



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

It is Finished.

John 19:30

^{ESV} **John 19:23**...When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

I started my seminary education at Dallas Theological Seminary in late June 1981. My first class was an introduction to New Testament Greek. It was a summer school class but that was alright with me I was eager to start. I was filled with excitement and anticipation and I appreciated the chance to get an early start on my theological education. Eight long years later in May 1989 I withdrew from seminary after completing a final course on Advanced Greek Grammar.

Now there were several reasons why I withdrew from seminary.

One reason...the most compelling reason...was that I was out of money. Beverly and I had spent all we had saved up and pretty much all we ever hoped to save up on school.

Another reason I withdrew is that I no longer possessed a car that could safely get me the twenty-two miles or so over to DTS. I had already used up two or three cars and the car I possessed when I finally quit I had bought for fifty dollars.

A final reason is that Beverly and I were both pretty much worn out. We had both worked eight years like slaves without a stop so I could finish my degree. She kept kids in our home from 6:00 in the morning till 6:00-6:30 at night. And I worked fulltime teaching school for a small Christian school in Arlington and painted houses, mowed lawns, and laid carpet on the side. Really we did whatever we had to do to keep going. We gave up vacations and furniture and anything else you can imagine. But eight years after starting seminary we had pretty worn out our children, our cars and our savings. We were both pretty well

spent spiritually and emotionally. So I withdrew from seminary...when I say withdrew what I mean is, I quit. I gave up. I threw in the towel.

When I quit I lacked nine hours of Hebrew being through with my 132 hour master's degree program. That is, I lacked three Hebrew courses being done.

I figured I was pretty much through with seminary and the ministry but the ways of the Lord are inscrutable.

And then ten years later in 1998, after working for a decade as a corporate executive the church I attended over in Arlington asked me to come to work as a part of its pastoral staff. And part of doing that meant standing for ordination, and standing for ordination meant I had to go back to seminary and finish the nine hours I had left undone. So that is what I did.

In May 2001, I received my ThM, my Master of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, almost twenty years to the day after I first started. As far as I know, I took longer to get my degree than anybody ever has at DTS.

Now I have to tell you it was an exciting day for the Browning clan when I finally walked across the stage and received my diploma. Of course, a lot had changed since the day I had first started. For one thing my two precious little children had grown from being babies into young adults. And I had changed as well. I had grown from being a young to an old man. The only two things that hadn't changed were my wife and the quality of my transportation...she was still young and beautiful and I still didn't have a car that could get me over to Dallas and back safely.

Now I wanted to tell you all of that because I wanted to say that when I finally finished seminary none of us said, **"It is finished."** I think I said, **"Well, that's that."** I think my kids said, **"It's about time."** I think my wife said, **"Watching you go to seminary was kind of like watching paint dry."**

But none of us said, **"It is finished"** and the reason we didn't is because finishing seminary was not the ultimate goal of any of our lives. It was **"a thing"** but it was never **"the thing."** It was a good thing, a painful thing, an important thing, a terrible thing, a wonderful thing. But it was not **"the thing."** It was a big deal to me and to mine but beyond the Browning household my finishing seminary had no real cosmic importance.

That was not the case, however, when our Lord Jesus spoke his sixth word from the cross...the word we find here in our text this morning in John 19:30. When the Lord Jesus Christ said **"it is finished"** he did not mean that insignificant **"thing"** was finished. He meant **"the thing"** was finished. Nor did he simply mean **"he was finished."** He meant the great cosmic event of time and history was accomplished. He meant his great central work of redemption was laid to rest.

Over my last five sermons, I have been leading us through the seven sayings of our Savior from his cross. You will remember, I hope, that early on during the crucifixion, the Lord Jesus focused his concern on others. His first three sayings from the cross were in fact all concerned with the well-being of others. Early on during the crucifixion, the Lord Jesus was concerned that his Father not break out in judgment against the sinful mob wrongly crucifying him. He pleaded over, and over, and over again for the Father to forgive them because they did

not comprehend the wickedness of what they were doing. After that, the Lord Jesus demonstrated his concern for the repentant thief being crucified next to him, and he spoke to him and promised him that later on that day the thief would be with him in Paradise. Finally, and you will remember this I sure the Lord Jesus demonstrated his concern for his mother and her welfare. And he made provision for her...commending her to the care of John the Beloved...and he did that even as he hung on the cross.

And then starting with his fourth saying from the cross, the Lord Jesus began to focus on his great redemptive work on the cross and on the pain he felt in being separated from the Father as he endured the alienation sinners deserve as he bore our punishment as our great substitutionary sin bearer.

First he cried out, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** And then he cried out, **"I thirst."** And those two sayings demonstrate the anguish he felt not just from the physical sufferings he endured on the cross but also from the spiritual separation he endured from the Father as he shouldered the punishment we deserved...divine judgment imputed to and poured out on him in our place.

