

**Sermon File # 725**

**Scripture Text: John 19:28-30**

**Sermon Title: *The Finished Work of Jesus***

**Sermon manuscript written by Roger Roberts and preached**

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**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

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## ***The Finished Work of Jesus***

### **Introduction:**

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem knowing it would be the week of his passion, but also trusting that on the following Sunday he would be raised from the dead. We note from reading the four Gospels that Jesus spoke seven last words from the cross. He prayed as he was being mocked and crucified, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). To the repentant thief being executed next to him Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). When he saw his mother and John standing nearby, he said "'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother'" (John 19:26f). During his time of sin bearing, which was by far the greatest agony of the cross, when Jesus was suffering our hell, he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46).

In John 19:28-30, our text for today, we again listen to important words of Jesus from the cross. This brief passage contains a reference to his 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> words, assuming that the reference to his giving up his spirit (30b) was his final prayer recorded in Luke 23:46: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." This morning we look at the cross as "The Finished Work of Jesus." The Evangelist John doesn't want us to miss this truth, so he uses three words in these three verses that are based on the word "teleo," which means "bring to an end, finish, complete; carry out, accomplish, perform, fulfill" (Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*).

Notice with me these words “completed” and “fulfilled” in verse 28 and the word Jesus cried from the cross in verse 30, “finished,” “tetelestai.”

Follow as I read **John 19:28-30**.

The highest mountain peak in North America is Mt McKinley, that reaches a height of 20,320 feet, which is 6,194 meters. Although challenging enough, Mt McKinley can be climbed successfully with the help of experienced guides. Every spring there are about a thousand climbers who “assault” and successfully climb its slopes to the peak. However, as recently as 1995 six climbers died in the attempt, and almost yearly there are fatalities among the challengers of this great summit (There had been over 100 fatalities by the year 2003. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_McKinley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_McKinley)).

Clovis Chappell relates that words were found carved on a tree, against which leaned the skeleton of an unsuccessful Mt McKinley climber, who had died short of the summit. The note, with a carved finger pointing downward, read simply, “The end of the trail.” In other words, someone didn’t finish the climb successfully. He died tragically before completing his mission (Clovis G Chappell, page 49, *The Seven Words*). All of us some day will come to the end of life’s journey or our climb, as it were. The crucial difference will be whether our climb will have been successful, or will it merely and sadly be simply “the end of the trail.”

When Jesus cried out from the cross, “tetelestai!” it was not for him the end of the trail. He was not announcing that his mission had failed. It was a cry of victory that through his suffering and death he had completed his mission given by the Father since before the beginning of time. Because of Jesus’ finished work we can have assurance that the purpose of our lives will find their fulfillment and completion in him.

Note with me that the work of Jesus and the will of the Father were finished and completed...

### **In his life and death**

Jesus’ cry from the cross was not the cry of a defeated man, but the cry of victory in his reaching the culmination of a mission of “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). The cross on which Jesus died was...

#### *The focus of his life*

In the opening prologue of John’s Gospel (1:1-18) the evangelist writes about Jesus as the eternal Word and Son of God. The incarnation of the Son was for the purpose of bringing eternal life to all who would receive him. This grace and truth that brings life and allows us the privilege of becoming the children of God was made available in the cross of Jesus, the eternal Son. Jesus explained to Nicodemus about God’s loving the world so much that he gave his one and unique Son, that whoever should believe in him would not die, but have eternal life (John 3:16 may have been John’s commentary following Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus).

### From the beginning

Even as a young boy in the temple, discussing with the teachers, Jesus was growing in his full understanding of a mission given by the Father in eternity, before the creation of the world (Luke 2:41-50).

The gospels tell us that Jesus began early on to teach his disciples that his primary mission was to be the cross, even though they failed to understand and accept the role of the cross and a suffering messiah (e.g., Matthew 16:21-28). As the cross loomed nearer, the dread of his suffering caused Jesus to agonize in anticipation. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27-28).

