

It is Finished

DAVE BAST

Jesus said some amazing things as he died on the cross, his last words. He forgave his tormentors, he promised salvation to a fellow sufferer, he expressed both the pain of separation from God and the serenity of entrusting himself into the Father's hands. All those words have deep and abiding significance for us, but none more so than the last. "It is finished," which really means, "I have finished it." This seventh word from the cross isn't a cry of relief; it is a cry of accomplishment. So, let's dig into this right now. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and we come now to the last word from the cross; at least the last word as we are ordering things. As we pointed out in an earlier program, there are really kind of three last words if you take each gospel by itself, but putting them together there is a traditional order. The last one that we are going to treat with is from John Chapter 19, once again a word only recorded by John, and it is a very short one; in fact, in Greek it is a single word.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One word, yes: *tetelestai*: it is finished—it's done—completed—finalized; and here it is from John Chapter 19, beginning at the 28th verse:

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said, in order to fulfill the scripture, "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there so they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.³⁰ And when Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

DAVE BAST

So, there it is from John; and if you again listen closely, you heard two of the last words of Jesus; the fifth word: I am thirsty or I thirst, which we treated in an earlier program; and then this last word from John's gospel, *tetelestai* in Greek: It is finished; but the question is, what is finished?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the first thing we can say with great clarity is Jesus is not saying: Oh, I'm finished! I'm washed up! I'm done...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I'm dead! The life has left me. No, not *I* am finished...*it* is finished; *it* is accomplished. Again, one word in the Greek, but we can tell from the conjugation of the verb that, indeed, *it* is finished; and so, the question is: What? What is the *it*? What is the, as we say in English grammar, what is the antecedent to the word *it*?

DAVE BAST

Yes, to the pronoun...

SCOTT HOEZEE

To what does *it* refer back to?

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and another thing I think we can say: It doesn't mean I'm finished; it doesn't mean simply my suffering is finished...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Or this ordeal is finally over, or whew, I have had it, at last...as we sometimes say with people, don't we? And often find comfort, especially when someone has suffered for a long time, a terrible death, maybe death from cancer. You get to the point where death is a mercy...death is a release; and finally, when they breathe their last, the family and others who love that person turn to each other and say: Well, at least it's over...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

At least their suffering is over.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are very sad, but for her we are relieved...

DAVE BAST

Right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It doesn't mean that either.

DAVE BAST

No; that is not what Jesus is saying.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is much, much, much grander. This ties in, too, with the way that Jesus went to his death, very knowingly and recognizing that this was the will of God; or, as Jesus says in various contexts, the cup he had to drink.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; and I think that is one way to enter the meaning of this final word from the cross is to think about the symbolism in the gospels of the cup that Jesus talked about. He talked about it in the Garden of Gethsemane. So, in the synoptics—in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—you may recall that scene where Jesus kneels on the ground and prays in great desperation: Father, if it is possible, let this *cup* pass from me. In John, it is slightly different. As they come to arrest Jesus, Jesus tells his disciples...Peter takes out his sword and starts hacking away and cuts the ear off one of the servants...and Jesus says to Peter: Put your sword away. Shall I not drink the *cup* my Father has given me? So, the symbolic idea, the cup...what is that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And a lot of...well, it is certainly the suffering of Jesus and everything he is going to have to endure...most scholars see this also as the cup of judgment; that Jesus' death is the definitive sign that God couldn't just wink at sin. He couldn't just whisk sin away with the flip of his hand or a wave of his magic wand. Sin and evil and death itself as the scourge of sin and evil had to be met head on. It had to happen this way for God to judge evil and make it punished...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And bring new life thereby. So, it is the cup of judgment; that bitter cup, down to the last dregs of the cup that Jesus had to drink because he is taking on the sin of the world, and it is this bad.

DAVE BAST

And somehow, in dying, Jesus drains that cup to the very bottom. In doing so—this powerful act of love—he sets us free from any fear of punishment or judgment. The great preacher and hymn writer, John Newton, said of this that because Jesus has drained the cup of God's punishment, there is no punishment left for us...for you and me. We don't have to drink this cup. He drank it for us; and whatever we may experience in life of suffering isn't God punishing us, but it is simply part of the process of the way he deals with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me, too, of another incident in the gospels when the disciples, as they often were...I think maybe it was James and John in this case...are angling for power positions. They kind of want to be Jesus' right- and left-hand men, and Jesus says: Can you drink the cup I am going to drink? And the disciples say: Sure; yeah, you bet; absolutely. They have no idea what they are talking about. And Jesus says: Well, you will have your own cup to drink. Someday you will suffer for me; but they cannot drink the cup Jesus was about to drink...

