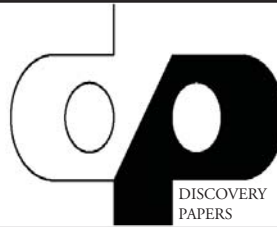




## “IT IS FINISHED”



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John 19:23-42  
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Sixty years ago most experts considered a sub four-minute mile to be a physiological impossibility. Yet, on May 5, 1954 Roger Banister ran the distance in 3 minutes 59.4 seconds. After a disappointing showing in the 1952 Olympics, this British medical student undertook a mission. He set himself the goal of breaking the unbreakable barrier: the four-minute mile. Two years later he pushed himself to the limit and the unattainable had been achieved. His quest was finished.

John's gospel is the story of an infinitely greater mission—the rescue of the children of Adam. The Word became flesh. The incarnate Son of God obeyed his Father and fulfilled ancient promises made to Israel. Love propelled Jesus to allow his enemies to execute him, and we begin this study where we left off, with the body of Jesus nailed to a cross.

Recall the apostle's stage-setting comment in John 3:1. *Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.* What will the end turn out to be? How will the Lord's mission of salvation succeed?

Before we hear Jesus' final statements and observe his death, before the end of his quest, we should take note (19:23-27) of two groups of people standing near the cross. First, there are four soldiers, gambling for used clothing. They well illustrate the blindness of the world, which focuses on useless enterprises, ignoring the glory of God. Second, there are four women, including Jesus' mother, along with disciple whom he loved. Jesus' gift of a new mother for John and a new son for Mary transforms the meaning of family. This act anticipates the creation of the church and establishes the primacy of Christ-in-common over the connections formed by genes and by marriage.

John 19: 28-29—

**After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.”<sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When Jesus had**

**received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.**

We note in this remarkable text that a form of the Greek word *telios* is used three times: once to describe what Jesus knew, *all was now finished*; once by John as a narrator, translated to *fulfill* in verse 28; and once in the direct quotation of Jesus, *it is finished*.

*Telios* (meaning ‘fully finished’ or ‘accomplished to the uttermost’) is rarely used in the New Testament to say that an Old Testament prediction has come to pass. When John observes ‘fulfillment of Scripture’ in Jesus' mention of thirst the reference is probably to Psalm 22, particularly verse 15—*my strength is dried up, my tongue sticks to my jaws*. The Lord's body is fully spent and he asks for enough liquid to free his tongue for one last word. The human voice was never put to a greater purpose than when Jesus declared (*cried aloud* Mark 15:37) the end of his quest, *tetelestai, It is finished!*

Then he bowed his head, an act of regal submission to the Father, exhaled his spirit to those who had gathered before him, and his life was ended. He breathed his last breath, but what can we say was accomplished? We will return to that question. However, before considering the theology and the meaning of the Lord's sacrifice we should take note of what John wrote to remove all doubt about the facts of Jesus' death and burial.

At the end of a festival week the Jews wanted the killing business (three men on crosses) done quickly so that the bodies could be removed before sundown—the beginning of the Sabbath. To speed death along Roman executioners would typically break the legs of a crucified criminal, hastening suffocation. We pick up again in verse 33:

John 19:33-37—

**When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.<sup>34</sup>But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.<sup>35</sup>He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling**

**the truth—that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup>For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” <sup>37</sup>And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”**

John’s testimony about the certain death of Jesus, reinforced with an oath (verse 35), was important because of false claims and subsequent heresies that arose after the resurrection. If Jesus had merely passed out and been later revived, his appearance to witnesses on Easter morning was no particular miracle.

When John wrote this gospel he was also aware of heretical teaching which attempts to ‘spiritualize’ Jesus’ demise. In this view, the Lord’s actual physical death (messy, bloody, and unpleasant) is contemptible compared with the noble idea of bold sacrifice and the inner change that comes from contemplation of such nobility. Following this track, it is not even necessary that any real Jesus ever existed in history—the beautiful stories are enough. Similar false teaching has been evident in every century since the first, including our own.

But John will have none of this. He was an eyewitness who is committed to tell the truth. The Savior died, and was pierced with a spear, fulfilling the Scripture that predicted these things.

The details of the Lord’s burial are also important.

