

IT IS FINISHED

John 19:30

By Rev. Leo Douma

21st March 2008 **Good Friday**

Those who love watching a good rugby match know that the game is not over till the siren has gone. If your team is down you don't give up because you know that winning the game can be determined by an unexpected try that rallies a losing side and turns the tide. Winning a war is often determined by a decisive battle, one that shifts the advantage. With that decisive battle won, winning the war becomes just a matter of time. For example, World War II ended on 7th May 1945. That day was "VE-Day", the day of victory and celebration. That victory came about because of the decisive change that came about on 6th June 1944. That was when the Allies landed at Normandy. That day was known as "D-Day". It was the decisive battle that began the change that finally led to victory. Now in a couple of days it will be Easter Sunday, the day we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. And a real celebration it should be too! But I wonder if we realize that Jesus had already begun his celebration on the cross! We see it here in the words of our text, Jesus' sixth saying on the cross: (19:30) "*It is finished!*" It may seem odd, but here on the cross Jesus makes his most excited and most joyous statement during his entire time on earth. In the Greek it is a one word exclamation "*Tetelestai!*" "*Done!*" "*Completed!*" "*It is finished!*" This joyous confession is a shout of jubilation. John does not note the tone in how Jesus says this one word, but Mark tells us Jesus cried out in a loud voice. Yes, let's understand this from the outset. This sixth word is not the groan of a person giving up: "I am finished, I've had enough". The crowd at the cross might have expected such a groan. After all, just before this Jesus had let out that violent scream, complaining of God forsaking him. And then Jesus had croaked a complaint of

being thirsty; an obvious indication of the suffering his body was going through. It would have surprised no one there if Jesus had groaned: "I am finished. I can't go on. I give up!" But it is not like that. This is a statement, an exclamation of joy: "Father it's been done. It is finished". There is joy and excitement in the voice of Jesus in a way we have not seen before. There is a taste of victory, that the decisive battle has been fought.

Let's focus for a moment on the meaning of Jesus' one word exclamation of joy. One commentator said that the one Greek word, *'tetelestai'* is the greatest word ever spoken in all of history. It is not a common word, of course, in our culture but it is profoundly powerful. The Greeks loved to say a lot using as few words as possible. And this one word is filled with meaning. This one word, uttered by Jesus on the cross, terrified Hell and sent a thrill running through Heaven. It is important to note that this verb is in the perfect tense. That's significant because it refers to an action that has been completed in the past with the results continuing into the present. A verb in the past tense says 'This happened'. The perfect tense adds the idea that 'this happened and it is still in effect today'. It literally means "it was finished and as a result it is forever done'. Or, "it was finished in the past, and it is still finished in the present. And it will continue to be finished in the future.' We could say it this way: 'All has been done that needed to be done. Nothing more is needed.' People in the first century would have understood the word because it was used in many ways. A farmer used it to describe an animal so beautiful that it seemed to have no faults. If he brought that lamb to the temple to be offered for sacrifice, the priest, whose job it was to ensure no animals with defects were offered for sacrifice, would look at it and say 'tetelsatai!' What a perfect animal you are offering to God! A carpenter, after finishing a perfect piece of furniture would smile

and say 'Tetelestai'! An artist, describing his finishing touch on a canvas would step back and pronounce, 'Tetelestai'! A servant would return to his master after faithfully finishing his job and report 'Tetelestai- Done! I have finished the work you gave me to do'. And, perhaps most importantly, this Greek word was a banking term. When a person had paid off his debt, the banker would hand him a receipt with the word 'Tetelestai' written across it: 'Paid in full'. Archaeologists have repeatedly found the Latin equivalent, 'consummatum est', scrawled across tax receipts used in those days. So you get the sense of this word. It is finished. There are no defects. It is perfect. The job has been performed exactly to the specifications. The debt is fully paid.

So, what has Jesus finished, perfectly, that is not just something completed in the past, but has effect to the present? Has all Jesus' saving work been completed? No, he has yet to rise from the dead and return to heaven. He has yet to pour out his Spirit and rule from his father's right hand (namely, the Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost). Has the full plan of God been completed? No, not really. Such will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to judge all creation, when all the earth will see him as Lord of all and Jesus presents the kingdom to his father in its final glory. Then God's plan will be fully completed. Has Jesus, suffering and humiliation been finished? No, Jesus has yet to die and be buried. Well, then, what is finished? The torment of hell, the payment, the suffering of the penalty for sin, where Christ was required to personally give himself as the sacrifice, that is over. Now, you notice that Jesus does not say "I have finished". There is not just personal relief here. Jesus is not triumphing in himself: 'I have done it, I have managed to go through Hell and come out the other side.' Jesus says "*It is finished*". Jesus himself is not the subject of this statement so much as the will of God. The task that God the Father

had given him is central. Jesus as the obedient son, as the obedient servant, has carried out the will of the loving father. Jesus' joy is that, in this moment of time as he is on the cross and has just come out of hell, his deed has fulfilled the eternal plan of God to bring peace and reconciliation, to bring forgiveness and life. When it comes to having people come to God and receive forgiveness and eternal life, nothing else, ever, needs to be done. No more suffering, ever, needs to be done to pay for the sin of those who come to the father in repentance and faith, nothing, ever!