Jesus was obedient to the Father in completing his assigned and accepted mission that was prophesied throughout the Old Covenant (e.g., Isaiah 53:1-12). In his High Priestly Prayer Jesus knew that the cross was just hours away. "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). He saw even then his work as completed, envisioning the atonement that would be provided within hours.

Notice how our text begins with Jesus' knowledge that "all was now finished," that is, "tetelestai." And next is a purpose clause, "in order to fulfill the Scripture" (verse 28). Jesus' entire life was directed to perfect obedience to the will of the Father. From the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus was tempted by Satan to take another path to glory instead of the cross (Matthew 4:8-10), and was tempted even by Peter, one of his closest disciples, to avoid the cross (Matthew 16:22-23). And all the way to the eve of the cross in Gethsemane, Jesus faced and fully overcame the temptation to avoid his suffering and death for us.

### To the cross

We noted how Jesus calmly submitted to the authorities and soldiers who came to arrest him (John 18:1-11). He had prayed his final prayer of surrender to the Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46, Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42). His human will of course was to avoid suffering, knowing that his suffering would be the greatest ever suffered by any human.

Yet in his deity he understood that he was fulfilling the Father's will and purpose that the Godhead had conceived before the beginning of time. After the agony of his prayer in the garden he knew without doubt that the cross was the only way for the world's salvation and he was convinced that his submission to the cross would be followed by his deliverance in resurrection and glorification (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus was intent upon...

#### *The completion of his task*

Jesus was determined to complete his task of death on the cross, which was...

### His sin-bearing atonement

Perhaps after Jesus spoke forgiveness to the repentant thief, and made provision for his mother, he entered into his greatest suffering. The problem with the movie *The Passion of the Christ* is that its emphasis on the horrible physical torture of Jesus' scourging and crucifixion is apt to overshadow his greatest suffering. Let us not forget that many were victims of Rome's cruelest form of execution. But no one ever has or ever will or can suffer as did Jesus.

During those hours of darkness he somehow entered hell for us and suffered the wrath of God against all the sin and sinners of the world. Separated for the first time in eternity from the Father's love, he cried out in his dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). As Philip Yancey wrote, "Some inconceivable split had opened up in the Godhead. The Son felt abandoned by the Father" (page 201, *The Jesus I Never Knew*).

No one, Kent Hughes reminds us, not even Hitler himself, has ever experienced in this life the total absence of the Father. We all know, even the most sinful and despicable of us, the presence of God's general goodness and grace, and some degree of the mitigation of pain. But Jesus bore the full experience of absolute suffering and absence of all good in those hours, which for him were an eternity of darkness (See Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*).

Perhaps it was right after these hours of darkness that Jesus spoke these words in verse 28: "I am thirsty." Earlier, Jesus had refused the offer of wine that would have dulled his senses because his intent was to bear the full impact and highest degree of suffering for us (Matthew 27:34). But now that atoning suffering had been accomplished, Jesus declared his thirst and received the cheap wine so he could make his victory cry before his death. Excruciating thirst is one of the horrible sufferings of crucifixion. Yancey also writes about "The irony of one who had made gallons of wine for a wedding party, who had spoken of living water that would quench all thirst forever, dying with a swollen tongue and the sour smell of spilled vinegar on his beard" (page 201, above reference).

But with the aid of the wine Jesus' vocal chords were moistened to enable him to cry out. It was not a whimper of defeat but was...

### His cry of victory

I believe this cry, "It is finished!" was the cry in a loud voice that Matthew refers to (Matthew 27:50). Jesus was crying out, "Victory!" The work the Father had given him to do from before all creation was now finished, i.e. accomplished. The mission he was born to do, was fulfilled. What he learned as a young boy, and dreaded increasingly as the hour approached, was now over. What he wished to avoid if at all possible, but decided to accept as the only means of our salvation, was now over and done. That eternity of hell as our sin substitute was now finished.

