

A Cry of Victory!

John 19:16-30

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

Ames, Iowa

April 4, 2021

In our service on Good Friday, we looked at *Jesus' cry of desolation*. This morning we consider Jesus' *cry of victory* in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection from the dead in the Gospel of John 19:30.

The sermon will actually be on one word in v. 30. It is the Greek word *tetelestai*. It takes three English words to translate this one Greek word. The English translation is, "*It is finished!*"

"*It is finished*" is a famous phrase and a beautiful phrase as well. However, the English phrase famous but the Greek word *tetelestai* is a famous as well. Many Christians are familiar with this particular Greek word.

Over the centuries much has been written and preached about this one Greek word. The fact that so much has been written and preached about the word *tetelestai* over the centuries and even today is an example of the impact of the finished work of Christ.

The English translation of *tetelestai* is "*It is finished.*" It is a good translation, but it does not do this particular Greek word justice. There is so much more to the Greek word *tetelestai* than the translation "*It is finished*" can communicate.

What we are going to do this morning is unpack the meaning of this one word. This particular Greek word is complicated to translate because it is in a tense of Greek that we do not have in English. It is a *perfect, passive verb*.

Here is what this means. A *past tense* verb defines a completed action. We understand that part. However, this completed action is not simply a one-and-done action. To be a *perfect passive verb* means its action is completed in the past, but it has implications and impacts all the way into eternity. A *perfect passive verb* is a verb that keeps on giving.

While that is the breakdown of the verb, we have not even begun to look at the definition of the word and how it is used. *Tetelestai* comes from the Greek verb *teleo*, which means *to finish or to complete*. So, for Jesus to use *teleo* as a *perfect passive verb* in reference to His crucifixion means that although His work has been completed, it is going to have an impact from that point on and into eternity.

Tim Keller says that a better translation of *tetelestai* would be, "*I've done it, and it is utterly finished. It is complete. I've done it, and I've done it completely. I've accomplished it utterly. I have traversed the infinite distance between you and God, and there is not an inch left. I have done everything necessary to bring you right into [God's] arms. There's not one thing left for you to do. I've done it. I've done it completely. It is absolutely and utterly finished. There's nothing else for you to do at all. Period.*"¹

Wow! I can see why the translators just decided to go with "*It is finished.*" But I also see why the Apostle John said at the end of his Gospel that if everything that Jesus did was written down that all the books in the world could not contain them. This one word deserves to be translated as a paragraph in order to explain its meaning.

So, with that said, here is my disclaimer as we move into the rest of the sermon. There is no way I can cover everything that Jesus meant when He said it is finished.

¹ Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

Now, let's look at the Greek word *tetelestai*. We are going to examine three things that Jesus meant He had completed or accomplished when He said from the cross, "*It is finished!*" Here is the outline: *God's Word, Salvation, and Resurrection.*

I. God's Word is fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus said in The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17-18:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

At the very outset of His ministry, Jesus makes a very comprehensive statement that His purpose is to fulfill the Law. What He meant is that He would obey all of God's Laws perfectly, and as a result, He would *perfectly* keep the covenant of works.

Then He said He would fulfill the Prophets. When He said this, He meant that He would fulfill all that had been prophesied about Him in the Old Testament. So, Jesus came to accomplish all the prophecies about the Messiah from Genesis to Malachi. You have to understand—Jesus' statement of purpose in Matthew 5:17-18 is an incredible statement.

Now, to help us get our minds around Jesus' fulfillment of God's word. I want to go back to something I touched on in the Good Friday service when I listed some of the prophecies Jesus had fulfilled.

In his book, *Seven Sayings*, theologian A. W. Pink laid out some of the prophecies concerning Jesus' crucifixion. Here are a few of them, and this morning I will read the Scripture that goes with them. It was prophesied that:

Jesus' betrayer would be a familiar friend. Psalm 41:9 says:

*Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*

Jesus would be forsaken by His disciples because they were offended to be associated with Him. Psalm 31:11,

*Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my
neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances.*

Jesus would be falsely accused. Psalm 35:11 says,

*Malicious witnesses rise up;
they ask me of things that I do not know.*

Jesus would be silent before his judges, Isaiah 53:7,

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.*

Jesus would be proven guiltless, Isaiah 53:9,

*although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

Jesus would be counted with the transgressors, Isaiah 53:12,

*he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;*

Jesus would be crucified. Psalm 22:16-17 does not use the word crucifixion because crucifixion had not been invented yet. However, it describes Jesus' crucifixion on the cross:

*they have pierced my hands and feet—
¹⁷I can count all my bones*

Jesus was mocked by spectators, Psalm 109:25 says,

*I am an object of scorn to my accusers;
when they see me, they wag their heads.*

Jesus' enemies also mocked Him because God did not deliver Him. Psalm 22:7-8,

*All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
⁸“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”*

They gambled for Jesus' clothes. Psalm 22:18,

*they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

On the cross, Jesus prayed for his enemies. Isaiah 53:12,

*he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

Jesus was forsaken by God. Psalm 22:1,

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?*

Jesus' thirst on the cross. Psalm 69:21,

for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Psalm 31:5 describes Jesus yielding up his spirit into the hands of His Father in Heaven:

*Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.*

Psalm 34:20 tells us that none of Jesus' bones were broken,

*He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.*

Finally, the gospel accounts tell us Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb, which was foretold in Isaiah 53:9,²

*And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,*

All of these prophecies were plainly foretold centuries before they came to pass, and there are many others as well. Brothers and sisters, there is not one of the prophecies about Jesus that was not fulfilled.

