

It Is Finished

How often do any of us get to finish a job on the same day we start? More likely days or months? Truth be known, many jobs never get done. New things have a certain excitement at the start, like a chocolate with a cherry center. But reality is more like a pit in the middle. And the harder the pit, the more you just hope they'll forget whatever you promised. This all makes Jesus' *Three Words of Truth* from the cross so grand. But to see the glory of these *Three Words of Truth*, you have to taste the cherry center. This was no quick dab of candy on a plate for God to crucify His Son. God gets blamed by skeptics all the time. But anyone who stops long enough can "***taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed is everyone who takes refuge in him.***" (Psalm 34:8 EHV) The prophets long before Jesus could see the blazing glory of Jesus' three words in one. Tonight we hear His cry: *Tetelestai! – It Is Finished!*

† Cry of relief?

To taste the finish go back to the beginning. The crown of God's creation, Adam and Eve, had perfect fellowship with God. Life was sweet, walking and talking with God in the Garden...until they rebelled against God. Now they had reason to fear God with death inside from sin. There could be nothing but animosity until God came with a promise: *The Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head.* No one but God knew then how long that would take or the dreadful cost – not to us, but to God!

What impresses me is how hard God has worked down through the centuries to make sure no one could forget His promise. He sent one prophet after another to remind them. Recall David in last night's Maundy Thursday Psalm 22: "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?...²²I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death....³⁰Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn – for he has done it.***" (Psalm 22:1,22f,30f NIV84)

Recall Isaiah at his commissioning asked, "***For how long?***" about his prophetic ministry. The LORD answered: "***Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken....The holy seed will be the stump in the land.***" (Isaiah 6:11–13 NIV84) From bad to worse even then! But Israel would rise – Don't forget it! – like a shoot from a stump.

"Behold a Branch is Growing," we sing each year at Christmas, about Jesus the Branch growing from the stump of Jesse. Remember how the LORD promised His people? "***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.***" (Isaiah 9:6f NIV84) Israel returned from Babylonian Captivity....Jesus was born....His three-year ministry was coming to an end when He resolutely set out for Jerusalem, amid disciples' objections and Jewish plans to kill Him. Jesus looked less and less like a King!

Were these three words of Jesus just peaceful release? Was His cry, **It Is Finished!** nothing more than a **Cry of relief?** Rational unbelief denies Jesus is God's Son. So they refuse to believe there is such a place as hell, except for their political enemies or someone who does something dreadful to them. But to them it's unacceptable, Jesus warning us about that super-human torture chamber "***prepared for the***

devil and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41) Jesus describes hell as a real place where *“there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; *et al*) God’s people Israel did not want to hear the truth about hell any more than Americans today. They demanded of Isaiah: *“Stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!”* (Isaiah 30:11 NIV84) Instead God’s Love keeps coming, keeps warning, keeps reminding as after our Palm Sunday Lesson: *“As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.”* (Zechariah 9:11 NIV84) God want us to...

† Cry no more!

God is not some angry ogre hiding in the dark shadows of the universe. Not some distant force too impersonal to care. God is too kind for all that. He found a way to throw heaven’s gates wide open and lock the gates of hell to all who trust in Him. God created us to love and worship Him as His dear children. Wants all people in heaven someday for eternity of bliss with Him and His family of believers. God provided a way, the only way to be just and merciful at the same time. Only God could imagine this!

Only God could **Finish** it. So Jesus volunteered. As the Seed of the woman, Jesus proved He is both true God and true Man. We spend the winter months in the season of Epiphany with many proofs shining with Jesus’ divinity, and you know what else? His love. Yes, Jesus is the only innocent, holy man who ever lived since before Adam and Eve fell into sin. Yes, He is the Holy One who enjoyed sweet fellowship as God’s Son from all eternity – *πρὸς τὸν θεόν*. Truly God spoke His pleasure at Jesus’ Baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus is God’s Son in whom He is *“well pleased.”* And all that is meant to comfort us who trust in God as His adopted children by Baptism.

Isaiah saw how God would *“lay on him the iniquity of us all”* so that *“by his wounds we are healed.”* (Isaiah 53:5f) But the Lord also records how Jesus looked at fallen humanity and *“saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.”* (Isaiah 59:16f NIV84) See how God’s pent up love went to work for in Jesus’ zeal?

God’s gracious plan was coming to completion on the cross, God’s goal to rescue us from guilt and grief and pain of body, soul and spirit. What breaks God’s heart is how many still refuse His grace. *As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes....You did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”* (Luke 19:41–44 NIV84) So true, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23)

This was so much more than a **Cry of relief: Tetelestai!** – **It Is Finished!** Jesus asked for a drink to make sure He could call out these *Three Words of Truth* loud and clear. (Luke 23:46) The Holy Spirit with the Holy Scriptures of the Bible wants us to taste God’s love so sweet: Jesus **Finished** God’s whole plan of salvation, His saving mission for me, even for me; for you, even for you; for all, yes, without exception – even the dying, repentant criminal hanging on the cross next to Jesus.

You see, archaeologists have discovered little slips of paper that say, *“Tetelestai!”* – PAID IN FULL! God wants your conscience at peace because your whole debt was paid by the shed blood of God’s own Son. You owe nothing more to God. The mortgage on your mansion in heaven: Paid! – Why pay more? Your debt of guilt to God: Paid! – Why pay more? Your inheritance is secured by God’s own Son: Paid! – *Why pay more? What’s that for? Leave you in darkness outside heaven’s door? Leave you in agony on hell’s burning floor? No more! says the Spirit, No more! Good to the core – Christ – nothing more - All PAID with God – Tetelestai! – forevermore!*

Let your life of love for family, neighbors even enemies be your own word of gratitude to God, your own fervent and eager, *Tetelestai!* Amen!