The work of the Lamb, prophesied in God's provision of the lamb in place of Abraham's son Isaac, was accomplished (Genesis 22:13-14). The one who was

foreseen when the Israelites spread the blood of slain lambs on their door posts was now the slain lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world (Exodus 12:12-13; John 1:29). John apparently saw this connection when the stalk of hyssop was raised to Jesus' parched lips, perhaps remembering the hyssop used by the Israelites in spreading the blood of the Passover lambs on their door frames (John 19:29; Exodus 12: 21-23).

As G Campbell Morgan wrote, on the cross Jesus completed his perfect work as our great Prophet, Priest and King. On the cross Jesus "said the first and last word about God. All true knowledge about God, said Morgan, must begin with the cross and be conditioned by the cross. On the cross Jesus fulfilled his role as our Great High Priest. He was the Mediator who stood between holy God and sinful man and removed that sin barrier, satisfying the righteous demands of Holy God for the price for our atonement and forgiveness. And on the cross King Jesus established the rule of God and his kingdom in our hearts (GC Morgan, page 275, Volume X, *The Westminster Pulpit*).

An interesting aside is that "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). Many of the Jews read this sign, John tells us, which was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek, the primary languages of this part of the world at that time. The chief priests of the Jews were upset with this declaration and requested that the sign be removed, which Pilate refused. So fittingly, Jesus' universal kingship, which was rejected by the religious establishment, was officially and irrevocably declared at the cross.

That Jesus' atoning death was the satisfactorily completion of the Father's mission for him would be evidenced by his resurrection and his eventual ascension to heaven, where he would be glorified. In anticipation of that, as he sensed life waning from his body, Jesus was ready to breathe his last in...

#### His sovereign departure

I believe that when Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit he prayed "in a loud voice" the prayer recorded for us by Luke: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (verse 30 and Luke 23:46 from Psalm 31:5, which perhaps was used as a Jewish lullaby). No one else but Jesus could determine his own death.

Jesus has said earlier in this gospel, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to 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 authority to take it up again" (John 10:17-18). Jesus' voluntarily experienced death for us.

He went before us in showing that, because of his cross, death also for us can be a peaceful and confident departure into the arms of the heavenly Father. Jesus, in his death, destroyed the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). This was the result of his finished work—our deliverance from the power of death.

The work of Jesus on the cross is also a completed work...

## In our lives

John gives the cry of Jesus in the perfect tense, which carries the meaning, “It is finished and always will be finished” (Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, page 448). Jesus announced something final, but also, as the Greek perfect tense conveys, something with continuing results. The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross is completely finished yet has results that have implications for each one of us. First, we know that because of the cross of Christ there is nothing we can do to save ourselves but rather...

*We are saved by his work alone*

What happened on the cross 2,000 years ago is over and accomplished, yet with eternal results. As Paul writes, “The death he died, he died to sin *once for all*” (Romans 6:10). The writer of Hebrews says that, “he entered the Most Holy Place *once for all* by his own blood” (Hebrews 9:12; 10:10). There is nothing that could be done or that ever needs to be done to provide all the grace and forgiveness and salvation for all who would believe till the end of time. It is finished. It is accomplished.

Paul makes this very clear. Our efforts to achieve salvation are futile and insulting to God, who has provided it all. Clearly grace means nothing is added to what God has done. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8f).

As someone has said, the formula for salvation is simple: “Grace plus zero equals salvation.” All we must do is realize our need, repent from sin, and accept God’s free gift. It’s free, but not cheap. It cost God the cross. And when we receive this free gift, we too enter the way of the cross in a life of grateful discipleship. Our lives become a grateful response to what Christ has done for us.

Steven Spielberg’s movie about the World War II D-day Invasion of Normandy, *Saving Private Ryan*, in a way captures this sense of the debt of gratitude. The movie closes with a scene of Private Ryan, now many years later an older man, surrounded by his family of children, grandchildren and perhaps great-grandchildren, visiting Normandy Cemetery.

