

Good Friday: The Seven Last Words

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Date: 03 April 2026

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Welcome, those who are here, and to those who are joining us online, welcome. If you are here and you haven't, if you've never been to one of our Good Friday services before, they're a bit of a different format. We're going to go into the, really the heart of the service, which is going back and forward between having a four to six minute reflection or teaching on each of the last seven last words of Jesus. So four, five, six minutes each. And they'll be punctuated by prayer. So the first person will come up and speak. I'll ask us all to stand and we'll have a minute or so of silence as we reflect on what we've just heard. I'll close the silence with a prayer. And then we'll either go to the next word or a song, but we'll go that rhythm all the way through the service. Reflections, silence, singing of hymns and songs until the service comes to an end. And then we'll have a sort of a closing prayer and blessing and a couple of announcements. So that's how the flow of the service will go.

So actually, let's just commend this service once again into God's hands. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you are just as present in a group of a thousand as you are in a group of, I don't know, 50, 60, 70 people. Father, we thank you that you love it when your people gather.

[2:38] Help us to know, Father, that you are the sovereign God who loves us. Draw us into your presence and tune our hearts to receive everything you desire to give us all the grace you desire to give us this morning.

Tune our hearts to receive that and respond in a worthy manner. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Lisa will come and speak on the first word.

Luke 23, 34. Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Before the cross, Jesus was rejected by his own.

He was spit on, given a crown of thorns, whipped, and carried his own cross, which he was not able to carry all the way. Stripped of his clothes, experiencing a very cruel death, and more.

With all of this, Jesus' first words are a prayer to God. God, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. With all the suffering and injustice he experienced, he prays. But he doesn't pray for himself.

[3:51] He prays for the forgiveness of those who are causing his suffering. Jesus came to take the punishment for our sins. By accepting his forgiveness, we can be with God forever.

For the forgiveness of God. Christ forgave us and taught us to forgive others. I looked up what forgiveness causes, and this is what I found.

Unforgiveness causes severe physical, mental, spiritual harm, acting as a toxic burden that leads to chronic stress, high blood pressure, depression, and weakened immunity.

It fosters deep-seated bitterness, rage, and resentment, while damaging relationships and hindering our personal growth by keeping a person trapped in the past.

In light of this, it seems fitting that Jesus' first words are, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. Jesus knows that unforgiveness hinders us and causes a barrier with our relationship with God.

[4:58] To forgive means to excuse a fault, absolve from payment, pardon, send away, cancel, and bestow favor unconditionally.

I was brought up in a Christian home. We went to church. We were very involved. I accepted Christ when I was nine, went to Sunday school, VBS, youth group, a Christian high school.

In the middle school, we were seen as the perfect family. But behind the scenes, it was not so perfect. I grew up in a household where I had to obey and not question, otherwise I was punished. I couldn't ask questions about my faith. I was told to just believe. I was a sensitive child and didn't like conflict. I did what I was told. Being the eldest, the roles were stricter for me than my younger siblings.

I was set as an example. My household was an abusive household. There was arguing, deceit, and sexual abuse. I was taken out of the house at 14, and at that point, I can choose if I was going to follow God or not.

[6:09] I always knew that Jesus was with me, so I continued to follow Jesus. Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. I knew Jesus wanted me to forgive my father.

Being brought up to obey, I did forgive him. My foster mother told me that I could ask God any questions and go to him if I was angry, sad, mad, really anything.

With this new information, I learned that asking questions is something God wants us to do. I wanted to learn and understand my faith more.

I wanted to understand what forgiveness was and what it meant. I learned I had to forgive in different levels.

My father knew what he was doing was wrong, and I had to forgive him. Later, I realized I needed to forgive my mother for not protecting me.

[7:12] She did not know what to do, and she was under my father's wrath. She was trapped, but I forgave her. My younger brothers, about seven years younger than I, were told lies about me, and as a result, they were mean to me and hurtful.

They did not know what they were doing. I had to forgive them. Different levels of forgiveness. I knew I had to forgive them, even though they did not ask for forgiveness.

This was for my own peace, and I gave them and the situation to God to deal with. There is also an everyday forgiveness that God has shown me.