Now because all of that is true, I want in our time of meditation this morning in the deepest reverence I can muster to focus on what Jesus meant in the sixth saying from the cross when he said, **"It is finished."**

The obvious question is, **"What was finished?"**

Now before I answer that question properly I need to make a couple of points. First, the three little words "It is finished" are just one word in the Greek New Testament...the word τετέλεσται. The word itself is a verb and is in the perfect tense in Greek. That's significant because the perfect tense points to a completed action in the past with some sort of connected result in the present. Now what that means is that something has been done in the past and the result of the action carries over into the present.

Let me see if I can illustrate what that means.

In Greek if I wanted to point out that I had pursued my wife in the past I would put them verb in the aorist tense and simply say, "**I courted my wife.**" It wouldn't tell you what happened only that pursued her at least once.

If I wanted to emphasize the continuing nature of the chase itself I would put the verb in the imperfect tense and say, "**I was courting her.**" The imperfect tense would emphasize the repeated nature of the courtship...that I was persistent.

But if I put the verb in the perfect tense the emphasis is on the fact that the courtship is over and complete some result has occurred. I might use it like this, "**I courted my wife and today we have five grandchildren.**"

Now you understand why that is significant. The Lord Jesus said, "**It is finished**" and the phrase is a perfect tense verb which means the action is completed in the past and there is some result in the present only John doesn't spell out for us what that result is. He leaves us asking, "**Yes, it is finished and the result is...is what?**" And, of course, to answer that question we have to

know what has been happening in the rest of the book of John...what its emphasis has been.

Secondly, the word that is used here...the word τετέλεσται can have more than one nuance or meaning. It can mean "**finished**" just as it is rendered in the ESV. Or it can mean "**accomplished**" or "**completed.**" I think that the best way to understand the passage is to put an emphasis on the idea of accomplishment. I say that because of verse 28.

^{ESV} **John 19:28**...After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "**I thirst.**"

You see that word "**finished**" there and the word "**fulfill.**" They are both different forms of the same word used in verse 30...the word τετέλεσται.

Listen to how the NIV renders it.

^{NIV} **John 19:28**...Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "**I am thirsty.**"

Now what that means is that Jesus knowing everything was completed says "**I thirst**" that the Scripture might be fulfilled and then finishes by saying, "**It is finished.**" In each case the word is the same..."**completed, fulfilled, finished**"...each word is a translation of the same Greek word.

It could not be any more emphatic in Greek and it could not be any easier to miss in English. You see what is clear is that the issue that concerns Jesus here has to do with what he has accomplished. Jesus was saying, "**The work is finished.**"

Of course that brings us back to our original question, **“What is it that was finished or accomplished?”** And then secondly, it leads to the question, **“Since that work or action is finished what is the significance for God’s people?”**

Now on the one hand part of the answer is obvious. Obviously the Lord Jesus knew his human life was coming to an end and with its end there would be an end to his suffering. Theologians often refer to his work of suffering as his passive obedience and often when they do they link it to his humiliation. When they use the phrase passive obedience the focus is not really on the fact that he was inactive but rather that his sufferings were forced on him by others...because of his righteousness. And when they refer to his humiliation they are referring really to his incarnation. You see before the Lord Jesus was born in the manger in Bethlehem he existed as the eternal Son of God. He was worshipped and adored and obeyed by myriads and myriads of angels. But when he took on flesh he humbled himself...veiling his glory. In his incarnation he was no longer adored as he should have rightly been but was despised and rejected of men, and now with his impending death on the cross all that...his humiliation was coming to an end. He was about to take back up his exalted position as Lord of all. He was about to ascend back to heaven to take up his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. But if that had been his principle point he would not have said, **“It is finished.”** He would have no doubt said, **“I am finished.”**

I suppose there is also a sense in which the many biblical prophecies concerning him were about to be finished...or better about to be fulfilled. His coming, his matchless, work and death were all prophesied in the Old Testament. In fact, he made the point himself in Luke 24 that he was the focus...the very point of the

Bible. But if that had been his principle point he would not have said, **“It is finished.”** He would have no doubt specifically referred to the many prophecies concerning his life and work and said, **“They are finished...they are fulfilled”**

But that is not what he said. What he said was, **“It is finished”** and what he meant by that was his work...his great atoning work...his great atoning work accomplishing our redemption and salvation was complete.

Throughout the life of our Lord he displayed an ever present awareness of his ultimate vocation and calling. You can see it the first time, I think, when he was separated from Mary and Joseph after one of their pilgrimages to Jerusalem during one of the holy assemblies. You will remember that they thought they had lost him. They had searched for him for three days and when they finally found him he was in the temple sitting with the teachers.

^{ESV} **Luke 2:41**...Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”** ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Now the interesting thing about verse 49 is that the more modern translations tend to translate what Jesus said just as the ESV does here, **“I must be in my Father’s house.”** But the word **“house”** is not in the Greek text. Instead, the neuter word **“things”** is in the text. What Jesus said was something like this, **“I must be in the middle of my Father’s things or places.”** Now because he was in the temple most modern translators tend to think he was saying I must in my Father’s places or in the temple...thus...my Father’s house. But if you grew up on the KJV as I did you will remember that it says, **“I must be about my Father’s business.”** Of course the word **“business”** is not in the text either but if you understand Jesus to be saying, **“I must be in the middle of my Father’s things or affairs”** you can see how easy it is to say, **“I must be about my Father’s business.”** Either way the idea is that Jesus felt a compulsion to be concerned with the things or places with which his Father was concerned.