After an emotional visit to the grave of one of the men who died in obtaining his rescue, the elderly Ryan turned to his wife and implored her to reassure him that he has been a good man and lived a good life. He never got over the price paid by the eight man team assigned to his rescue, and needed to know his life was worth the cost. Good men, perhaps better than he was, had died in the rescue mission. With quavering voice he turned to his wife and said, “Tell me I’ve lived a good life. Tell me I’m a good man.” “You are,” she reassured him. (See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saving\\_Private\\_Ryan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saving_Private_Ryan)).

The price paid for our rescue from eternal death and hell was immense. Our lives must be lived in grateful response, showing our lives were worth the cross. Jesus’ work was finished...

*Yet Jesus' work continues*

Jesus' cry "It is finished!" speaks of once-for-all completed action with ongoing results. Indeed, there is nothing we can do to add to the atoning, saving work of the cross, and the attempt is an egregious insult to holy God. And the work of the crucified Savior has continuing results in our lives. When we turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance and trust, and submit to his lordship, we are regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. We become new creations in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I have had people resist the invitation to trust and follow Christ, saying they were afraid they could not live up to the commitment they were asked to make. But the truth is, none of us could live up to the calling to follow Jesus and to live a new life. But he enables us to live on a higher plane by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the power of the risen Lord living in us. We live by the power of the finished work of Jesus, who conquered sin, death and hell on the cross. And the benefits of his victory are transferred to those of us who are "in Christ." Our lives are redeemed in order for us to enter into God's eternal kingdom purposes.

John's Gospel is a continual testimony to the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, our King. We have noted that in his arrest and submission to the cross he is in full control, and lays down his life of his own accord. This means also that he is not dependent on any one of us. His work and will for us shall be accomplished whether you and I cooperate or not. The issue for us is whether or not we choose to join Sovereign God in his eternal plan. The opportunity and privilege are ours to embrace or to squander. He has chosen to expand his kingdom and to enlist worshipers through weak instruments like you and me. I'm grateful that the work of the kingdom doesn't depend on us.

The sovereignty of God is a grace doctrine, assuring us that we are simply weak instruments in the hands of a mighty God who is accomplishing his eternal purposes through us. I am coming to understand that when I fret over my kingdom service and experience frustrations in ministry, I am not living, thinking and serving by faith. If we are frustrated in God's work, we are guilty of the ultimate oxymoron and are insulting the living God, who cannot be frustrated. If I'm frustrated in God's service, then I am in a contradiction. It cannot be God's service if it can be frustrated by mere circumstances, delays and human inadequacies. For example, if I'm frustrated over someone's unwillingness to accept the gospel, I must be running ahead of God, am trying to pick unripe fruit, or may even be working at the wrong fruit tree. If I'm walking with God and working with God, I will be simply joining him in his work, which cannot be unfruitful, if done in his way and in his time.

I heard the story of some Allied soldiers involved in the post-World War II clean-up efforts in France. Inside a bombed-out church they discovered a handless statue of Jesus that had fallen to the stone floor. One of the soldiers, evidently a believer, restored the fallen statue and found a piece of paper and wrote these words which he attached to the Jesus statue with no hands: "He has no hands but our hands."

The risen Lord Jesus doesn't depend on any one of us. But he has chosen to do his work through the arms, hands, minds and feet of his redeemed people. We who are

saved by grace are enlisted in his kingdom enterprise, for the purpose of recruiting other worshipers around the throne. We are called to follow Jesus and to enter the narrative of the cross, sharing in his trials and sufferings and showing his likeness as we abide in him and produce the fruit of the Spirit, Christlikeness. Each one of us is indebted to him and we all find our place in the ongoing work of Jesus in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

And we work with Jesus, who by the Spirit works through us...