Forgiving those in our lives that are close, our family, parents, husbands, children, friends, workmates. They can do or say things that can hurt us, whether we know it or not.

Be quick to forgive them. As well. Holding on to hurt only hurts us and our relationship with God and others. We even need to forgive those we don't know that cause us inconvenience or pain.

[8:24] We need to pray for all and believe that God will take care of their side of the situation, and we need to take care of our side of the situation with God's help. Mark 11, 22 to 26 teaches us that forgiveness hinders our faith from working.

The Father can't forgive our sins if we don't forgive other people. Jesus freely forgives us. Jesus freely forgives us. We are to forgive others. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

God, our Creator, loves us so much, He showed it by sending His Son, Jesus, to bridge the gap that our sin causes between us and God. He knew what His Son was going to go through, yet He still sent Him.

Jesus fully submitted Himself to God. Paul encourages us in Philippians 2 to be like Christ. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but to the interests of others. Have the mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in likeness of men, and being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[10:02] Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

I invite you to stand. We'll have a minute or so of silent prayer. Father, we marvel and rejoice that you are omniscient, that you know all things, you see all things, and we give you thanks and praise. Our mind can't really ever fully understand it, that knowing every single thing there is to know about us, that still you desire to forgive us, and so your Son came to die on the cross, that by our faith and trust in Him we might be forgiven of every sin we have ever done.

We ask, Father, that you would bring that truth deep into our hearts. We ask, Father, that you would help us to die to all vain attempts to forgive ourselves, but instead that you might bring before our hearts, our minds, our eyes, the true and real and deep and eternal forgiveness that is offered to us from yourself, to each one of us.

And we ask, Father, that as that truth becomes more real to us, and we are able to stand, that you would help us to be people who forgive, that that might more and more be what characterizes us, that we forgive.

[11:44] And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. I ask you be seated, and Uzo will speak on the second word.

The second word of Jesus is from Luke chapter 23, verses 43. It says, Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

So now, just some brief context for this verse. Just in this scene, Jesus has been crucified, and alongside both sides of him, two people who are accused of being thieves.

One of them mocks Jesus, saying to him, If you are so innocent, how come you are up here with us? The other says, The other asks him in humility for mercy, and to him, Jesus responds, Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Now, this meditation will entail me drawing your attention to three words in this sentence that I find to be particularly revealing. First word is, truly.

[12:56] Truly here showcases Jesus' seriousness and sincerity. Oftentimes in scripture, Jesus will, when he intends to communicate something with particular sincerity, he says, Truly, truly, I say to you, or verily I say to you.

Here in this scene, to a criminal, he says, Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. And so, by saying this, he showcases the sincerity of his promise, which underscores our hope of assurance for forgiveness and salvation once we profess Christ and ask for his mercy and humility. The second word is you. You here referring to the criminal. Now, some might think it's scandalous that a criminal would receive promise of paradise just like that.

There is a common notion, or cognitive bias, if you will, amongst modern society, wherein, if God forgives the worst person you know, or the worst person in history, whoever that may be, this warrants some query against God.

However, if you were to forgive me, or us, then that's understandable because our sins aren't that bad. This reveals a false sense of entitlement that we have to being consulted or having a say as to who God can show mercy to.

[14:17] If this is the case, a question then arises, who has a say as to whether God shows mercy on us? And furthermore, would it be a favorable decision?

Perhaps, instead of worrying about how God can show grace to another person, we should ask how he can show grace to us, and then rejoice that he has. The last word is today.

Now, in the traditional interpretation, we are given to understand that this showcases the immediacy of our being with Christ upon our death. This offers some comfort, hope in the face of death.

However, in my brief research, there exists some debate over whether the word today should appear after the comma, as I read before, or before the comma, such that it now reads, truly I tell you, truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise.

Now, for some, this shift creates doubt, uncertainty about their fate prior to Christ's second coming, but after their death. It offers not hope, but now fear, fear due to uncertainty, fear due to the unknown.

[15:28] But I submit that what should in fact offer us hope is the essence, the core of the promise, and not the exact time of the promise being fulfilled. A quick argument to illustrate, and then to conclude.