All of the prophecies that Jesus came to fulfill, He fulfilled perfectly. He never sinned by breaking God's law. He never said, "*Oops! I made a mistake.*" He never said, "*My bad Lord. Please forgive me because I messed up.*" He never failed to obey God. He did all things perfectly. As a result, He fulfilled the law, the prophets, and finally, the covenants were fulfilled, and the New Covenant was established in His blood.

So, when Jesus cried out, "*It is finished,*" He had fulfilled all of the law and the prophets. There was not one of the smallest details that He left undone. Everything He had accomplished lead to our *Salvation*.

II. Salvation has been accomplished (John 19:30)

The focus of Jesus perfectly fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, the Law, and the Old Covenant of works was to accomplish the atonement for our sins against God. So, when Jesus cried, "*It is finished!*" He meant that all of the Law and the Prophets had been fulfilled in order to accomplish salvation for His people.

When He said, "*It is finished*" in John 19:30, He meant that there was nothing else to do for our redemption. He had done it all. He had done what we were unable to accomplish. He kept the Law and the prophets. We were unable to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, so He did it for us and then died in our place and for our sin of breaking God's laws.

When Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" He did not mean we need to keep working for our salvation. He did not mean we need to do more and try harder. When He said, "*It is finished,*" He really meant it is finished.

Think about it this way. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches us that our faith is a gift of grace. That gift comes from Christ's completed work on the cross. It is often hard for us to believe that we can do nothing to secure our salvation. Americans like to earn it. Actually, that is not unique to Americans. It is because all humans are born with a sin nature that sin nature fills us with the desire to earn our salvation. We like earning it. We want to deserve it.

What makes true biblical Christianity unique and different from all other world religions is that it teaches us that we cannot earn it. There is nothing more for us to do. Jesus earned it. We cannot earn it or even add to His finished work.

A. W. Pink tells the story of a Christian farmer who wanted to share Christ with his neighbor who was a carpenter. The farmer shared the gospel over and over with the carpenter, but he would not accept the fact that he could not add to his salvation. The carpenter believed he had to do something, so he kept rejecting the farmer's message of the gospel.

Then one day, the farmer asked his friend to build him a gate for his barnyard. The carpenter worked and worked on the gate and built it to the exact specifications the farmer wanted. When it was ready, he called the farmer, and the farmer came over and loaded up the gate. Then they both drove over to the farmer's barnyard where the carpenter installed the gate.

² James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 1523.

As soon as the gate was installed, the farmer pulled out an ax and began to hack on the gate. The carpenter was horrified and stopped the farmer and asked him what he was doing. The farmer paused and said, “Well, I think I need to add to your work.” “Add to my work!” the carpenter exclaimed, “You need to stop.” But the farmer kept hacking on the gate until he ruined it.

The carpenter said, “You have ruined the gate! I had built that gate to perfection.” Then the farmer said, “That is exactly what you do when you try to add to the complete, perfect atonement of Christ. You ruin His work with your miserable additions to it.” Finally, the carpenter understood his mistake and fell upon Christ’s mercy.³

Friends, Jesus’ last word from the cross—*tetelestai*, is exactly the opposite of what the desire of your heart is to do—*earn your salvation*. Biblical Christianity teaches that Jesus has achieved our salvation, and He blesses us with it. All we can do is be given the gift of faith, and then we then lovingly place that faith in Jesus completed work on our behalf. Finally, we lovingly obey God because we have been blessed with the gift of salvation.

Let me ask you a question. Are you striving to earn your salvation and hoping God will accept you, or are you resting in the completed work of Christ? If you think you must strive to earn your salvation, why don’t you give up on your worthless efforts today and receive the gift of salvation that Jesus accomplished with the gift of faith that He gives you?

Simply turn from your sin of striving and trying to earn God’s favor, acceptance and righteousness, and trust in Christ’s finished work. Then you will know His salvation and the power of His resurrection. Talk to me at the end of the service, and let me help you or find a Christian in our service to explain to you what it means to trust Christ.

III. Our Resurrection is Assured (Phil. 2:8-9)

When Jesus said yelled, “*tetelestai*” on the cross, He was also proclaiming that He had been obedient to God to the point of His death, and this obedience means He will be raised to life again by the Father.

Philippians 2:8-9 teach us one of the implications of the Greek word *tetelestai*.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him.

John Piper says, “*And by means of the resurrection, God the Father cries, ‘It was finished indeed!’ The great work of paying for our sin and providing our righteousness and satisfying God’s justice was finished in the death of Jesus.*”⁴

When v. 9 says, “*Therefore God has highly exalted him.*” The Apostle Paul is explaining that Jesus’ exaltation is seen in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and being restored to His place as King of kings and Lord of lords. Now, as the King, He gives life to those trapped in spiritual death, and He raises them to be true, eternal life in Him.

In other words, in Jesus’ resurrection, we see the impact of the *perfect passive tense* of *tetelestai*. This verb is still at work today because of the finished work of Christ.

³ Pink, *Seven Sayings*.

⁴ John Piper, *Fifty Reasons Jesus Came to Die*, 100-102.

Romans 8:11 says:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

And Romans 6:5 says:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Friends Christ finished all that is necessary for us to have salvation from our sin and to be reconciled to God. His finished work includes your resurrection from the dead. There is nothing for you to do except believe in God's word and trust Jesus.

As the old hymn says:

*Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

Likewise, we read in the Gospels where some Galileans approached Jesus and asked Him what they must do to do the works of God? Jesus replied:

This is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent.

He didn't tell them that they needed to earn it, but all they needed to do was believe in Jesus. Are you trusting Christ? Let this Easter be the day of salvation for you where you begin to trust in the finished work of Jesus.