

“IT IS FINISHED”

John 19:16-42

Key Verse: 19:30, “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Jesus Christ was betrayed by his disciple Judas Iscariot, who handed Jesus over to the Jewish leaders. They arrested Jesus and put him on trial. Jesus was not nervous or afraid. Jesus testified to the truth of his eternal kingdom. The Jewish high court charged Jesus with blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God. Then they took him to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Governor Pilate found no basis for criminal or political charges against Jesus. But the enemies of Jesus put heavy pressure on Pilate saying, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.” Pilate appealed to them, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests lied saying, “We have no king but Caesar.” So Pilate gave in to their demand and handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Humanly, it was the most unjust trial in world history. Jesus never did or said anything wrong. Then why was he crucified? God had a purpose. Jesus was not a victim. Jesus chose to die. It was for our salvation. May we look upon the Crucified One with eyes of faith and believe and know that he was hanging there to take away the sins of the world, even mine and yours to make us children of God and to give us eternal life.

I. Jesus was crucified and died (16-30)

First, they crucified him (16-18). After Pilate handed Jesus over, the Roman soldiers took charge of Jesus. The Bible already told us how they flogged Jesus and mocked his kingship. They put a kingly robe on him as well as a painful crown of thorns. His back must’ve been oozing with blood from the flogging. Verse 17 tells us: “Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).” The other gospel accounts tell us that a man was forced to help Jesus carry his cross. But here the author tells us that Jesus carried his own cross. This was the normal procedure. The criminal had to carry his own cross to the place of execution. Jesus carried his cross. The other gospels inform us that Jesus was helped to carry his cross. Jesus must’ve been exhausted by the whipping and the beating he received. The Bible does not tell us the details of Jesus’ suffering. But he was fully human. Jesus was bruised and bleeding in pain, carrying his cross in silence. Verse 18 tells us simply: “There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.”

Crucifixion was painful, so painful that a word comes from the procedure: excruciating, which means “out of the cross.” Crucifixion itself was not intended to quickly kill the

criminal. Sometimes the criminal would hang for days, dying from internal organ failure or cardiac arrest. They could be attacked by wild beasts or birds of prey with no defense allowed.

Crucifixion was shameful. The victim was often completely naked, and pinned to a pole like an animal, not a human being. Roman citizens could not be crucified. It was the death of slaves and criminals. The author does not mention that Jesus was mocked by many to save himself if he could. It simply says that they crucified Jesus between two other criminals or terrorists to compound his shame. Jesus was crucified.

Second, “king of the Jews” (19-22). Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” He was not going to change it.

“Jesus of Nazareth.” Sweetest of names. Healer. Worker of great wonders. Teacher of great wisdom. He lived with perfect love for God and for people. He lived the life that we should all live, but that we couldn’t and didn’t.

“King of the Jews.” Historically, the Jews had some good kings and some bad ones. The best kings followed the footsteps of King David, the role model king in Israel. But even David was not perfect. Still, the Jews loved and admired him because David loved God and tried to do what was right in the eyes of God. They also liked David because he was a warrior, who brought victory and peace to Israel. But the Jewish leaders didn’t like Jesus. Jesus did not fit their idea of a good king. Also, if he really was king, what would happen to their own positions of authority? They would be out of jobs. So, they felt they had too much to lose to acknowledge Jesus as their king. They told Pilate to change the charge against Jesus, saying that Jesus claimed to be king of the Jews. But Pilate would not change it. Perhaps it was to humiliate the Jews, as if to say, “Here is what Rome thinks of you Jews and your king. Your king is dying like a criminal.” The notice was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. Aramaic was the language of the Jews; Latin, the language of the Romans; and Greek, the most common, widespread language. Essentially, every traveler to Jerusalem could read the charge against Jesus in a language they could understand. “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews.” It was the message that God wanted the world to know. It is because this king of the Jews is the King of all kings, and the Lord of all lords. He is our eternal King.

Third, the soldiers divided and cast lots for his clothes (23-24). When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

These soldiers did not care about this so-called king of the Jews. To them, he was just another criminal being crucified to rid the Roman empire of troublemakers. Jesus did not have an extensive wardrobe. Still, his clothes were worth something. So the soldiers divided his clothes into four shares with the fifth piece, a seamless undergarment remaining. They decided to cast lots to see which of them could have it. They did not know that the Savior of the world was hanging on the cross above their heads. They did not realize that if they looked up and believed in the one on the middle cross, instead of wearing his shirt or robe, that they would have eternal life. They were caught up in the fading treasures and pleasures of life, and they missed the life that is truly life.

Yet even these soldiers were fulfilling what God already knew and foretold. Psalm 22 was written 1000 years earlier by King David. David wrote, "They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." And that is exactly what the soldiers did. Jesus' death fulfilled many prophecies in the Bible. Jesus died according to God's set purpose and foreknowledge.

Fourth, "Here is your son...Here is your mother" (25-27). Near the cross of Jesus stood Jesus' mother Mary, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Mary, which is the same name as Miriam, was a common woman's name among Jews. These precious, faithful women stood beneath bleeding, dying Jesus. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

How could the author know about these intimate words that Jesus spoke from the cross? Because he was the beloved disciple, John, whom Jesus spoke to. Jesus dearly loved his mother. Jesus knew she was overwhelmed with sorrow. Jesus knew how to comfort and love her through his disciple, John: John would take his place as her son.

Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son," and to his disciple John, "Here is your mother." Jesus wanted his mother to love John like her own son, and John to love Mary like his own mother. Jesus brought them together like mother and son. Jesus entrusted his own mother to John to take care of her. So John did. John took her into his own home from that time on. Christian tradition has it that, after this, both John and Mary lived and died in Ephesus.