Premise one, if we can trust Christ's character, then it doesn't really matter when the promise is fulfilled. To support this, think about it. If the scripture shows Christ's character to be trustworthy, and his words to be sincere, then does it really matter when the promise is fulfilled?

If the scripture were to tell us the exact time the promise were to be fulfilled, but also in the same scriptures, we see Jesus, Jesus' words being lies, his character being untrustworthy, would that really bring you clarity?

Premise two, and so therefore, if Christ's character is trustworthy, then it doesn't really matter. If his character is not trustworthy, then it doesn't really matter.

Premise two, we can trust Christ's character, fortunately, and by way of support here, 1 Peter 2 verse 6 says, whoever puts his trust in him will not be put to shame.

[16:38] Conclusion, therefore, after we die, it doesn't really matter when we get to be with Christ. For he said, we will be with him, and so we shall. Thank you. I invite you to stand for a minute or so of silent prayer.

Thank you. Father, we thank you that we can gather, and in the background here, the quiet, friendly, safe, murmuring of children, and at the same time, in the distance, the sound of sirens. But Father, whether it is the comforting noises or the noises of great distress, we give you thanks and praise that Jesus is our true shepherd, and that when it comes our time to walk through the valley of the shadow of the veil of death, that we will not walk alone if we have put our faith and trust in Jesus.

We thank you, Father, that like the thief on the cross who is penitent, you have not weighed our merits but pardoned our offenses. And Father, whether the theologians who think we are immediately in your presence or we sleep and whatever it is they say, we know that we will be with Jesus, that he will care for us, and that we will see him face to face and be granted resurrected bodies in paradise for all eternity.

So we ask, Father, that you build within us a sure and certain hope of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, triumph over death and our sharing in his victory by humble faith.

[18:31] And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated for the third word. Reading from John 19, 26 to 27.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, woman, behold your son.

Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. A son looking into the eyes of his mother.

A mother looking into the eyes of her son. The son dripping, stained, exposed, looks out to the masses who jeer and laugh and lock eyes with the tender gaze of his mother watching her son. Her son she first heard about from the angel. Her son she swaddled and soothed. Her son who held her hand and all her hope now hung destitute in front of her.

[19:55] He initiates with her. Behold, woman, behold your son. His eyes now shift focus to his disciple. Behold your mother.

He calls out, pulling himself up to get the words out. Collapsing, back down in exhale exhaustion. What of his brothers?

His uncles? Surely there are other family members to take care of his mother. Mary's own sister is there beside her. Yet he in his last moments redraws the lines of responsibility delegating a loved disciple to care for his mother.

To stand in his place as the son that he needs as the son that she needs to protect and provide for. But Jesus knows the disciple offers something different to Mary than potentially a relative could. Though all Mary can see is deep loss, broken dreams, and oppressive darkness, Jesus, in frailty, speaks words that denote attuned attention to her physical needs, yes, but also to her spiritual need.

[21:12] Is this beloved disciple one who has economic means to protect his mother and provide for her in such a vulnerable stage of life? Humble means possibly, but nothing lavish.

We don't really know, but surely this disciple affords her something much more valuable. He keeps her right where she needs to be to be reminded of Jesus, his teachings, his actions, to be reminded of his promises in miracles and wonders, to be in the community of people who would mourn him deepest and who saw him rightly.

Yes, but even more, what this disciple does ensure is that he would keep her right where she needs to be to be amongst the first who would see him raised from the dead, amongst the first to see death conquered and fear and loss mended.

Yes, this would place her right in the front row of beholding his resurrection power, seeing her scatter hopes and dreams rebuilt into a more glorious narrative than could ever be imagined.

A grafting into a new family, God's people reconstituted around the resurrected Christ, a new line that centers on him that supersedes bloodlines, open to all nations.

[22:38] As he looks after her temporary security, he is moments away from securing her eternity and all those who look to him. His eyes are somehow on her in his moments of agony.

His eyes are somehow on you in those moments of agony, a son looking into the eyes of his mother, a mother looking into the eyes of her son.