*Until our task is completed*

History is "his story," and Jesus is at work bringing his church to himself. And his work will continue until the last of his elect are gathered in. When the last soul in the last people group, of the farthest unreached nation, speaking the last tongue to receive the gospel message is brought to Christ, then the end will come. Jesus said "the gospel must first be preached to all nations," and then the end will come (Mark 13:10). In Revelation 21 we hear the reigning Lamb upon his throne saying, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," the *telos* (verse 6).

And you and I will continue to live on this earth until the end, the *telos*, when for us "it is finished," "tetelestai!" Some of God's best people seem to die such untimely deaths. But we must trust that their purpose on earth was completed, that they had finished what the Lord God had ordained for them. In unknown ways, the life of a child or young person, taken by death in a seemingly tragic way, mysteriously accomplished God's purpose.

Every day we are given life, we need to pray that the eternal purpose of God will be brought closer to completion. Even in what seem small ways, such as an obscure act of kindness, a prayer for one who suffers, the sharing the message of hope with the dying, are all part of the story that will be completed. Even the things that happen to you beyond your control are part of the story. These things that are often so unwelcome are segments of the story that God ordains to make us more like his Son. It seems that God's purposes are more often fulfilled through our responses to what happens to us more than what we initiate. When the story, your story, is complete, you and I breathe our last.

*And we breathe our last*

In full confidence of his completed mission, Jesus, in peace and with a loud, triumphant voice, breathed his last. Jesus prayed, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). His last words were in fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus prayed the "Good-night" prayer from Psalm 31:5, one that perhaps was repeated by Jewish children praying before bedtime. It was like the sweet prayer of children today,

*"Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take."*

Jesus' completed work had taken the horrible sting, dread and fear out of death. Death, which Paul says remains as the last enemy we will face, is now, because of the cross, is a defeated foe whom we no longer need fear. The sting of death, Paul says, is the law (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). But the law no longer condemns us and we are forgiven and given the grace and righteousness of God, in which we will stand before him in glory. Death is passage from this mortal life into greater life with God in heaven.

### **Conclusion:**

I think of the aged Apostle Paul, who in writing perhaps his last words, finished his second letter to Timothy from a Roman prison. Many believe this was his second Roman imprisonment, and he had perhaps even gone to Spain and was now facing martyrdom for the gospel. Maybe he could hear the steps of the soldiers coming to escort him to his pending death as he wrote these words:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Early on I mentioned about how thousands yearly climb to the summit of Mt McKinley. Every year even experienced climbers die in the attempt to reach its summit. Most of them died because they had no guide, but in May, 2011, even an experienced guide lost her life while leading other climbers (See: <http://www.adn.com/2011/05/27/1886449/guide-identified-as-one-of-the.html>). As our guide to eternal life, Jesus died in triumph for us. And he is our guide, our infallible guide through life's climb to the summit. His death was not like for those climbing fatalities, "the end of the trail." His death was the triumph of a completed mission.

Life for us can end in victory or in needless, senseless and hopeless tragedy. It can be, in Christ and because he ascended Mt Calvary for us, a victory. Our lives by his grace can be the successful accomplishment of his purpose for us. And death for us can be a peaceful departure and not the end of the trail. All we must do is trust and follow him as our guide, as our Lord and Savior.

May we at the end of our journey up the mountain of life be able to say with Jesus, "It is accomplished!" Will death be the end of the trail? Or will it be the completion of a glorious mission?

### **Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. What do you think Jesus meant when he cried from the cross, "It is finished"?

2. What do you think was the main significance and task of Jesus' life?
3. In what sense was Jesus' cry, "It is finished!" a cry of victory?
4. What are the implications of Jesus' death for us? (Or, what difference has Jesus' death on the cross made in your life?)
5. How has the death of Jesus affected the way you and I will experience death?
6. What do you think is your God-given assignment?
7. Do you think your assignment will be completed? Why or why not?
8. Read 2 Timothy 4:7 and reflect on Paul's outlook on the completion of his life-task. What needs to be done in your life to bring to completion your God-given life's purpose?

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