John 19:38-42—

**After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. <sup>39</sup>Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. <sup>40</sup>So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup>Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. <sup>42</sup>So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.**

Another effort to discredit the resurrection in the early days and by skeptics ever since centers on the claim that Jesus’ followers made off with his body. Or that his body was discarded with other dead criminals (the usual practice) and that no one made note of where it ended up.

In fact, Jesus’ body was not taken by his Galilean followers, but by important members of Jerusalem society. It was carefully placed by itself (no chance of a mix up) in an expensive ‘new tomb’ in a well-marked garden. If he later was seen alive, it was because of a miracle not the result of mistakes or chicanery.

Returning now to the quest-ending cry, *It is finished*. How should we think about what was accomplished on the cross? Let me highlight four descriptions of Christ with regard to his finished work on the cross. He is sin bearer, friend maker, child welcomer, and the destroyer of evil.

First, we note that Christ took our sin upon himself. Recall the announcement of John the Baptist: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29). Jesus is the sacrificed lamb who bears our sins away. There is no better news than this.

Modern psychology can speak with considerable expertise about the effects in the present of suffering and deprivation that occurred in the past, sometimes long in the past. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a dramatic example of such an effect.

But the sufferings we have inflicted on others can be more devastating to our souls than hardships which have befallen us. Frequently, we hurt the people closest to us. I don’t know any parent who doesn’t regret failing their children or any spouse who does not long to take back wounding remarks.

I painfully remember a choice I made, as a young Christian, to bully a handicapped kid in my high school. I wanted to fit in with classmates who were doing the same thing and merely succeeded in grieving the Spirit and reinforcing the stereotype of Christian hypocrisy among my friends. Our sinful past will darken the present and the future (post-traumatic sin disorder) if there is no authentic basis for forgiveness. Praise God, the Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world.

Consider Colossians 2:13-14—

**God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup>by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**

Second, the death of Jesus provides a definition of love.

John 15 :13—

**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**

We sometimes speak of God's love on a grand scale—his love for the world. But I find it compelling to realize that Jesus had in mind individual friends (a non-religious term) when he *laid down his life*. The Good Shepherd who knows the name of his sheep—he knows the ups and downs, the quirky thoughts and unique interests that make each one of us ourselves. He is glad to name us his friends.

The gospel of John paints intimate portraits of a wide range of people who were nobodies and rejects in the world's eyes but were friends to Jesus. The woman at the well at Samaria, the little boy with loaves and fish, the blind beggar whose parents turned away from him, the sisters in Bethany who were crushed because their brother was dead, Mary Magdalene and Thomas who doubted. Jesus' death on the cross was a demonstration of love for his friends.

Third, on the cross the Lord gave the right to be named children of God.

John 1:10-12—

**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**

Being lost and then found, adoption, child-placement, full acceptance as a family-member, the embrace of God as Father. These outcomes also were made possible by the cross of Christ. The world (including us) wanted nothing to do with him, yet he persisted and persuaded and to all *who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*. Stories of orphans welcomed into a loving family are some of the most beautiful in the world. The beauty is beyond describing when the lost become children of God.

Last on our list we see that Jesus' cross broke the power of the evil one.

John 12:31-32—

**“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”**

Jesus declared that the devil is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). These are his essential qualities: a passion to cause pain and death; a core commitment to deception. And we are no match for him. War, prejudice, fear, distrust, and revenge never accomplish anything and yet are constantly repeated throughout human history. Good people die needlessly. Lies destroy neighborhoods, families, and churches time and again.

However, on the cross, Jesus ended the rule of the 'strong man' who was too strong for us. The evil one is cast down, and even though Jesus 'lifting up' is the painful reality of the cross, it is by this means that we are drawn to him and granted eternal life.

Consider the great text in Revelation (an inspiration for Handel in composing 'The Messiah')

Revelation 11:15—

**Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”**

The ruler of this world is cast out. Jesus is Lord.

We rejoice at the good news of Jesus' victory-cry (*tetelestai*) *It is finished*. We rejoice, however, because we know what happened next. Surely for the disciples on that awful Friday, seeing Jesus entombed at dusk, joy was nowhere to be found. For them the word *finished* described the termination of a beautiful life, the silencing of his words and his laughter, and end of his hope-inspiring love for them.

But their despair will shortly be swept away. Jesus finished his quest, sacrificing his life. The glory of resurrection is now near at hand.