I invite you to stand, please. We'll have a minute or so of silent prayer. father, we give you thanks and praise that we are reminded of your great tenderness and kindness towards us.

Father, bring deep within our hearts that we will never meet anyone more kind or more tender than you. you are tenderness and kindness itself.

Father, we ask that you continue to look upon us. Some of us, fathers, struggle with great wounds and great loss. Some of us, fathers, struggle with deep fears.

[23:54] Fears and loss and wounds that are so deep we feel uncomfortable even allowing others to know about it. But you know. And so, father, we ask that you would look upon us, continue tenderly and lovingly and with kindness.

That you minister to those of us who struggle with great loss and great wounds that we might know your tender comfort. And, father, reveal to us as to whether there are people with whom we can share.

We know there are, father. You have put each other, you have put us in a one another life. That you use your children to help us bear our burden.

So, father, draw us again to your tender heart. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Remain seated. Please be seated as we will have Shannon bring the fourth word.

The fourth word comes from Mark 15 verses 34. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani, which means my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[25:09] I'm not very good at memorizing scripture. Maybe some of you can relate. I never have been, and I seem to have plenty of excuses as to why I'm not good at it and don't do it as much as I should or could.

But if I'm being honest with myself, it's really just a matter of it being an underdeveloped skill, a muscle that I haven't put to very much use. As technology has progressed and smartphones have made us dumber, the muscle of memorization has atrophied, and it's to our detriment, our mental and spiritual detriment.

In Mark 15, verse 34, Jesus shows the incredible spiritual power of scripture memorization. We see how knowing the scriptures isn't just a functional, robotic response that we expect is going to help us to deal with the challenges of life.

Rather, it is a deeply theological and spiritual experience. Memorizing sacred texts was and is an essential part of Judaism, as it is for many cultures with strong oral traditions.

Teachers like Jesus and Paul would have memorized vast swaths of the Old Testament, putting many of us modern Christians to shame. And not just teachers, but followers as well. We typically view memorizing scripture as a helpful tool in times of trouble, a way to encourage us, to lift us up, and to remind us of bigger and better things.

[26:40] And while that can be and is all good and true, what I love about Jesus' own use of memorized scripture in this passage is that he chose a rather strange and un-uplifting verse to recite.

It's fair to assume that Jesus would have known by heart several, if not all, of the Psalms. There were so many others he could have chosen. Psalm 23, for example, would have been a great one to use in that moment.

I'm sure many other martyrs have. But in Mark 15:34, Jesus chooses Psalm 22, a passage of unequivocal lament.

Interestingly, he quotes it, I just realized this, he quotes it in Aramaic. The Hebrew Bible was not written in Aramaic. He chooses to use the language that speaks to his heart.

So I think that's a plug for translating scripture and knowing it in your own language, in your heart language. He uses it the same way the author had, to cry out, to voice a deep, guttural desperation, despair that he felt in that moment, a moment when he was separated from the very God he chose to obey.

[27:55] This is a scripture passage that opens with a line that is dangerously close to an accusation toward God. Why have you forsaken me? This is the line that Jesus quotes.

He's not afraid to express frustration, desperation, and deep, deep disappointment. In fact, I believe he uses this unexpected, unconventional, memorized passage precisely to express the deeply human emotion of loss.

He's embodying a core part of humanity in this fallen world. Like his entrance into our earthly realm as an embryo, then a fetus, then a helpless baby, his empathy with us in the deepest and lowest elements of life reverberates through this prayer.

In this moment, he prays a priestly prayer that both expresses his humanity and paves a path for us in ours. Hebrews 5 tells us, during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could have saved him from death.

And he was heard because of his reverent submission. The scriptures invite us to pray through our suffering, not to repress it, not to silence the pain, but to cry through it.

[29:24] Do you realize how unique this is to Christianity? Jesus is showing a natural response to the unnatural reality of death and separation from our father. He's using spirit-breathed scripture to express it.

And he was doing it out of reverence and obedience. The gospels record our Lord crying out this very real, very raw prayer because they are pointing us to and teaching us through a theology of suffering.

