

John 19:28-30; Luke 23:44-46

Hebrews 7:25-8:2

March 25, 2018

“Final Breaths”

Introduction

This is Palm Sunday, one of those special days we mark in Christian tradition. It's the Sunday before Easter Sunday and we recall how Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph with loud “hallelujah's” from the people. But by the end of the week – this week we're entering, this week we now call Holy Week – Jesus was condemned and executed on a cross.

For six weeks now we've been reflecting, in our small groups and here on Sunday morning ... we've been reflecting on Jesus' last words spoken from the Cross. We have heard, how in unbelievable agony, he spoke words of forgiveness to his executioners, words of hope and promise to a penitent criminal, words of care for his mother, words of despair that gave way to hope as he cried out to his heavenly father, and then last week we gave attention to his words of human pain, his physical thirst that is a type of his spiritual thirst for God. Today, in our final message, we focus on His words just as he breathed His last.

Trust in God

All four Gospels say something about Jesus' final words, though not all exactly alike. Matthew reports: *“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit”* Matt. 27:50. Mark says: *“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last”* Mark 15:37. I think it is telling that it says he *“cried out”* and *“with a loud cry”* noting that these weren't words mumbled under his breath. It's hard to imagine anyone having enough strength to mouth any words after the beating He took and then hanging on a cross for six hours. Luke tells us that *“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit.’”* Luke 23:46. So in His final words Jesus makes a confession of faith, trusting His destiny into God's hands.

It is a faith found in the words of a Psalm, a Psalm of David when he was pursued by his enemies, and the words are fitting: *“I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery”* Psalm 31:12. But here are the key words from that Psalm: *“But I trust in you, LORD; I say, ‘You are my God. My times are in your hands...’”* Psalm 31:14-15. Jesus, in strong words, was confessing his trust in God and announcing where he was going. From eternity he came. To eternity he returned. And another thing: He was announcing who He is, using the words of King David from whom, according to Jewish tradition, the Messiah would be descended.

Jesus, now representing all of humanity, committed Himself to the One, the only one, who can save Him from the nothingness of darkness, which is death. The Author of Life, the Source of Light, is the only One you can turn to for the ultimate challenge of death. Who or what have you committed your life to? What is burdening your spirit today? Failed relationships? Finances? Fear of being without your parents? Place it all in your Father's hands, commit yourself to Him, and find rest. Jesus shows the way for us to do just that. Now, while you are still alive, God is your loving Father into whose hands you can commit yourself.

Completed Task

Now the fourth Gospel, John, reports that Jesus' very last words from the cross were: *"It is finished"* John 19:30. Jesus chose His destiny. Jesus knew that going to the cross, where an innocent one was sacrificed, that death itself would crack, the beginning of the end of slavery to sin, which results in death.

Is your work ever done? It seems like there are always more meals to make, more homework to do, and more reports to write. We all know what it's like, don't we? All of us have unfinished things cluttering up the highway of life: the half-mowed lawn, the half-read book, the letter started but never sent, the abandoned diet, the degree we never finished, the phone calls never returned. But it can be much more painful than that: the abandoned child, the job we quit in a fit of anger, the wrecked marriage, the bills never paid, the promises never kept. How many of us go through life leaving behind a trail of unfinished projects and unfulfilled dreams? How many of us today have regrets about unfinished business? Are you living an unfinished life? How few are those who can come to the end of life and say, "I finished exactly what I set out to do." Still fewer, I suppose, might say, "I finished all that God called me to do." That may be our worst fear ... that we will die before our time. But it happens everyday. We die too young, or too soon. We die with our work unfinished or our dreams unfulfilled.

Not so with Jesus. In these last words from the cross, Jesus declared that his work was done and his mission accomplished. Of course not many people realized this. His enemies thought that he was finished, done for, defeated. Even most if not all of his followers thought this. But Jesus did not say, "I am finished." He said, "It is finished!" When you put the "t" of the cross next to the "I" of Jesus you get a miraculous result. You get mission accomplished—the mission of paying for every last one of our sins.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus hung on the cross He knew that he had borne the sins of the human race. He knew that he had done everything he could for you and for me. He knew that his work had been completed. And having done what God sent him to do—having cared for the needs of others he

committed himself to God. ***"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again"*** John 10:17.