DAVE BAST

No, not that same cup, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They didn't know what they were saying. Only Jesus can do this; and by doing that, he...as we just said, he accomplished his purpose, which... You know, there is a famous hymn called: *Christus Paradox*—the paradox of Christ—the paradox of life coming from an instrument of death—and among the many different paradoxes that come from the cross is that in dying, Jesus fulfilled what he needed to do, which is opposite how it usually goes.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was terribly assassinated before he was even 40...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That didn't exactly accomplish his life's purpose, nor did the tragically early death of one of the greatest composers of all time, Mozart.

DAVE BAST

Mozart, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You don't die and say: Oh, good; now I've really done a good job here. No, it cuts it short, usually.

DAVE BAST

Right. With people like that we think: What a tragedy that they died so young, and how the world was deprived of their ongoing life and work; but with Jesus we never feel that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

We never feel that he died too young.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right. Right; you hear people say that: Think of all the symphonies Mozart had left in him to write, you know; or John Lennon, who was also killed when he was 40—the member of the Beatles—how many more great songs weren't still in him that we never got to hear; but you are right. Nobody ever says: Oh, Jesus died on the cross. He probably had some more parables in him...

DAVE BAST

Yes!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Too bad we didn't hear more parables...

DAVE BAST

More miracles!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; more stories; but no, this did it.

DAVE BAST

It was his work to come and die. That what is what he came to do; and at the climactic moment, he could say, "It is finished."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and that has dramatic implications. Again, we said a few minutes ago, Dave: What is the *it* exactly; and we are going to want to unpack that a little bit more, because when we see what the *it* is of it is finished, we are going to connect some really important, big biblical dots and see what God is up to; and we will start thinking about that more in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are talking about Jesus' last word from the cross as John records it, the last of our series on Jesus' words from the cross; this dramatic cry of accomplishment, of finishing his work; as he died, he claimed, "It is finished."

SCOTT HOEZEE

And even though this is a word from the cross, it is almost an Easter word—of victory—of triumph—that Jesus knows that his work is finished; and we know, too, that...interestingly, by the way, and this is

mentioned in various other gospels, including Matthew...that one of the things that happened when Jesus died...and again, we said there seem to be at least three last last words, and how to put them together can be a little tricky...but in Matthew's gospel, and some of the other ones, when he says his final word and breathes his last, we are told...and this is in Matthew 27...at that moment, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the gospels make a big deal out of that, and it is interesting to wonder why.

DAVE BAST

Well, exactly; and you think about the symbolism of first the tabernacle as Moses created it, and then later that was translated into stone, a more permanent building, the Temple in Jerusalem, which, though destroyed, was then later rebuilt during the time of the return from exile in Babylon. So, there were two rooms inside the Temple, and they were separated by this ornate curtain woven, and in the back room, the Holy of Holies—the *Sanctus Sanctorum*—originally was the Ark of the Covenant. Now, in later years after...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The throne of God.

DAVE BAST

Right; the very point of God's dwelling with his people, on which sat the so-called Mercy Seat—the cover where the blood of atonement was applied on the Day of Atonement. So, all of this suggesting that God is both with his people, but also somehow remote from his people. He is inaccessible. He is behind the curtain.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sin will always keep us removed from God. So long as we are sinful people who have not been redeemed, we cannot get to God. We have no direct access. Indeed, as you said, only once a year was even the High Priest allowed to go on the other side of that curtain; but now something dramatic has happened; and you know, Matthew was one of the gospel writers to make...and Mark as well, I think...make it very, very clear that the curtain was torn from *top* to bottom to let you know who did the tearing. It came from above. It was symbolically...God tore that down now because what Jesus accomplished...it is finished...it is accomplished...what Jesus accomplished was finally the reunion of God and humanity; which ties together really the whole of scripture.

