished” everything changed for us. Sin and death no longer have the final word because Jesus death on the cross broke the power of sin and death. Mission accomplished. It had to be and now, it is finished.

“It is finished” means access to his grace is available for us. You may remember a series of messages I preached last November about the glory and presence of God. We talked about God's presence on Mt. Sinai and the fact that people weren't supposed to come close to the mountain. Then when the tabernacle was built and later the temple, there was a place called the Holy of Holies, (the passage we just read from Hebrews 9 referred to it as the Most Holy Place).

The Holy of Holies was where the presence of God was manifested, but only one man could go inside the Holy of Holies (the high priest) and only once a year (the Day of Atonement) to offer sacrifice for the people. There was a veil or curtain that separated the place of God's presence from the rest of the temple or tabernacle. When Jesus died, Matthew's gospel tell us, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Matthew 27:51. This tearing of that curtain was a tangible sign that the things that separated us from God were removed and we could now come to God through the sacrifice of Christ. The writer of Hebrews says **"Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." Hebrews 10:19-22.**

Because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross, the offering of his blood, his life as a sacrifice for our sins, we now can come to God and find life and help, mercy and peace. We can come to him and be in his presence, with full assurance. Earlier the writer of Hebrews declared, **"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:16** "It is finished" Jesus said and access to God's presence, his mercy, his grace was opened to all who will come to him in repentance and faith. How about you? There is nothing left for Jesus to do to provide salvation and cleansing of sin and eternal life for you. He has already done all the work. It is finished. Mission accomplished. Now, the decision belongs to you. What will you do?

"I don't know if Jesus could love or forgive someone like me." What did he say? "It is finished". He proved his love for you. He died for you. He has provided the means, the grace and mercy needed for you. The choice is yours!

Some of us struggle trying to earn our salvation. Our good works are rather puny compared to the offering of Jesus on the cross. Listen, God is completely satisfied with the finished work of Christ on the cross. The resurrection proves it. Why aren't you satisfied with it? Jesus did what had to be done. Confess your sins and believe in your heart that he died for you. You can then have that full assurance of faith. Believe him when he says, "It is finished."

Thank God sin and death no longer have the final word. Thank God Jesus death brought us eternal victory. Thank God as Neuhaus said, It is finished, "settled, decided, certain, complete

and incontestable. Nothing can happen now to undo it. Now there is absolutely nothing to fear.”

...Richard Neuhaus