What His Death Accomplished

As I said last week: Jesus was not broken by the Cross. Rather, he repaired the broken relationship with God that plagues all humanity. So, what does that mean? It means this:

1. **The malice** of his enemies was finished. By nailing him to the cross, they had done their worst. There was nothing more they could do to the Son of God. His physical sufferings were at an end. They could not hurt him spiritually and neither can your enemies hurt you spiritually when you are in Christ.

2. **The plans** ordained by God were finished. Many times during his ministry, Jesus spoke of "the work" he was sent to do and of the "hour" of trouble that was coming. He once spoke of a "baptism" of suffering he must undergo. All those things were part of God's plan. Even the evil intentions of those involved in condemning and executing Him, fit somehow into God's greater plan to save the world through the death of his Son (Acts 2:23).

3. **The Old Testament** prophecies were fulfilled. He had been given vinegar to drink (Psalm 69:21), he had been sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12), his hands and feet had been pierced (Psalm 22:16), his garments had been divided (Psalm 22:18), and his side was pierced (Zechariah 12:10), and other prophecies surrounding his death.

4. **The ceremonial** law was abolished. As Romans 10:4 puts it, Christ is ***"the end of the law."*** All the Old Testament rules concerning animal sacrifices are set aside. And the rules and regulations concerning the priesthood are out of date since the Greater Priest has now laid down his life for his people. ***"Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself,"*** Hebrews 7:27. Once Jesus died, those atoning sacrifices for sin were no longer needed.

5. **The price** of sin was paid in full. Recall what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus: ***"Behold, The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"*** John 1:29. That "taking away" of sin was accomplished by the death of our Lord. He was condemned that we might be justified. He was made sin, that we might be made righteous. ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"*** 2 Corinthians 5:21.

He bore our sin that we might be set free from having to always follow our passions, desires, and animal instincts. He suffered so that we might be redeemed from our basest impulses to live in a godly manner. He died, giving full satisfaction for sin, so that we might live. The work of redemption was complete.

“It is finished” is the English translation of the Greek word of the New Testament. Τετελεσται is that one Greek word; it comes from the verb τελεο, which means “to bring to an end, to complete, to accomplish.” It’s the successful end to a particular course of action. It’s the word you would use when you finish college or maybe basic training in the military; it’s the word you would use when you make the final payment on your new car or your house and you get that receipt back that says “paid in full.”. The word means more than just “It’s done.” It means “I did exactly what I set out to do.”

But this word is used for another reason: Τετελεσται is in the perfect tense in Greek. That’s significant because the perfect tense speaks of an action which was completed in the past and the results continue into the present. It’s different from the past tense, which says, “This happened.”

The perfect tense adds the idea that “This happened and it is still in effect today.” When Jesus cried out “It is finished,” he meant “It was finished in the past, it is still finished in the present and it will remain finished in the future.” *“The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God,”* Romans 6:10.

Your Final Words

His final words “It is finished.” They can be your last words too. Thanks to Jesus’ suffering and death, God is not your condemning judge. Name your sin (and you do need to name them all) and God’s response is: Τετελεσται – it is finished, it is paid in full, He finished and is still finishing His work on your behalf. All the brokenness and sin in your life that would keep you from a right relationship with God and bar you from heaven, has been taken care of and is being taken care of by Jesus. *“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”* 1 Peter 2:24.

I like to joke that God put me on this earth to accomplish a certain number of tasks and right now I’m so far behind I’ll never die. But of course there are still things left undone in my life. No doubt you could say the same. But if you and I are still living an unfinished life there is one thing we must be sure to complete, the only one thing truly needful for us to do. That one thing is to either accept or reject Jesus’ atoning work. And maybe we’ll need to do this more than once, as the temptations of life continue to assail us daily.

Our aim in life, regardless of all our accomplishments or lack thereof, is to be able to genuinely say as did St. Paul: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* 2 Timothy 4:7. Don’t leave here today with unfinished business. Accept that you are sinful, accept that Jesus paid the eternal price for your sin, then commit or recommit your entire life to Him who gave you life.

Thank God that Jesus left no unfinished business behind. He finished what he came to do, and the result is that *"... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,"* Hebrews 10:10.

It was finished then, it is finished now, and to the glory of God, after a million times a million years have passed, it will still be finished.

***"The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God,"* Romans 6:10.**