I heard just recently the eminent New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright from England speaking about this and he said: You know, it is such a shame that in the Church many people reduce the death of Jesus to say: Well, Jesus died so I can go to heaven—just me—you know, he will take me to heaven, which will be out of this world, by the way, a lot of people think; and N. T. Wright says: No, that shrinks it down so much. What Jesus did was accomplish what God had started to do even in the Garden of Eden when God wanted to live with Adam and Eve. He built a temple for him to live in. That didn't work so good; and so then, in Exodus, he builds first a tabernacle, which is a temporary tent, and then later the Temple, but these are all temporary steps along the way. God and humanity haven't gotten back together again like God wanted in the Garden of Eden. Now, they do; and so, all of scripture...and you get finally to the end of Revelation when the new heaven and the new earth and the dwelling of God comes *down* from heaven to this earth... We don't go to heaven; heaven comes down here...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now, the dwelling of God is with us. They have no need of a temple, for Jesus is their living Temple, which is a theme in John's gospel. So, this isn't just Jesus died so I can go to heaven...

DAVE BAST

Yes, although...

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is all of scripture...

DAVE BAST

It does include that, but...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It includes me being with...right, but this is all of scripture being fulfilled.

DAVE BAST

It is a cosmic work that he has finished...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed.

DAVE BAST

And in his death, yes, the way is open for us to be reunited with God—to be reconciled with God—that is one great New Testament word. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins or trespasses against them, says the Apostle. So, his death dealt with sin, his death opened the way for us to come home to God; yes, to go to heaven when we die, but also for heaven to come here in a new heaven and a new earth at the last day. It is the victory of God over the forces of death and evil and sin and hell. It is the beginning of a new age; it is not... Yes, it is finished, but it is also just starting on the cross. So, we are never going to plumb the depths of all that Jesus' death accomplished, but it is great to try at least, and to begin to stretch our imagination to see what this tremendous finished work of Christ...and incidentally, the fact that it is finished means there is nothing for us to add.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

He has done it all. He has offered the one sacrifice. Hebrews makes it so clear that this sacrifice is the last sacrifice, the only sacrifice that is needed. Christ doesn't have to be offered up again and again and again. Once for all, Hebrews says, when he had made satisfaction for sins he sat down in heaven; and I think that is the meaning of that phrase that we confess in the creed; that he is seated at the right hand of God. His work is done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and barbaric though I think some people in our world today, or maybe people all through history have thought this way, but barbaric though some might regard it, it all happens through the shedding of blood, which is a Bible-wide theme.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It goes back to the sacrifices in Israel. Why the shedding of blood? Well, the life of us is in our blood, the biblical writers knew and believed; and for life finally to make a comeback, for death finally to be defeated, blood has to be spilled; sprinkled, as it were, you know, on the Mercy Seat, as it was in Israel. Again, the book of Hebrews does more with that Temple/Holy of Holies/High Priest imagery than any book of the Bible. It is rich, rich, rich material in Hebrews; but it had to happen this way because that is how serious this is: Life for life; and now we have life because of Jesus' death and, of course, his resurrection as well.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, all this talk about blood in the New Testament—the blood of Christ—points to the truth that in dying for us, in shedding his blood, Jesus somehow cleanses us from sin; he purifies us, he brings us back to God, he makes new life possible, he sets up the condition for God to once again dwell with humans and ultimately renew the whole creation; but...but...one other important New Testament theme, I think, that we have to stress is that we need to respond to this. This is a wonderful gift. The work that Jesus has done on our behalf is finished, but our work isn't finished. There is something we need to do, and the New Testament makes it clear that we need to respond to this in faith. We need to entrust ourselves to him and to what he has done. So, Paul, writing to the Romans says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but are now justified by God's grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood effective through faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, that is the deal. Whenever this story is told and retold, whenever the death of Christ is spelled out, it is as though God is putting him forward again for us to receive as *our* sacrifice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; faith is the gift God gives us that helps us to tie in with the gift. It is like we cannot access what Jesus did when he said, "It is finished," until we are given the gift of faith, and that then becomes like a pipeline through which all of the cleansing waters of baptism flow into us; and so, it is something to which we need to respond in faith. As you said, Dave, what faith tells us is that Jesus' death is not the end, it is just the beginning, and we will want to think a little bit more about that as we close our program in just a moment.
Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are looking at this last word of victory and of accomplishment from Jesus. One little word in the Greek language, in which the New Testament was written...*tetelestai*...it is finished. Dave, you and I took Greek once upon a time...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we remember this is the perfect tense of the verb.

