

Good Friday April 2, 2010 John 19:30

A plaque hanging on the wall of an elderly Christian couple reads, “The three most important words ever spoken: ‘It is finished.’” As recorded in the Greek New Testament Jesus didn’t speak three words, but one: “tetelestai,” which is translated into English, “It is finished!”

You know the feeling when you’ve completed a project at work, or a big assignment at school. You stay up late, sweat and struggle, and finally you can say with great satisfaction, “It is finished!” Jesus finished all the work He had come to do here on earth, 100 percent, completed. Exactly what work was that? Even before Jesus was born, the Father announced it to Joseph through an angel. **“Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21). Jesus never lost sight of his mission. When Jesus was 12 years old and his parents found him in the temple at Jerusalem, he asked them, **“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house”** (Luke 2:49)? During His earthly ministry He announced, **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”** (Luke 19:10).

To save us He, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, had become true man, born of the Virgin Mary. He humbled himself by being born under the Law God requires all humans to keep. You know the powerful temptations you just don’t want to give in to, but then do, and the terrible guilt you feel after? Jesus was tempted even more severely, directly by the Evil Foe himself. Had He given in even once, He would have failed in His mission. But He never sinned. Through His obedience, we are considered perfect by God our heavenly Father!

Jesus also knew the high price He would have to pay as punishment for all human sin. As Good Friday drew near He informed his disciples, **“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death . . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:18,28). Those who claim Jesus was only a pious man teaching new ways to love God or a healer for damaged emotions or sick bodies miss the point completely. He is fully God and fully human. He came to rescue us lost sinners from eternal damnation in hell by suffering the punishment we deserved for our sins! The night before He died He prayed to God the Father, **“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do”** (John 17:4). Tetelestai – it is finished! We’re saved.

“It is finished“ means something more. Let me explain. Do you have any outstanding debts? A mortgage? A car payment? A student loan? A balance on your credit card? Won’t you be thankful and relieved when you make your last payment and the loan papers finally arrive in the mail marked, “Paid in full”? In Jesus’ day the Greek word “tetelestai” was commonly used in the form of a stamp for business documents. It meant, “Paid in full.”

What debt did we owe God? Whenever we sin, it would be charged to our account. Sooner or later it must be paid. That time you were so worried or busy you forgot to pray; the time you neglected your children or disobeyed your parents; that time you lost your temper; that time you quarreled with your spouse; the time you cheated in school or in business; took care of your earthly desires but defrauded God out of what you could have given for His eternal work; lied or gossiped about your neighbor; insisted on your way in the congregational meeting – God would have charged those sins to your account. Could

you ever have paid them off? Impossible! Nothing we do today could every pay for our sins of yesterday. Every day would only pile on more new debt.

Jesus said, "It is finished." He announced that all sins of all time were paid in full. John, who was standing beneath the cross and heard Jesus' cry, later wrote, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). He also explained, "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Every last one. The little ones I can't remember? The big ones I can't forget? The dumb ones I should never have committed? The stubborn ones? The filthy and disgusting ones? Yes. Yes. Yes. Jesus paid for all in full!

Because Jesus said, "It is finished," Paul could say to the jailer at Philippi, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Ac 16:31). Because Jesus said, "It is finished," I can today assure you that God loves you and through Jesus He has given you everlasting life. Because Jesus said, "It is finished," we need not fear we still must do some work of penance; suffer in purgatory, badger ourselves with regret, or be reincarnated to this life until we get it right. Trust in Jesus. Because Jesus said, "It is finished," we're forgiven!

If you went out with friends and they picked up the tab for dinner, you wouldn't insist on paying for it too, would you? What would you do? You would say, "Thank you." How do we say "Thank you" to God? Like Christ, we want to bring glory to Him by completing the work He has given us to do. What is that? It's not some big venture in the future. It's right here, right now, and always. "You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Tonight we go again in spirit to Calvary to be there when they crucified our Lord. We don't stand at the cross to feel sorry for Jesus nor to weep for Him. We stand at the cross to view Christ crucified with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will cause us to appreciate anew all Jesus did to save us from our sin. It is well we go to the cross, year after year, week after week, day after day - lest we ever forget "it is finished." Then as we live by faith in Him, as we live in love for Him according to His holy commandments, at the end of our lives we will also be able to say with thankful heart those three most important words ever spoken, "It is finished." Amen.