Christ's personal experience with pain and his unashamed use of such a vulnerable and dark passage of the Bible acknowledges our own suffering. It shows us how because of his choice to be forsaken, completely forsaken, to follow through with the worst thing possible means that we will never be fully forsaken.

This morning, I heard an interview with a famous pastor, many of you would know him, who was facing a terminal illness a few years ago. He very wisely and simply said, if Jesus Christ has been risen from the dead, that means everything will be okay, but that doesn't mean you stop crying. Jesus shows us that it's okay to grieve, to wail, to question, and to cry out at the searing pain of feeling forgotten, forsaken. But because of his grief, we know ours will eventually come to an end, as his did.

[30:51] Psalm 22 ends, and Jesus would have likely, well, he would have memorized the whole thing and known it as well as the beginning. And it goes like this, all the rich of the earth will feast and worship.

All who go down to the dust will kneel before him, those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him. Future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn, he has done it.

Jesus' lament wasn't, that was not his last word on this earth as a human. Because of his lament and the scorn he faced, he could later declare, it is finished.

I invite you to stand for a minute or so of silent prayer. Father, we know there's nothing necessarily wrong with Hallmark cards and other greeting cards, but we thank and praise you that you have not called us to be Hallmark people, but Bible people.

We give you thanks and praise that your word is just filled with promises too wild and crazy for ever to be made by a Hallmark card.

[32:15] And at the same time, your word touches the very depths and hardest parts of human experience, the hardest parts of fear and anxiety and shame, that your word, Father, covers the whole range and gamut of human emotion and human experience.

And so, Father, always mindful of Jesus and what he did for us on the cross, in light of his death upon the cross and his resurrection, help us to be, to read and know your Bible.

And help us, Father, to so read and know your Bible and in that light, understand Jesus and his death upon the cross better and better and better. We ask, Father, that you help us to have minds that are furnished by your word, saturated by your word, are purified and healed by your word.

Father, make us Bible people as your son was. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated for the fifth word. The fifth word comes from John 19, verse 28.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst. Exhausted, dehydrated, and losing blood, Jesus surely would have been thirsty.

[33:42] I can only imagine how parched he would have been. But as I sat with these words, what came to mind was the powerful imagery of thirstiness elsewhere in the Bible.

Israelites wandering in the wilderness, testing God, and God ultimately splitting open the rock at Horeb to quench their thirst.

Take care, lest you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground, where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock.

The thirst of Samson after killing a thousand Philistines, again quenched by God, splitting open the earth. And Samson was very thirsty, and he called upon the Lord and said, You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?

And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out of it. And when Samson drank, his spirit returned and he revived. The sons of Korah in Psalm 42 crying out, As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

[35:08] My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? The words of Jesus himself in the Beatitudes, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

And of course, Jesus' promise of living water in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. Jesus said to the woman, Everyone who drinks of Jacob's well will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him or her will never be thirsty again.

In these passages, we see God's provision, we see answers to prayer in times of thirstiness, we see God's people thirsting after him, and ultimately we see Jesus promising a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

So, what do I make of Jesus hanging on the cross, thirsty and about to die? I see the Christ physically thirsty, yet unlike for the Israelites and Samson, there is no spring of fresh water. That day there will be no revival. There is simply a sponge of sour wine, one final swallow to fulfill the prophecy at Psalm 69 21.

[36:35] They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. I see the Christ, thirsty for God and his righteousness, the only one who lived a perfect life.

I see the paradox of Jesus having lived his whole life doing the will of the Father and living in absolute harmony with him, willingly accepting to come and appear before God to die a criminal and

a sinner.

And I ultimately see the Christ for the first time, cut off and forsaken by the Father, freely absorbing my sin, your sin, the vileness of everything we have ever done wrong, willingly submitting to God's judgment for that wrongdoing.

Two thousand years later, it can be easy to gloss over what actually happened that day on the cross. We can see it as some abstract thing, a sleight of hand, in which we magically come out justified on the other side.

Yet it involved the immeasurable pain of a father sacrificing his only and beloved son. There was no last-minute substitution of a ram.

[37:59] It involved the father watching the son suffer beyond our comprehension. We're not talking just physical pain, but the crushing weight, the crushing conviction of our sin.