DAVE BAST

And the tense is important here because a perfect tense in Greek signifies the ongoing result of a past action.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

I still remember my Greek professor teaching us this. What we could really translate this word as is: It is in the state of having been completed or having been finished. In other words, the results still flow from this.

Christ did this once and for all on the cross.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

He is done. No more need for sacrifice. No more blood needs to be shed. Nothing we can add to it; nothing that we pay, but the consequences continue to flow. It is in the state of having been completed, and that reality means that he has won. He is the victor!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and therefore that, looking into the past, means all that has been wrong has been fixed, but it rolls forward into the future. That ongoing sense of the perfect tense of the verb, that it is going to keep rolling on until all is made new.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I remember a story from history that always kind of strikes me as having some similarities with this word from the cross. It is the story of the Battle of Marathon. In 490 BC, the Greeks defeated a great Persian army in one of the most important victories of their history, and they sent a soldier back to Athens with the news. His name was Pheidippides. The distance of the battlefield at Marathon happened to be 26.2 miles. So, if you have seen those 26.2 stickers on cars, you know, people bragging that they have run a marathon, well the original marathon was run by Pheidippides. He ran all the way after fighting in the battle. He came into the city of Athens after 26 miles. He gasped out a single word: *nikomen—we won!* And he dropped dead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And in a sense, Jesus' cry is like that. A single word that says: We won. It is finished. God has done it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; God has conquered. Again, we talked earlier about the paradoxes—the seeming things that cannot go together—the victory of the cross. Christians have been talking about this for 2,000 years—the victory of the cross. You never hear people say: Oh, the victory of the electric chair or the goodness of the hangman's noose, no; only on the cross...and only on Jesus' cross, while we are at it...can we combine the words victory and cross, because that is where he won the victory; and of course, it will be confirmed...one of the things that we often forget, by the way...on Easter Jesus rose victorious from the grave, right? But often we forget that what the Father was doing...among other things...what the Father was doing by raising Jesus from the dead on Easter morning was putting his stamp of approval on what Jesus had done, including dying on the cross. God was not just saying: See, that wasn't really the end. That wasn't so bad, was it? No, by raising Jesus in God's own power he was saying that cross was necessary; it did win the victory; and the proof is that he is alive again.

I heard somebody once say to a very popular TV preacher who always preached about possibility thinking and self improvement, somebody once said: How do you square all of this prosperity stuff with Jesus? Didn't he die a terrible death on the cross? And the TV preacher said: Oh, like all successful people, Jesus had his setbacks, but on Easter he put that all behind him; right? No; God is not sweeping away the cross by raising Jesus from the dead; he is validating it.

DAVE BAST

Right; and that means that all Jesus' promises can be counted on, too. So, all the other words that he spoke from the cross, the promise of eternal life to the penitent thief, the forgiveness of his enemies, the sense that he has paid the price; it is all validated and vindicated by what happened on Easter morning; and the fact is,

as the angels said at the empty tomb: Look, he is not here. He is risen! There is a direct line between these two words: He is in a state of having finished the work.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The work has been completed. He is now in a state of having risen. It is ongoing and eternally valid and significant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you read that all through the New Testament. Here are some familiar words that many of us know well from the Apostle Paul from Colossians 2: ¹⁴Jesus was erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and the authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the cross.

So, all the enemies that we have ever had, the devil, his hosts, evil, darkness, Jesus made a public spectacle of them and ended it by dying himself.

DAVE BAST

Right; and the proof is that he was raised again. As the New Testament says, God raised him from the dead and declared him, in that very act, to be the Son of God with power; but though the victory has been won, the battle isn't over yet. As we all know, we live and still struggle with many setbacks and suffering and pain ourselves, but the promise is that ultimately, as Jesus comes back one day to finish and consummate the work of salvation, and God wipes every tear from our eyes and we dwell with him forever, that is the hope that the Gospel proclaims.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are profoundly grateful for the work of Jesus, his suffering, his death, and his ultimate victory on Easter morning. It is the Good News that the Church has been proclaiming for two thousand years.

DAVE BAST

Hallelujah; Christ is risen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Risen indeed!

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Just visit groundworkonline.com and tell us what you would like to hear next on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/it-is-finished>

Printed on November 23, 2024