

The Finished Work – *John 19:23-30*

Introduction – John records the desire of the Jewish authorities to kill Jesus as early as John 5:17-18. And in that passage, Jesus rebukes them for not seeing Who He is from the testimony of the Scriptures they claimed to hold so dearly – “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life*” (5:39-40). Among other things, John would have us meditate on how Scripture was particularly fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. And the last word John records Jesus saying before He “*gave up His spirit*” was *tetelestai*, “*it is finished.*” What was finished?

Casting Lots for a Tunic (vv23-24) – Four soldiers divided Christ’s garments as He hung naked on the cross. The tunic remaining, and possibly the most expensive piece, they determined to cast lots for it. Or rather, David had prophesied that they would. They did this possibly as Jesus chanted Psalm 22, beginning with “*My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?*” (Ps 22:1, Matt 27:46). The whole psalm is Messianic. A thousand years before it happened, David saw by means of the Spirit, that Christ would have his hands and feet pierced (Ps 22:16), that He would die at the hands of his strong enemies (vv12-13) and that it would be an agonizing death (vv15, 17). They would gamble over His garments (v18) and He would thirst terribly (v15).

Knowing these details helps us see the fulfillment of prophecy, the sovereignty of God in the smallest of details, and therefore the purpose of God in details. But let it sink deeper. We are told to sing the Psalms, like Jesus did. Jesus found fellowship in David’s sufferings and used those words in His own sufferings and prayers before His Father while hanging on a tree. We have fellowship with our Savior in His sufferings as we sing the Psalms and then we learn to argue and plead with God through our own sufferings before the face of God.

Of course, the casting of His garments signified His shameful death, stripped naked, exposed in his human frailty amid horrible torture. The shame of nakedness is part of the curse for our sin (Gen 2:25, 3:7). Crucifixion was a public renunciation and rejection of the whole man, and Isaiah foretold this reproach (Isaiah 53:3-6). “*Christ was stripped of his garments, that he might clothe us with righteousness; his naked body was exposed to the insults of men, that we may appear in glory before the judgment-seat of God*” – Calvin.

“Woman, behold your son!... Behold your mother!” (vv26–27) – Jesus is dying and He is dying for the sins of the world. There, on the cross, He is doing what He is doing for others. When under extreme pain it is hard to think of anything but yourself. Yet His mind is not self-absorbed; the mind of Christ was on the concern of others. He had prayed for forgiveness for those who were crucifying Him (Lue 23:34) and promised the penitent thief of salvation in Paradise (Luke 23:43). But John focuses on another concern; Jesus’ mother.

There is strength and grace in Christ to avoid being consumed with one’s own afflictions, but only if one has the same faith as Christ in the goodness of His loving Father. Dying well and faithfully includes looking past oneself and providing, as one is able, for the well-being of those you will be leaving behind.

Note: The Roman Catholic theologians treat this passage as teaching Mary to be Co-Redemptrix along with her Son. They insist that Jesus was committing the apostles and the church into the care of His mother and some even take it as the installment of Mary over the church as his ultimate achievement on the cross. This turns the whole scene on its head. Jesus was giving His mother over to the care of John and the church, not the other way around. The previous night He had made clear that it was to the Holy Spirit that He committed His followers (John14:16-17) – (R.D. Phillips).

“I Thirst” (vv28-29) – Once again John tells us Scripture is fulfilled as Jesus says, “*I thirst*” (Ps 22:15, 69:3), which would have been part of the natural torment during crucifixion, having suffered a great loss of blood and fluids from the scourging, piercings, and the exposure to the hot sun. But again, there is more to consider here. First, remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus where the former begged for a cool drop of water to relieve his anguish as he was tormented in judgment. Jesus was experiencing the sufferings of hell, our righteous judgment. And so now, the One who offered living water if they would come to Him cries out in thirst as He suffers the consequences of our sin on our behalf.

Second, John mentions a vessel of sour wine, a sponge and hyssop, put to the lips of Jesus to assuage the thirst. The hyssop branch was used in OT sacrifices, and this wouldn’t be missed by John’s readers. While the sour wine is assuaging Jesus’ thirst, His blood is assuaging God’s holy wrath. On the Day of Atonement, the priest would sprinkle blood on the

Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies, the very center of the temple. In Hebrew, the word for Mercy Seat means “*the place of propitiation*” and the Greek translation is hilasterion. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus made propitiation for the sins of His people in this sacrifice (Heb 2:17). Paul says the same in Rom 3:25 and John in 1 John 2:2. The old temple was just a shadow. Jesus is the new temple. The old mercy seat was just a shadow. Jesus is the new mercy seat, the new place of propitiation.

“It is Finished!” (v30) - In English it is three words. In Greek it is just one – *Tetelestai* – it is finished. Jesus, hanging on the cross, lips so parched with thirst, takes enough sour wine to issue His final decree before death. It was a cry of victory. John does not mention how Jesus uttered this Word, but the other gospels record that Jesus, in His last moments, cried out with a loud voice. This was not the cry of defeat. This was the cry of Victory. Although this was a day of great sorrow and suffering; it was a day of great defeat; defeat that is, for the enemy.

What had Christ finished? – He had finished His obedience unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8). He obeyed His Father’s will in every aspect. Hebrews tells us that He was tempted in all ways, and yet without sin (Heb 4:15).

Our Lord had become the fulfillment of all the ceremonial laws. He was the perfect sacrifice of which all the Mosaic sacrifices were simply types and shadows. The old covenant was ended. There is no longer any need to offer sacrifices for sin (Heb 10:14, 18).

Christ had come to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. He had bruised the serpent’s head, having disarmed principalities and powers. He had made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross. The reign of the serpent was over (Col 2:15).

Finally and to our great benefit, Christ became a full, perfect, complete propitiation (mercy seat) for us, that God may be both just and the one who justifies (Rom 3:21-26). In every other religion, men make propitiation to the gods so they will leave you alone. Only in Christianity do we have God making propitiation by Himself for Himself so that men can draw near to Him.

*He hell in hell laid low;
Made sin, he sin o’erthrew;
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death, by dying, slew – S.W. Gandy*