

It Is Finished

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Preacher: Dan Peters

[0:00] And this morning then, it's that cry of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is finished, that I would like us to focus on, but not in an isolated way.

We're going to relate that cry to other things that are going on in that little paragraph in John 19, and indeed we're going to relate it to other parts of this great fourth gospel.

What does it mean? It's famous, isn't it, this cry of our Lord Jesus? It's self-evidently dramatic and memorable, but what does it mean?

Well, what I want to show you is that it is finished actually means different things to the different parties who are affected by it. And so I have three headings, and first of all, this, it means anguish for Jesus' enemy.

That's the first thing about this cry, it is finished. It means anguish for Jesus' enemy. And by Jesus' enemy then, I mean Satan.

[1:07] Now, John's gospel, as many of you will be aware, has no account of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, nor does it record a single instance of Jesus casting out a demon.

So is this evangelist uninterested then in the satanic, in how Jesus' mission relates to the devil?

Well, no, that would be a wrong conclusion.

There's one hugely important text in this connection. It's chapter 12, verse 31 of John's gospel, and there Jesus announces this. He says, now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

The ruler of this world is Satan. It's not a dissimilar title, is it, to some that the Apostle Paul uses for Satan, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air.

So that's the title there in John 12, 31. It's referring to Satan, clearly. As for the verb in John 12, 31, cast out, it's the same Greek word that's used in the other gospels for that ministry that Jesus engaged in.

[2:18] Over three years, liberating so many poor, oppressed folk by expelling, by casting out demons from them. John, as I mentioned a moment ago, he doesn't record that ministry of Jesus.

But as I say, he uses the same word there in chapter 12, verse 31, so that it's as if John is kind of bypassing all the minor warm-up expulsions which fill the pages of the other gospels.

John focuses on the big one, the one that Jesus really has in his sights. Not the casting out of piddly little demons, but rather the casting out of their leader, Satan himself.

The eradication, the banishment, the decisive removal of that supreme enemy. John 12, 31 envisages that.

And from that point on then, as readers of John's gospel, we're waiting for it to happen. Where is this conquest, this overthrow, this casting out of Satan?

[3:29] Was chapter 12, verse 31, just empty words? Is it really going to happen? Those thoughts are in our minds. And then eventually, we come to chapter 19 and Jesus' crucifixion.

And within chapter 19, we eventually come to this little paragraph that we have read this morning.

And we hear Jesus, first of all, crying, I thirst.

I thirst. Now, it's a well-documented effect of crucifixion. Often, men dying in this way felt a horrible, overwhelming sense of thirst.

But when Jesus cries, I thirst, it's not simply or even primarily because of that. No, John gives us two reasons for this cry.

One reason is to fulfill the scripture, and we'll come to that later. The other reason is this. Knowing that all was now finished, he said, I thirst.

[4:30] Knowing that all was now finished. So, something that is now over has made Jesus thirsty. It's like when you go into the house after you've been on a run or after a gardening session or something.

And you've finished now. And it's made you thirsty. And so, the first thing you do is you get yourself a huge glass of water. That's the picture here. Knowing that all was now finished, he said, I thirst. Which means that it isn't the dehydrating conditions of hanging on a cross that is causing the thirst. Because they haven't finished. They're still ongoing as he speaks.

It's something that is now over that has made him thirsty. What then? Well, we need to think in terms of the ancient world here.

Is there any situation in the ancient world which we know definitely made people need to drink water? Yes, there is.

[5:50] Fighting in battle. We know that made men thirsty. Remember Samson? In Judges 15 verse 18, he fought that battle against the Philistines single-handedly.

And having finished the battle, he thought he was going to die of thirst. Battle-induced thirst is mentioned again in Psalm 110. We know that this was a thing in the ancient world.

And it's reasonable to infer then that Jesus' thirst here is a battle-induced thirst. That the thing which is now over as he speaks these words, but which has made him thirsty, is fighting.

He has been fighting on the cross. He has been doing that casting out of Satan of which he had spoken earlier. Which means then that when he goes on then to say, it is finished, whatever else that may mean, at one level at least, it is a shout of triumph.

At one level at least, it is a belligerent taunt aimed at Satan. It's all over, you loser. I've won. I've defeated you.

[7:02] I've cast you out. The rout is complete. It is finished. We sang that line, didn't we, in our hymn earlier on this morning. Finished the victory cry.

And indeed I'm saying this is a victory cry. And as my heading indicates then, this triumphant cry of Jesus, it means anguish for Satan.

Jesus' cry, it is finished, is the most terrible thing that Satan has ever heard. It has been reverberating in his head ever since, haunting him and dismaying him.

And we need to feel that reality this morning. Sometimes we look at this world around us. Or perhaps we just look at our own lives.

And Satan just seems so rampant perhaps. So effective. So scary. And at such times then, we need to go back to this cry.

[8:06] This jubilant, gloating cry of our Savior. We need to realize Satan is defeated. History doesn't hang in the balance this morning.

It could go God's way or it could go Satan's way. No. Satan is defeated. Your life as a Christian does not hang in the balance this morning. It could go God's way or it could go Satan's way. No. Satan is defeated. Jesus has taken him on at the cross and he has shouted, it is finished. It's almost the football world cup.

At the last football world cup, England played Wales in one of their group matches. And a whole load of us were watching this match in our living room. And England scored a goal.

And most of us, not all of us, but most of us in the room were celebrating the fact that England had scored a goal. And at one point then, one of Isaac's friends who was in the room, he revealed, kind of after the celebrations had finished, he revealed that he'd known about this goal half a minute or so before it had gone in.

[9:17] Evidently, we weren't quite watching it live. There was a slight lag. He had his phone in his hand and he'd seen on social media that this goal had been scored. And so there we were then.

And while we were nervously watching Marcus Rashford prepare to take this free kick, thinking that it could go either way, actually it couldn't go either way at all. He'd already scored and the rest of the country were already celebrating the fact.

And it's a bit like that when we get overly nervous about Satan. Satan's already been defeated. He has heard the cry, it is finished.

And his heart is breaking now and all of heaven is celebrating now. But somehow we often seem to suffer from a bit of a lag, don't we, as Christians? We're behind, not just by half a minute, but by 2,000 years.

To us, it looks like Satan could still win. No, he can't. He can't possibly. He cannot win, not now that Jesus has shouted at him, it is finished.

[10:18] And so we need to get up to speed. And we need to catch on to heaven's celebrations and to the crushing sense of defeat in which Satan is now permanently engulfed.

And so we're asking, what does it is finished mean? And we're saying in the first place, it means anguish for Jesus' enemy. Secondly, this morning, it means action for Jesus' father.

It means action for Jesus' father. And by Jesus' father, I don't mean his adoptive human father, Joseph. I mean God the father, because Jesus is, of course, the son of God.

Now, we're all familiar, I'm sure, with the concept of a covenant. A covenant is a binding relationship between two parties in which each makes certain commitments to the other.

And of course, it's an important concept to us as Christians because it's the way that God relates to us. He relates to us by way of covenants. But the Bible strongly hints at another covenant relationship as well as the one between God and us.

[11:24] Namely, a covenant relationship between God the father and God the son. Just turn back in your Bibles a page or two to chapter 17, where Jesus utters that famous prayer in the upper room.

And look then at what he says in verse 4, John 17 verse 4. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do, and now, father.

And so it goes on. And you see the logic there then. Jesus seems to be appealing to a covenant kind of relationship, a covenant kind of arrangement, doesn't he? And he's saying then, I've accomplished my side of the arrangement.

Now, father, I want you to dot, dot, dot. Now, there in chapter 17, of course, strictly speaking, Jesus hasn't accomplished the work that the father gave him to do.

He's still in the upper room. I think the fact that he can speak like that rather wonderfully expresses his confidence and his resolve. He's determined he is going to go through with the cross, and there's no way he's going to be deterred from it.

[12:38] But all the same, he cannot say in an absolute sense in John 17, I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do. He can't at that point absolutely demand the father to now do his bit of the covenant arrangement.

Well, I would put it to you that what we have here in chapter 19, verse 30, is a repeat of chapter 17, verse 4.

Only now Jesus can say it in an absolute sense. Because now he's not in the upper room. Now he really has accomplished the work the father gave him to do. Now, it is finished means exactly that. So that while, yes, at one level Jesus is addressing Satan, at another level, just like in chapter 17, he's addressing his father.

And again, but with more force and with more weight now, he's saying, I've accomplished my side of the arrangement. I've completed my responsibilities.

[13:42] Now, father, I want you to do what you've promised to do. Now, father, I want you to spring into action. And what is that action into which he wants the father to spring?

Well, we could answer that by going back again to chapter 17, because there he spells out some of the things that he now wants the father to do for him. But it's interesting to consider that right at this moment, right at this point in his crucifixion, we know he has a particular Bible passage in his mind. Remember I said one of the reasons he cries, I thirst, is to fulfill the scripture. That's what John says in verse 28. And the scripture that John means there must be Psalm 69 that we read earlier.

Do you remember those words in verse 21 of Psalm 69? For my thirst, they gave me sour wine to drink. By the way, if you were here last night, that's a different drinking of wine from the other one, the one we were considering last night, the wine that Jesus refused to drink, that was mixed with

gall. That was drugged up wine, we said, in order to ease pain. And Jesus didn't want to ease his pain. This is just wine to relieve his thirst. This is a different moment in the crucifixion account. So Jesus cries, I thirst, because he wants to be offered sour wine, because he wants to fulfill that prophecy in the Psalm. And that means then that Psalm 69 must be on his mind. We can conclude that quite reasonably. Psalm 69 must be on his mind at this point in the crucifixion. Now, do you remember the whole structure of Psalm 69 that we heard read to us earlier on? Up until that verse about the sour wine, Psalm 69 is all about the Messiah's sufferings. But then the rest of the Psalm from verse 22 onwards is all about what God is going to do in response to the Messiah's sufferings. So that I think it's reasonable to infer that when Jesus in our text cries out, it is finished, he's saying, Father, I've done all my stuff. I've carried out the first half of Psalm 69. Now I want you to carry out the second half of Psalm 69. I want you now to do all the things that are mentioned there. So what is mentioned there? What, according to Psalm 69, is God going to do in response to his son's sufferings? Well, let's take a quick look. For one thing, following the sufferings, God will exalt. [16:29] He will exalt his son. Verse 29 of the Psalm, let your salvation, O God, set me on high. For another thing, following the sufferings, God will judge. He will judge those who inexcusably and knowingly inflicted his son's sufferings. And that's the theme of that grim section of the Psalm, verses 22 to 28. For another thing, following the sufferings, God will build. He will build his church, verses 35 and 36 of the Psalm. It's couched in Old Testament language about the cities of Judah and all the rest of it, but it's really talking about God building his church. And then for another thing, following the sufferings, God will renew. He will renew the very cosmos itself, verse 34 of the Psalm, turning a groaning creation into a singing, praising one. So that's what Psalm 69 says God is going to do in response to his son's sufferings. And when then Jesus cries, it is finished. He's saying, Father, the time has come. The time has come for you to do all those things. It's time for you now to exalt, to judge, to build, to renew. I've been faithful to my covenantal obligations. Now you, Father, must be faithful to yours. And here we are then, 2,000 years later. And we can say that the Father has done a lot of those things mentioned in Psalm 69. He has exalted his son. His son is now at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. He has judged the perpetrators of the cross. Peter in Acts 1 will apply those very words from Psalm 69 to Judas Iscariot. And of course, 40 years later, the very city that put Jesus to death was judged, wasn't it, and was raised to the ground by the Romans. He is in the process of building his church throughout the world. So the Father has done a lot of those things that are promised there in Psalm 69.

But, but, there is of course still much more building of the church to do. Still thousands of people groups out there altogether untouched by the gospel. And certainly, there's still the renewing of the cosmos to do.

It's groaning as loudly today as it ever was. No sign of its renewal yet. And as history drags on then, and in those moments when you and I get discouraged, we might be tempted to ask sometimes, has God now given up on these things? Has the Psalm 69 project been abandoned?

Are some of its details destined to remain forever unfulfilled? Well, I want to say to you, the answer to that has to be a resounding no. God cannot have given up on those things. Our text this morning makes that inconceivable. We said a few minutes ago that Satan has Jesus' cry at his finish reverberating around his head. Well, perhaps we can even say reverently that God the Father has Jesus' cry, it is finished, reverberating around his head. All the time he does.

Constantly he says to himself, my dear son has finished his work and fulfilled his covenantal obligations. I must not fail in response to finish my work and fulfill my covenantal obligations, for that would terribly dishonor my son and all that he did out of loyalty for me.

[20:24] Some of you will be familiar with the musical *Les Misérables*, and one subplot in the story is the Paris Uprising of 1832. All these young men erecting barricades in the streets of the city to challenge and defy the regime. And in one scene then, we watch these young men making their

plans in a cafe, and they're full of hope and full of optimism that their cause will triumph and set in motion a new and better chapter. It's a very jubilant scene. But then one night, the government troops massacre the men on the barricades. Only one of the young men from the earlier scene survives, and he goes back to the now empty cafe, utterly devastated by what has happened. And he sings this song in which he addresses his fallen friends with whom he'd once fraternized in that place. And he reflects bitterly on the futility of their stand against the regime. The song is called Empty Chairs at Empty Tables, and one line in the song goes like this, my friends, my friends, don't ask me what your sacrifice was for. In other words, it was just futile. He could now sing, my friends, my friends, don't ask me what your sacrifice was for.

Well, God the Father does not this morning in heaven look at God the Son and say in a sad tone of voice, my son, my son, don't ask me what your sacrifice was for. Rather, he draws his son's attention this morning to a growing global church, to its expanding presence in China and Nepal and Iran and Algeria and Brazil and many other places, and he says, that, my son, is what your sacrifice was for.

And one day he will unveil before his son's wondering eyes a rejuvenated universe, liberated from the curse, liberated from its bondage to decay, and he will say, that, my son, is what your sacrifice was for.

Jesus, it is finished, I'm saying, propelled the Father into action, action that continues to this very day, action indeed that will not stop until finally the point is reached when the Father can echo the Son's cry. And pointing to a fully built church and to a completely renewed creation, the Father too can shout, it is finished. I, my son, have fulfilled my covenant obligations, just as you on that cross fulfilled yours. And so, believer, don't fret this morning.

Don't fret that God may fail to deliver on the things that he has promised in Scripture. He will not fail. His son's, it is finished, will drive him on and on and on and on until all has been done.

[23:36] What does this cry mean? It means anguish for Jesus' enemy. It means action for Jesus' Father. But then thirdly and finally this morning, it means assurance for Jesus' people.

It means assurance for Jesus' people. You don't have to turn there, but let's think back to the beginning of John's Gospel and what is pretty much the first statement in John's Gospel of Jesus' mission?

Well, it's that one uttered by John the Baptist, isn't it? As he sees Jesus walking toward him at the River Jordan and you remember his great cry, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And surely then, as we come now to the end of this Gospel, and Jesus is crying, it is finished, surely that must link back to that seminal mission statement at the start of the Gospel.

Surely, amongst all the other things that he's saying, he must be saying, that is finished. That thing that John the Baptist announced by the River Jordan is finished.

[24:54] My sin-bearing, sin-removing work, I have accomplished that. And so, at another level still then, this cry, as well as being directed at Satan, as well as being directed at the Father, is surely directed at us.

He's addressing his people, and he's assuring us in this cry that our sins are dealt with. And I suppose that's the most basic significance of all of this cry, but I suspect it's the one that we most need to hear this morning.

Believer, this is ABC stuff, but let me ask you, do you realize all your sins have been completely taken away?

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, all your sins have been completely taken away. it's interesting that Jesus says these words, it is finished, and then very calculatedly dies.

It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. I think we can perhaps relate that to a famous verse in Hebrews, Hebrews 9, verse 27, where you remember the writer says, just as this is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, and so it goes on.

[26:27] And we often apply that verse to unbelievers in a very warning kind of way, you're going to die, and after that there's the judgments. But that's not really what this verse is about in its context.

It's talking about Jesus, and it's contrasting then Jesus with the old covenant sacrifices, the Levitical sacrifices in the temple, and the way in which those sacrifices had to be repeated year after year after year after year.

And the writer is saying then mainly, he's saying that Jesus' sacrifice doesn't need to be repeated because it was actually effective, but in that verse, verse 27, he's saying, and actually it couldn't be repeated anyway because Jesus is a man and a man can only die once.

Jesus' sacrifice couldn't possibly happen year after year after year because it's appointed to man to die just once, and so Jesus couldn't possibly die over and over again.

And what that means for us then in our passage this morning, it means that as soon as Jesus bows his head and gives up his spirit, he's not going to get another shot at taking away our sins.