And it involved the father restraining himself as the son cried out, I thirst. Desperate for water, no doubt, but more desperate to remain in unbroken relationship with the father.

The cry goes unanswered that day. And ultimately, it involved the father's wrath, falling on that beloved son, not because the son deserved it, but because they both loved us so much.

Why? Why would the father and the son do this? Because they understood it was the only way that you and I get to drink the living water, so that when we die, we can confidently say, I thirst, and know that our thirst will be satisfied.

I invite you to stand for a minute or so of silent prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you have not removed from human hearts a longing and desire and a yearning to know you.

[39:35] You know, Father, that there is a part deep within each of us that, just like Adam and Eve hid from you in the garden, so we would rather have terrible fig leaves around us and hide in bushes than be present with you.

you. But even in the midst of that very important and deep-rooted part of us, you have left within our hearts a longing for you.

And we give you thanks and praise that on the cross, your son opened that pathway that we might know you and that we might have our thirst for you quenched, our hunger for you satisfied, that all our longings and yearnings ultimately can come to fruition, not because of our great longings and yearnings, but because of your great love for us and what your son has done.

We ask, Father, that you fan into flame within us ever deeper and more full a longing and yearning for that day when in Jesus we will see, Father, you in the company and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll be seated as we hear Scott bring us reflections on the sixth word.

[41:00] It is finished in the thirtieth verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. John writes, When he had received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished.

With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John, the Gospel writer, uses the Greek word tetelestai for the phrase, it is finished.

And this definitely does convey the idea of something being finished or completed and it was sometimes a phrase used in the ancient world to reflect the payment of a debt or the payment of a bill of some kind.

But in thinking about this a little bit further, and as others have mentioned, we probably think of Jesus speaking from the cross in Aramaic, even though John was writing in Greek.

And so what would it have been like in Aramaic? As best as we can tell, it was probably a phrase like mashalim, which is similar in meaning to the Greek, but it was a phrase specifically used to indicate the completion of a sacrifice.

[42:09] It certainly had other meanings, completion, perfection, peace, and these could relate to the fulfillment of a plan or a debt, but principally it was about the ritual end of a sacrifice.

In the most basic sense, over the years Christians have thought that this phrase, it is finished, was Jesus saying that he had completed his earthly mission, paid for the sins of humanity, and fulfilled prophecy.

Sometimes one of these aspects is given more weight than others, and it's worth considering each one of them briefly, and of course they do interrelate as well.

First, it clearly represents the end of his earthly mission. The important point here, I believe, is that it was a mission that he pursued and controlled of his own volition and will, consistent with the Father.

So, he knew that he was completing a mission to pay for the sins of humanity, and this was something that was pursued in a structured way that he was well aware of.

[43:32] He was not an unwilling victim. He had set his face to go toward Jerusalem, as Luke says in his gospel, and he knew what was involved in the physical completion of his mission.

And the second element, briefly worth noting, was that he was to be the sacrifice for the sins of humanity. The symbolism and the concepts here have been probably elaborated more than some of the other meanings that can be associated with this phrase.

His death basically atones for the sins of humanity, and this is often referred to with phrases like substitutionary atonement, although we can often think of this in highly personalized ways as well in terms of our own experience, rather than theological reasoning.

Third, and underlying all of the final words, and not just this one certainly, Christ has fulfilled the prophecies from the Old or the First Testament, or the Tanakh, if you prefer, just about every step of the approach to Jerusalem, his triumphs, his trials, and his crucifixion, is rooted in the prophecies of the Old Testament, principally parts of the Psalms and Isaiah, but certainly other books are involved as well.

Probably the most, to me anyway, vivid and striking illustration of this from a symbolic perspective is that prior to saying it is finished, he does say, I thirst, and he did slake his thirst by drinking of the sour wine.

[45:23] And symbolically, this really represents the drinking of the cup of God's wrath as a way of consuming responsibility for the sins of the human race.

And once that is done, then the whole process of atonement in its immediate sense has been completed. and this is a symbolism that occurs in some other parts of the scripture as well.