Fifth, "I am thirsty" (28-29). Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." Here we see Jesus' humanity. After much loss of blood and water, Jesus' body was severely dehydrated. He was thirsty. The one who is the source of living water became thirsty for us. The one who promised rivers or streams of water to all who believe in him, allowed himself to become dried up on our behalf. Only after Jesus had accomplished everything did he request anything for himself, and even this, was to fulfill scripture. A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they

soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. John tells us that this too was to fulfill scripture. Most likely he was referring to a prophecy in Psalm 69:21, "They...gave me vinegar for my thirst."

Sixth, "It is finished" (30). Verse 30 says, "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John records as Jesus' last words, "It is finished." What is "it" that Jesus finished? "It" was much more than his earthly life, for everyone dies some day. But not everyone can accomplish what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

"It" is the will of God for our salvation. "It" is the way for sinners—imperfect people, to be forgiven and cleansed and made ready for heaven. "It" is the means for us to become children of God with an inheritance in the Father's house. Jesus finished the work of God. Jesus finished our salvation. Jesus secured eternal life for all who believe in him. Jesus finished the Father's work, which he gave him to do. In John 17:4 Jesus said to his Father God, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." So what was the work that Jesus finished?

Jesus healed the sick and preached the kingdom of God. Jesus made the lame to walk and the blind to see. Jesus fed the hungry. Jesus rebuked the proud and self righteous. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding. But this was all to reveal God to us. Still, it was more than giving us knowledge. If it was only knowledge that we needed, then Jesus would've only had to teach us. If it was equal distribution of wealth that we needed, then Jesus would've taught economics. If it was the eradication of all disease that the world needed, then Jesus would've taught medicine or given us all the gift of healing. What is it that the human race needs most? We need salvation from sin, so Jesus died on the cross to save us. Jesus died on the cross as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus' top disciple Peter later understood this and wrote, " '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'" (1Pe 2:24). Again, Peter wrote, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1Pe 3:18).

At age 17, J.Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was reading a Bible tract. The words "the finished work of Christ" caught his attention. He wondered to himself what was finished?

"A full and perfect atonement for sin," his heart replied. "The debt was paid by the great Substitute. 'Christ died for our sins,' and 'not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.'" Then came the thought with startling clearness, "If the whole work is finished, the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?" The one, the only answer took possession of his soul: "There was nothing in the world for me to do save to fall upon my knees and accepting this Savior and His salvation to praise Him for ever more." Old doubts and fears were gone. The reality of the wonderful experience we call conversion filled him with peace and joy. New life came with

that simple acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, for to “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” And great was the change that new life brought.”¹

Actually, his mother had been earnestly praying for his salvation during his conversion experience. His sister had also been praying for him daily for one month. Soon after his conversion to Christ, Hudson Taylor went to China as a missionary. He started the China Inland Mission, which sent hundreds of missionaries to China and witnessed thousands of Chinese people becoming Christian. Martin Luther and John Wesley both had life-changing experiences as well when they simply accepted the Bible truth that sinners are forgiven and saved and made children of God when they put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, rather than their own effort or goodness.

Jesus finished our salvation on the cross. There is nothing more we must do to be saved from our sins and to have the promise and gift of eternal life. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

II. Jesus was buried (31-42)

First, blood and water. According to verse 31, it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. The Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, so they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers broke the legs of the two men who had been crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

The Jewish leaders were keeping a law in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. It says, “If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.” Isn’t it ironic that these religious leaders were careful to keep God’s law while delighting to see Jesus crucified? Their hatred and self-righteousness made them completely blind spiritually.

Breaking the legs was intended to speed the deaths of those being crucified. But since Jesus had already died, they did not break his legs. Instead, a soldier pierced Jesus’ side. Blood and water suddenly flowed out. Some medical experts have commented that it

¹ From “Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret,” by Howard Taylor, Ch.2.

appears Jesus died of a ruptured heart. Biblically speaking, blood and water are symbols of cleansing and forgiveness. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" And verse 22 says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

At this point in the narrative, the author comments, "The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe." Jesus shed his blood and died, and John was an eye witness to it.

Second, not broken, but pierced. Not only so, these details again fulfilled scripture: "Not one of his bones will be broken" and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." The scripture regarding broken bones has two references. Psalm 34:19-20 says, "The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken." Ultimately, God delivers the righteous, but not always in the moment. The other reference is to the Passover lamb, which was not to have any of its bones broken (Ex 12:46; Nu 9:12). Jesus is elsewhere referred to as the Passover lamb. Indeed, Jesus died during a Passover. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The scripture regarding Jesus' piercing comes from a prophecy in Zechariah 12:10. Isaiah also prophesied, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5).

Third, Jesus was buried. We are now introduced to Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but only secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body of Jesus away. With Joseph was Nicodemus, whom Jesus had spoken to earlier about the need to be born again. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two men wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen, in accordance with Jewish burial customs. Where Jesus was crucified was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, never used before. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Joseph and Nicodemus were secret Christians among their peers. But when Jesus died, they took a stand; they went against their colleagues to identify with Jesus. They became bold. The suffering and death of Jesus changed them. They risked everything to ask Pilate for Jesus' body and to bury Jesus. It was their last show of respect. They knew Jesus

didn't deserve to die. They seem to be too late to follow Jesus however, since Jesus was now dead. But we know they made a right choice. Moreover, the story is not over yet.

In conclusion, why did Jesus die? He was not a victim of evil people. Jesus knew what he was doing. Jesus died on the cross to give all who receive him the right to become children of God. Jesus died on the cross so that all who believe in him may have life to the full. Jesus died so that everyone who trusts in him shall not perish but have eternal life in him. Jesus died to finish God's work of world salvation, even yours and mine. Eternal thanks and praise be to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior!