

It is Finished

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Date: 22 September 2024

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 01] Well, good morning, everyone. My name's Steve, if I've not met you before. And if this is the first time you've been here at St. Paul's, so you've just joined in, tuned in at the moment.

We have been, over the course of a couple of months, working our way through the second half of John's biography on the life of Jesus. And we did the first half early this year.

What we've been really the undercurrent all the way through is really just showing out here again and again from the text of John's Gospel, how the Christian faith is relevant, it's reasonable, and it's good, and that ultimately it leads to abundant life.

That's the undercurrent. Today's passage is really getting to the crux of it all. It's like Jesus' whole life and ministry is coming to this point, and this is what, this crucifixion of Jesus, as we've just read, is what Christianity offers a world that is losing hope in its ability to fix itself.

That's what we're looking at today. It's what Christianity offers you, who are struggling to change, for you who are looking for peace, who cannot find security, for you who are looking for hope.

[1 : 27] And it's crucial, this message, because over two centuries now, Western societies like us here in Australia have put our hope in the progressiveness of history.

We've held this strong belief for over two centuries that every generation will experience a better world than the one before it.

We've held out this hope that it's just a matter of time, just a matter of time, and we'll be able to solve our greatest ills. We've assumed that human reason, ingenuity, science, once it's freed from superstitious beliefs, and especially anything to do with religious belief, we will have a much better world, a much better world, a better future.

And the reality is, over the last couple of centuries, there's a number of good things that have come our way. But the reality is, that the first four decades of the 20th century, last century, should have been enough to wipe out the illusion of the progressiveness of history.

In the space of four decades, our world faced two world wars, a pandemic, and a Great Depression. What followed that was the Cold War, and the threat of nuclear holocaust.

[3 : 05] Holocaust. It seems the greatest threat to our hope for a better world, in the end, is not the natural environment, but the various forms of evil that spring from the human heart.

You see, science can come up with a vaccine. We're thankful for that. And we've got a bunch of technology. And 16's coming out. That's sure to make life better for everyone.

There's a heap of stuff. That's sarcasm, in case you didn't pick that up. But what it can't do, it can't eradicate human evil.

It still exists. The ordinary cruelties of self-interest in business, racism, arrogance, pride, dishonesty, corruption, abuse, sexism, bullying, the countless acts of selfishness that we witness, and, dare I say, we even practice day by day ourselves.

And so John 19 offers us our deepest hope. The word that the Bible uses for hope is a word that means profound certainty.

[4 : 23] Christianity offers a profound certainty about our future, and even about our presence, even during evil and suffering, a profound certainty that God is guiding every twist and turn in our life towards the resurrection of our bodies and our souls to a new, perfect, and eternal world where there is no more pain, no more death, no more tears.

In fact, Christianity is the only worldview that has ever existed in society, anywhere in the world in history, that offers a perfect new world with new bodies as our ultimate hope.

It's the only one. all founded on the resurrection of one person. But that's next week. It's really all founded here in these explosive three days of history that are the death and resurrection of Jesus and Nazareth 2,000 years ago in Israel.

And today I want to focus on just two things on this passage just read out to you. Open your Bibles, John 19. Two things that Jesus said on the cross those two things reveal firstly of all the nature of the hope that Jesus offers us and secondly how do we take up, how do we accept this offer of hope?

That's in these two points and if you've got the St. Paul's app you can follow along in there if you like and take some notes. So first of all the nature of his offer of hope. At the end of the crucifixion account in John 19 we read this in verse 28.

[6 : 21] Later knowing that everything had now been finished and so that scripture would be fulfilled Jesus said I am thirsty.

Now our first reaction to hearing Jesus say that is you go well of course he's thirsty you know like he's he's out there exposed you know crucified under the hot Middle Eastern sun losing bodily fluids he's got no sun protection and of course he's thirsty.

But I think we need to dwell on it just a little bit more than that. because think about it up to this point Jesus has suffered an awful lot.

He's been beaten in the face with fists he's been lashed with a whip in such a way that his back would have been looked like a chunk of raw meat his ribs would have been exposed from behind he's had tent pegs driven through his wrists and his feet a crown of thorns squeezed over his head he's endured all of that and he's not said a single word nothing not even an oof ow that hurt nothing he accepted it and he has submitted to it so why now does he say actually I'm thirsty something deeper is happening here than mere physical thirst and so what you need to do is you need to read the

I am thirsty in the context of everything that John's already written in his gospel earlier John records Jesus encountering a woman at a well she's a Samaritan woman a first century mortal enemy of the Jewish people and she is surprised that Jesus who's a Jew asks her for a drink and then Jesus says to her in John 4 verse 13 everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again talking about the water that's in the well but whoever drinks the water that I give them will never thirst indeed the water that I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life so Jesus in this encounter is talking about something much more significant than drinking water out of a water bottle out of a well you see in the Bible thirst is a metaphor for the spiritual emptiness that comes when God is not the centre of our life

[9 : 17] Psalm 42 another one of the famous Psalms as the deer pants for streams of water so my soul pants for you my God my soul thirsts for God for the living God where can I go and meet with God you see it's one thing to believe that God exists it's another thing entirely different to have him as the central reality of your life it's not belief in God that our soul needs so much as meeting God as knowing God as experiencing God you see without God being the central reality of our life we die of thirst spiritual thirst that is it's actually possible to believe that God exists but have something entirely different as the central driving reality of our life if I may continue to use the metaphor here these other things they might be success approval comfort friendship family sex romance influence it might be money are the actual drink that we are consistently pouring into our lives in order to satisfy a soul quench that we constantly feel inside the emptiness the void that we feel inside the point

Jesus is getting to is this if we attempt to quench the thirst of our soul with anything other than the love and the beauty and the comfort of God in Jesus then we will thirst again and again and again and again and again until we thirst forever only God in Jesus can fully and completely satisfy that thirst of emptiness everything else is like drinking seawater momentarily makes you feel okay until you just thirst again and again until it kills you so what Jesus does here is he offers this woman something better the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life this woman replies sir give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and won't have to keep coming back here to draw water

Jesus wants to give it she immediately wants it but Jesus doesn't give it to her instead it appears that he entirely changed the subject altogether go and get your husband well actually I don't have a husband and Jesus says you are right when you say you have no husband in fact you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband so she wants to take up his offer of this water of life and he changes the subject and brings up her broken messed up life it's a little bit harsh isn't it Jesus but he isn't changing the subject at all he's being incredibly tender with this woman in this moment he's pointing out to her that all her messed up love life is simply a result of

her looking for men to give her what only God can give her to use the metaphor again her life has revealed that she has been drinking the seawater all her life the seawater of romance and relationships and she is thirsty and thirsty and thirsty and it will never satisfy and so Jesus offers her the fresh water that will fill her up and satisfy her forever the reason her life is going so poorly so poorly is because when we look to someone or something other than God for our love and our significance and our identity and our security and our hope we will simply thirst over and over and over again until we thirst eternally what she needed was God as the living reality at the centre of her life she needed to have the love of God at the centre of her life so that she didn't need to look to the love of a man in her case to give her what only the love of God could give her and so Jesus was not so much confronting her as he was lovingly convicting her this is a woman who we see in the text had a belief in God but the belief wasn't enough God wasn't the centre of her life and Jesus helped her see it helped her see that other things were in fact more important to her so that's the back story let's jump back into John 19 to the crucifixion of Jesus that's the reason why Jesus says I am thirsty his thirst is a picture of what he is really going through on the cross as he experienced ultimate thirst for us the old testament the book of Nahum puts it like this who can withstand his indignation this is talking about

[15 : 55] God who can endure his fierce anger his wrath is poured out like fire as I said last week on the cross Jesus is here getting what the whole human race deserved for our evil in putting everything else but God our creator God is the centre controlling influence of our life he's getting what we deserve our life our creator God he was experiencing divine justice it was like in that moment the white hot anger of God like a million suns burning down on him he is thirsting thirsting and thirsting so that we could receive living water he is dying for our spiritual thirst he is experiencing the agony of being separated from God the fountain of living water so that we can have access to the fountain of living water for all of eternity he experienced the agony of separation from the love of his father the experience of his fire of judgment so that we can experience his love and the never ending refreshment of the water of eternal life he got what we deserve so that we can get what he deserves he suffered so that we can have a river of life welling up in us that is another way of saying his favour his love his approval his acceptance that's the nature of his offer to us today as it was to this woman at the well in

John 4 so how do we if that's the offer how do we take up the offer and that's that's the next point I want to go to the next thing Jesus says the last thing he says as he breathes out his last is in verse 30 it is finished it is finished Jesus is using a word here in the original language means totally paid it's a word you'd write across an account in the original language in the Greek language it would be it is finished it is totally paid paid in full one of the wonderful and great paradoxes of history is that here is the helpless and powerless and dependent Jesus dying on a cross and his last words are I did it I did it I've triumphed I've accomplished it it's finished it's done victory and what he's described what he is his accomplishment here is what a little bit later in the New Testament is described by in 1 Peter 3 Christ also suffered once for sin the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God I've done it the way is now open there is this infinite chasm between us and our creator God and Jesus has done absolutely everything that's required he has paid every single debt that we owe to God dealt with every single bit of shame and guilt and sin he's accomplished it all there's nothing more that we must do to bridge the gap between us and God that's his last words it's finished a word to my Asian friends and elite western people can contrast the last words of Jesus with the last words of Buddha do you know what his last words were strive without ceasing strive without ceasing Jesus I have thirst for you it is done it is finished it is accomplished Buddha Buddha says keep working keep going keep going keep going and you may get there now let me say there is a whole lot of admirable things about Buddhism like the self-denial and the recognition that selfishness is in fact a major problem but the eightfold path of Buddhism is incredibly hard it is demanding and that's why his last words were strive without ceasing if you want to achieve enlightenment Jesus last words was I've done everything I've done all the striving for you I've done everything that's required to bring you to salvation I've thirsted for you so that you can be satisfied religion as I said last week is where you give God a performance and hope that he will bless you on the base of your performance the core message of Christianity is that God blesses us in Jesus Christ and we get to live to love to serve him the one who has already given us the love the blessing and the acceptance

[22 : 23] Jesus says it's done any effort on our behalf to make his finished work better does not in fact make it better in any way whatsoever it actually makes it worse any effort at all any striving at all when Jesus says it is finished what he meant to say was it is finished we cannot receive his salvation and act as if we can add to it in any way whatsoever and I know there's a bunch of Christians sitting in the room going yeah you know I heard this 30 years ago I understand that Steve got this piece of information but let me speak particularly to the

Christians in the room right now someone who says I follow Jesus there are two kinds of Christians if you like who try to add to the work of Jesus one kind is the beat myself up person and the other is to prove myself person the self beater is the one where every time someone criticizes them they are devastated and they beat themselves up every time you do something wrong or make a mistake you beat yourself up in fact you did something 15 years ago and you still can't get past it always the need to feel bad about yourself let me just tenderly say to you in this moment you need to know and you probably need to know this every hour of every day Jesus was beaten up for you he was beaten up for you and good enough for you he paid for your sins stop trying to pay for them yourself it is finished any attempt to add to anything that he has done is simply going to subtract from it and your joy in it the other person is the self prover this is the other end of the spectrum they usually feel much better about themselves they're often proud self made person you've had a bit of success in your life and you think it means something in actual fact and there's the need to have the money there's the need to have the success the possessions the family the career the recognition to feel secure and significant means you are constantly adding to

Jesus work he's the only one who makes you feel secure and significant and acceptable the message of Christianity is that we are all sinners saved by grace and if we trust in the finished work of Jesus that's it it's so simple and it's so simple that our rebellious human heart hates it and that's why we must preach the gospel to ourselves every single day as I said last week our hearts are more evil than we ever dare to believe but we are more loved and we are much more affirmed and accepted than we ever dare hope or imagine in Jesus the person who tries to prove themselves doesn't understand they never can you never can

I remember sitting with a pastor a few years ago now and we were talking about church growth and so on he was a pastor of a church of 15,000 people and he said to me Steve you know it's never enough the size of your church is never enough never satisfy only Christ satisfies what is it that you're pursuing the person who tries to prove themselves doesn't understand they never can be in factual fact you're more evil than you ever imagined that's a crowd conversely people constantly trying to atone for their flaws by beating themselves up never will because you're already more loved and affirmed more than your wildest dream

God humbles one and he affirms the other it is finished it's done Jesus death doesn't contribute to our salvation it is our salvation all of our overwork and anxiety and constant striving and lack of gratitude and joy is because we don't yet realise it is finished and this is the amazing truth of the Christian faith as in is central to the events of Easter it's so summarised succinctly in the New Testament writer this is 1 Timothy here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is there any any more wonderful news for people like us who know that we cannot measure up to the demands of our own conscience let alone the demands of our own morality while living in fear what the future holds

[28 : 58] Christianity is so full of hope hope for the self beaters hope for the self provers it is full of hope for you it is full of hope for this world let me just say it's why we're raising funds for Burundi for training of theological students this hope might go out it's why we're raising funds for Layla Park there's someone there already in the role imagine an extra day and I suspect that as this hope wells in up in us more and more we would be like the Thessalonians in 2 Corinthians 8 despite our extreme poverty just overwhelmed in generosity why not because they had to but

Paul tells us it's because of love love of Christ has flooded their hearts right now we are way behind on both targets way behind I'm not sure what you want to do about that it is finished in Jesus see your need met in him and center your life around him