[27:48] It's like an exam. You're sitting there in an exam and you finish the paper early, there are 10 or 15 minutes to spare. And of course as long as you sit there quietly with the paper in front of you, you can kind of modify some of your answers, you can add bits and bobs and things like that, but as soon as you put your hand up, hand the paper in, leave the room, you cannot then waltz back in five minutes later and say, I want another go at question four, please.

And it's like that then for Jesus, once he bows his head and dies, he cannot go through this sacrifice again. He's got to get it right in this one moment.

But you see, I love his confidence here. There's no dithering. He cries, it is finished and he bows his head because he knows, he knows that he's done everything and he's dealt with every single sin.

You know how it is when you're staying in a cheap hotel and you're leaving in the morning and you have to put your key card in the slot at the reception desk and you're a bit reluctant to do it in case you've left something in the room and you go back and check that there isn't a toothbrush still in the bathroom and you're about to put it in and you think, well, there could be something under the bed and so you go and check again and you keep dithering like that.

Well, Jesus here, there's nothing of that, is there? Because he knows. He knows that he here has dealt with every last sin of every last one of all his elect people.

[29:24] He's not saying to himself, what if there's some lie that someone's told? What if there's some lustful thought that someone's had? What if there's some proud act that someone's done and I haven't quite dealt with that?

It's been accidentally overlooked. I better not die yet just in case I haven't finished the job. No, he knows. He knows every sin has been dealt with. He's completed the job perfectly and so without hesitation, without any vacillation whatsoever, he cries it is finished and he dies.

And the point I'm making is that if he was that confident, you can be that confident as well. If he was so sure he had dealt with all your sins, you can be that sure that he has dealt with all your sins.

And just one more thing and I close with this about that cry I thirst. Yes, we've said it indicates Jesus has been fighting. Yes, we've said it indicates that Psalm 69 is on his mind and he wants to fulfill all its details.

But also, of course, at the most basic and prosaic level, he wants to moisten his lips. And the reason then that he wants to moisten his lips, is that he wants this line, it is finished, to be nice and clear.

[30:40] He doesn't want to garble this line. So people at the foot of the cross are saying, what was that? What did he say? No, he wants it to be heard.

He wants John, who was standing there, we know, at the foot of the cross, to hear this line so that he can write it down, so that people in Glasgow, 2,000 years later, can turn to the page of their Bibles and read this line.

Jesus wants it to be clear. Why? The omniscient God will understand the situation, whether or not Jesus says it is finished, and he will spring into action, to use our earlier language.

Satan's not stupid, he knows that the game's up and he's defeated, whether or not Jesus says this line, it is finished. Why does he need to say it? Well, not, he needs to vocalize it so clearly, not really for God's benefit, not really for Satan's benefit, but for your benefit and mine.

so that you and I have a line, a sentence, three words with which to bludgeon every doubt and every misgiving that arises in our consciences tomorrow morning.

[31:50] Am I really saved? Am I really going to get through judgment day? What about that thing I did, that thing I said, that thing I thought? What about that terrible episode where I made a mess of everything ten years ago?

Am I worthy enough? Am I going to make it through the day of judgment? Jesus wanted us to have a line with which to batter those doubts into silence. It's like when you go into a supermarket and there's some song that's playing on the system in the supermarket and it's cheesy and it gets into your head and the rest of the day you can't get it out of your head, it's just kind of going around on a loop in your head and Jesus wants it is finished to be going around in a loop in your head for the whole of your life, not just the whole of the day.

He wants you to spend your whole life as a Christian with it is finished constantly blaring out, deafening all your doubts into silence.

And so let it in, let this cry into your head and don't let it out. And tomorrow when you're tempted to doubt, am I enough?

Is my life enough? You can respond, no it's not, but it is finished. Jesus has taken away my sin and there's not a single sin left to pull me down on the day of judgment.

[33:10] He's taken them into oblivion, he's taken them as far as the east is from the west to a place where they cannot possibly be recalled. He's done it, it's over, it's finished, nothing needs to be added, nothing supplemented.

Lean on that, cast the weight of your eternal soul on that this morning, it is finished. But you say, I'm such a failure, yes, but it's finished.

But you say, I've made such a mess of things, yes, but it is finished. Nothing else matters, it is finished. He's carried all your sin to a place from which it can never return.

May God bless his word to us. Amen. Amen.