Jesus was thirty-three when he was crucified. When people die young they usually leave behind a lot of unfinished business. Many might think that at thirty-three years of age, and only three years in his ministry, surely Jesus' work on earth and just begun. But no, in John 19:28, John writes "*Later, knowing that all was now completed (tetelestai) and so that the scriptures would be fulfilled...*" That's why Jesus jubilated "*It is finished*" Scripture is completed. Some once counted the number of promises there are in the bible- more than 300. And there are also more than 300 prophecies about the Messiah which had also at this point as Jesus spoke this sixth word been completed. From before the creation of the world God, triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, had a plan for salvation and a part for each to play in that plan. We glimpse pieces of that plan throughout scripture as we hear how the "*seed of the woman*" will "*crush the head of the serpent*", when we read of Abraham's seed be a "*blessing to all the nations*", when we read of the "*virgin will be with child*", or think of the "*descendent of David forever on the throne*". We see it some more when we think again of Isaiah 53 as it foretold how the servant of God would be "*despised and rejected*". Not only the prophecies but the whole sacrificial system pointed to what Jesus had just finished on the cross. For hundreds of years, rivers of blood had flowed from the altar of God and yet the cost of

sin had never been fully paid. The book of Leviticus describes the rather complex system that involved offering different animals to be sacrificed. The Law was very specific. There could be no unblemished animals. They had to be perfect. The priest spent a good part of every day killing animals and splashing the blood on the altar. In some cases he would preserve part of the animal for food and then burn the rest. His job description involved slaughtering, draining blood and burning. He did this day after day, week after week, month after month. No matter how hard he tried to clean himself up, he would come home with the smell of blood and burning flesh on his clothes. The work of priests was never done, because people kept sinning. The priests were never allowed to sit when they were on duty, symbolising that their job was never completed. Each day brought new sins and a fresh cry for blood. A priest who served for 40 years would have killed thousands of animals. When he died, another took his place and did the same thing. Blood, death, sacrifice. But now Jesus can triumphantly say "*It is finished*". Jesus was the perfect, completely sinless sacrifice. His suffering of hell has paid the price in full. Never, ever, ever again was there, is there, a need again for sacrifices for sin. Jesus has done it all. Christ has made atonement for our sin. When teaching young people I say that 'atonement' means 'at-one-ment'. Because Jesus has paid the price, through him we can be forgiven and be at one with God. Because of what Jesus has done on the cross we can now have access to God. We are justified of our sin. Again as I teach young people, 'justified' means 'just-as-if-I' had never sinned. Because we are justified, God adopts us as his own children, and the Spirit resides in us, enabling us to respond to God. Now we ourselves are the Holy of Holies of God's temple. No longer is there a high priest, slaughtering the animals, speaking for the people at the temple of God. Now we are the temple. We are now seen by God as spotless as his own Son. God has said all along that

his justice must be satisfied, the requirements of his holiness must be satisfied. The human race cannot rebel against its maker and not feel the awful wrath of God. But now on the cross in Jesus' suffering the justice of God and the love of God embrace. Scripture is fulfilled. Jesus has done it and brought salvation. "*It is finished*". And because of that the promises about Jesus' second coming are also guaranteed. The promise of a new heavens and a new earth, where sin will be no more, where there will be no more crying or mourning – it will surely come because Christ has done it. He has conquered hell and sin and death. 'Father- it is finished'. Jesus has accomplished salvation. Nothing more is needed for the complete forgiveness of all God's people, for the complete restoration of the entire creation. Nothing more is needed. No other sacrifice is required. If I believe in Jesus then nothing is lacking for me to have a life with God as his child. '*It is finished*'. There is nothing, absolutely nothing we can contribute to his work of redemption. Jesus has done it all. There is nothing you can do to have God love you more. Unfortunately, far too many people, even lots of Christians are performing to be good enough. Perhaps it's to get approval from a parent or to impress the boss at work, or to impress friends. We feel the need to 'do' something. But no degree of personal change, church attendance, good works, sacrifice, will get you any closer to God. Sin is only forgiven by what Jesus did on the cross. Some years ago a Christian farmer was deeply concerned for a friend who was a carpenter. Each time the farmer tried to share the gospel, and said how Jesus had made the way for him to have a relationship with God the carpenter argued that he had to do things on his own to get to heaven. The farmer decided to ask the carpenter to make a wooden gate for him. When the gate was finished, the farmer hung it out in the field. He then asked the carpenter to meet him at the gate the following morning. When the carpenter arrived he was surprised to see the farmer

standing by the gate with a sharp axe and asked 'What are you going to do with that axe?' The farmer replied 'I'm going to add a few cuts and stokes to your work'. The carpenter was aghast and said 'There's no need to do that. The gate is perfect just the way it is. I did all that is necessary to it.' The farmer ignored him, lifted his axe and slashed and hacked at the gate till it was completely destroyed. The carpenter cried out, "Look what you've done! You've ruined my work!" The farmer replied 'Yes I did and that exactly what you're trying to do. You're trying to nullify the finished work of Christ by your own miserable additions to it!' Are you doing the same thing? Because Jesus cried out "*It is finished*" your sin, all of it, has been paid for. Since Jesus paid all of it you don't have to. If you try to be good enough to get to heaven it means you don't think he paid it all. This Good Friday, understand what Jesus has done. The price for sin, your sin, my sin, is horrendous. But Jesus paid the price in full. So make it a very Good Friday, by bowing in deep humility before God, acknowledge your sin and your need for forgiveness and receive the grace God has to offer.

On that first Good Friday Jesus in great excitement and jubilation declared on the cross "*It is finished!*" And on Easter Sunday morning the Father replied to that jubilant cry. He opened the heavens, removed the stone from Jesus' grave and raised Jesus to life. With that reply God had responded and said "Yes! It is finished. My plan of salvation, my decree is fulfilled. It is all paid in full. Here is my receipt." As Paul said in Romans 4:25: "*[Jesus}...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*" The resurrection of Jesus is God's "Amen!" to Jesus "It is finished!" The Son said "Done!" and the Father replied "It sure is Son, it sure is!"