So even as a twelve year old boy, Jesus was concerned with pleasing his Father. But it is not just pleasing the Father for the sake of pleasing Him. It is pleasing the Father by completing the task he was given to complete.

And he says just that in John 4:34. The disciples had gone into town to buy food and when they back they found Jesus talking to the Samaritan women. They urged him to eat knowing he had gone without food for a long time. But he said to them...

^{ESV} **John 4:34...Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”**

Still that raises the question, **“What was that work?”** Certainly a part of the answer has to do with the proclamation of the gospel. If the Book of John went

no farther than chapter four that would have to be our answer. But it does go farther. In fact it answers the question quite clearly.

You see the answer to that question is found in John 12...John 12:27 and following.

^{ESV} **John 12:27**...“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

You see the work that Jesus was called to do by the Father was the work of redemption. He was to come into the world to bear the penalty of our sin. You see the holiness of God required that He pour out the full fury of His righteous judgment on our sin. His justice demanded that he do so. But to do so meant our eternal damnation and separation from his presence. So the Lord Jesus came down from heaven...took to himself a human body and reasonable soul and bore in our place the white hot wrath of an incensed God. He did that that we might be spared...that we might be saved...that we might be a holy, separate and set apart people for God...zealous to do good works...zealous to do good works not because we want to gain God's favor but rather because the Lord Jesus in his great redemptive atoning work on the cross has already obtained God's favor for us. You see when the Lord Jesus says, **“It is finished”** here in John 19:30 he means your salvation is bought and paid for...that was the work that Father sent him to do and that is the work that he completed on our behalf, and he is making

the announcement here in John 19 to make sure we understand that it is all perfectly true. Look again at our verse starting in John 19:28.

^{ESV} **John 19:28**...After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), **"I thirst."** ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, **"It is finished,"** and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Now let me make just a couple of more points and I'll be through. You see that little phrase at the end of verse 30...**"he bowed his head and gave up the spirit."** It is a few other times in the Bible to speak of someone bowing their head in sleep...the quiet restful sleep that comes at the end of a long and arduous task. But the Lord Jesus uses it in reference to himself both in Matthew 8 and in Luke 9. In both places, the phrase is attached to same quote.

^{ESV} **Luke 9:58**...And Jesus said to him, **"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."**

"To lay his head" is exactly the same phrase translated here in John as **"bowed his head."** You see the Lord had no place to bow his head...to lay his head...until his work was finished. His face was set like a flint to accomplish his work and he did so and then and then only did he put his precious head down to rest.

And because that is true, brothers and sisters, it ought to affect how we live. Our lives ought to be bound up with a cord of gratitude so strong that every action, every thought, every word we utter is filtered through the reality of what the Lord Jesus has actually accomplished for us. You see the gospel doesn't really

focus on being a better dad or mother. It doesn't focus on being a better employee or student. It doesn't focus on financial security or even being a better lover. I believe that when you understand and cling to the gospel you will, in fact, be all of those things...a better husband or wife or student or lover...but that fact is just incidental. You see the gospel addresses, rather plainly, the problem of sin and death...and you know when you think about it...that really is the greatest problem of all. It seems to me that if the church is going to strive to be pragmatic and useful it could do that by simply addressing the biggest problem of all and that problem is the problem of sin, and of death and of the grave.

Let me illustrate what I mean.

I don't think I will ever forget one visit that I made to the hospital when an old friend of mine, a wonderful man named Ken Gregson found out he had terminal lung cancer, and called me to come and see him in the hospital. I had known Ken through my job working for a Christian bookstore chain. He had been the CEO and President of the parent corporation and was wonderfully generous and kind man to me and all the other employees. We all called him "pappy".

Anyway, he called me to come and see him because he wanted me to preach his funeral which he knew wasn't going to be very far away. I went to see him and we engaged in some small talk and I finally said, 'You know Ken, I feel a bit hesitant to bring it up. But in light of the fact that you know you are going to die would you mind if we talked about the gospel and the state of your soul?'

He smiled at me and said and I don't think I will ever forget his answer which went something like this, "Well you know Tom I didn't ask you here to talk about the weather."

We both laughed and from that point on we talked about the gospel and the importance of Christ's atonement for our sin. We talked about how God poured out the penalty for our sin upon Christ and how that when a person puts their trust in what Christ has accomplished on their behalf on the cross in redeeming them from their sins and in making them to be right with God they become a Christian not on the basis of anything they have done but rather on the basis of what Christ has done for them. When we finished talking for about an hour or so later I said to him, "So let me ask you Ken, are you trusting in Christ and His atoning work right now for the forgiveness of you sins, to make you to be at peace with God and to one day resurrect your body from the grave and to unite it again with you spirit...so that you will live with Him from then on as a glorified saint for all eternity?"

Ken looked at me and smiled and said, "I have...I do and I am ready for whatever comes next."

You see Christ's work for us is finished...our sin is dealt with and we are at peace with God...there is nothing else for us to do but to believe it is true and to live in light of that fact.

Praise be to God that is so.