Finally, it's worth noting, apart from specific words and meanings, that the tenses and the structure of the writing in John's gospel at this point suggest that this is not just something that has happened once, this is something that has been structured in the past to happen.

It's occurring now. It echoes into the future. And the salvation provided by the crucifixion and death of Christ is an ongoing thing. And it is the completion of the part of his work that will precede his later return as a judge.

I invite you to stand for a minute or so of prayer. Thank you. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you are a God who speaks and we ask that you would help us to be a people who listen.

[47:02] We give you thanks and praise that you are a God who has made promises and has kept them. And we ask, Father, that you would make us a people who hears your promises, remembers them, and trust that you will keep them, both those who you have already kept and those that you will keep in our lives and in our future.

And we thank and praise you, Father, that you have provided a way for there to be, for people like us to be part of your new covenant. We thank you, Father, that because Jesus drank the cup of your wrath on our behalf, we can spiritually feed and drink on him in the Lord's Supper.

And so, Father, we ask that you would help us to feed and drink on Christ. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Invite you to be seated as Samuel reflects on the seventh and last word.

The seventh word is from Luke 23, 46. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And having said this, he breathed his last. These were the final words Jesus spoke on the cross. At this point, Jesus had already been through so much.

[48:33] He was betrayed, flogged, humiliated in front of everyone, and finally nailed to the cross. From a human perspective, everything seemed to be in utter despair, with no light, no hope, only complete crushing defeat.

But even in that moment, even with his last breath, Jesus did not surrender to bitterness or despair. He did not turn away from God, nor did he speak in anger.

Instead, he said with a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Even in suffering, even in uncertainty, even in death, Jesus chose to trust God.

God, he placed his very life into the Father's hand. This is a picture of complete faith. Jesus sets an example for all of us.

He reminds us that even in our most difficult situations, he is with us. Everything is, nothing is beyond God's control, and that we can trust him even in our most difficult moments.

[50:05] Some of us here today have been through or may even now be walking through very difficult situations. We may feel trapped, without hope, as if we were thrown in extreme darkness, with no light, and absolutely no way out.

We may not understand why things are happening, we may feel confused, afraid, or even defeated. But because of the example Jesus set on the cross, we are reminded that we are not alone, and we are not forgotten.

God is with us. So on this Good Friday, as we remember the suffering of Jesus, we also remember his trust.

And maybe we can ask ourselves, can we also surrender our lives into God's hands, not only when it's easy, but also in our darkest moments?

Trusting God doesn't mean we have all the answers. It means we know the one who does. trust us. And because of that, it gives us strength to hold on.

[51:28] We trust God not because everything is going well, but because he is faithful. to stand for a minute or so of silent prayer.

Father, we commend into your hands the persecuted church throughout the world. We think in particular, Father, lamentably, there's too many countries for me to name, but we think in particular of the persecuted church in Iran, in Pakistan, in China, in northern Nigeria, and as I've said, Father, too many other places to list, but we commend these our brothers and sisters in Christ into your hands.

We ask, Father, that you would continue to give them strength to stand in very hard times, to kneel in prayer in very hard times. We thank you for their faith, and we ask, Father, for their tormentors and persecutors that you would turn their hearts away from persecution and violence and turn their hearts to Christ.

We also remember before you at this time, Father, the missionaries that we support around the world. We commend into your hands Trish in Uganda, Kogala Ministries also in Uganda, Norm and Audrey in Angola, Judah and Jesse amongst Venezuelan refugees in Colombia, for Brian in Taiwan, for Samir amongst the Derry-speaking refugees and Derry-speaking people in Afghanistan. Father, we commend these missionaries into your hands. We commend their locations as well. May you, at this time, distant from family, may they rejoice in their Christian brothers and sisters in these places.

[53:35] May you bless them in all things physical and spiritual. And, Father, we commend ourselves into your hands. In the words of Samuel, who has just spoken, we ask, Father, that whether in good times or in bad, in times of our height of joy and in our times of deepest sorrow, that you would help us day by day to commend ourselves into your hands.

Trusting that you walk with us and that the end of our story has already been revealed when we put our faith and trust in Jesus. So we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen.

Thank you.