

BaptistWay: It is finished

January 22, 2015

- *The BaptistWay lesson for Feb. 8 focuses on John 19:28-42.*

While touring Eastern Europe, Christian author and Oxford professor John Lennox met a Jewish woman researching the Holocaust deaths of her parents and other relatives. He told the story of their encounter in his book, *Gunning for God*. While observing images of the horrific medical experiments carried out at the Auschwitz Nazi death camp, the woman suddenly turned to Lennox—whom she knew to be a Christ-follower—and asked, “What does your religion make of this?”

Struggling to respond, Lennox eventually said, “I would not insult your memory of your parents by offering you simplistic answers, ...but I do have what, for me at least, is a doorway into an answer.”

“What is it?” she asked.

He did not remain distant

Lennox replied: “You know I am a Christian. That means that I believe Yeshua is the Messiah. I also believe he was God incarnate, come into our world as Savior, which is what his name means. Now, I know this is even more difficult for you to accept. Nevertheless, just think about this question: If Yeshua was really God, as I believe he was, what was God doing on a cross? Could it be that God here meets our heartbreaks, by demonstrating he did not remain distant from our human suffering, but became part of it himself? For me, this is the beginning of a living hope that cannot be smashed by the enemy of death. The story does not end in the darkness of the cross. Yeshua conquered death. He rose from the dead; and one day, as the final judge, he will assess everything in absolute fairness, righteousness and mercy.”

After a few moments of silence, with tears in her eyes, very quietly she said: “Why has no one ever told me that about my Messiah before?”

For some of us, the crucifixion is so familiar, we may skim the story when reading the Gospels or hurry over it in an effort to get to the “good” part—the resurrection. But in the crucifixion, God did meet our heartbreaks. He didn’t remain distant from our suffering. Through Jesus’ willing sacrifice and obedience, he provided the means necessary for each person to be in right standing with God’s holiness. We needed the crucifixion, because it was there Jesus said, “It is finished.”

Bleak and severe

Jesus’ crucifixion was bleak and severe. The mere fact he was made to carry his own cross to Golgotha (v. 17) shows he was considered nothing more than a common criminal worthy of capital punishment. Hanging naked, publicly exposed and humiliated, Jesus endured both intense physical pain and the agony of loneliness. Most of his disciples scattered, abandoning him to his fate; and as he hung there, those who remained neither rose up to defend him, remove him from the cross nor resist the authorities.

In fact, Peter already had denied even knowing him (Luke 22:56-57). Even still, in the concluding moments of his life, Jesus expressed compassion and concern for others; seeing his mother, he entrusted her to John’s care (vv. 26-27). Then, he addressed his own need, crying out, “I am thirsty” (v. 28). Not only did this fulfill Scripture (Psalm 69:19, 21), it further proved his humanity. He—like us—had real hurts, real needs.

The drink offered him in those last moments (v. 29) was either wine vinegar or a cheap, bitter wine. Regardless, it was unpleasant. Imagine you’ve just finished running a marathon followed by push-mowing 10 acres in the Texas summer heat, and you’re offered an acrid drink to quench your

thirst. Not exactly the refreshment you seek.

'It is finished!'

Apparently, though, that bitter drink gave him enough strength for one final cry: "It is finished" (v. 30). The Greek word Jesus used here, *tetelestai*, means "to complete, conclude, accomplish, finish or pay a debt." His cry announced nothing further needed to be done. Whether a cry of relief or victory is a matter of debate—I believe it was both. The agony was ending and God's purposes were being triumphantly accomplished in that moment.

Jesus had perfectly fulfilled God's directives: He'd lived a sinless life, proclaimed God's coming kingdom, undergone the human experience, voluntarily given his life to complete the requirements for our redemption from sin, established a basis for faith, and died innocently as the perfect and final sacrifice. Then, with his mental and spiritual faculties intact and his physical body torn and bleeding, Jesus died (v. 30).

Jesus' death is the critical moment in John's Gospel. He carefully went on to outline what happened next, beautifully tying in references from earlier in his book as well as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. As a well-written tale should, his plot described the characters regrouping—confirming Jesus' death (vv. 31-37), removing his body from the cross (vv. 38-39), burying their Lord and rabbi in a borrowed tomb (vv. 40-42). And then John reached the climax—the resurrection—followed by the denouement of Christ's appearances and commissioning of the disciples (John 20-21).

But we cannot leave the crucifixion without responding to it. We must see the crucifixion in all its gore and feel it in all its agony. Otherwise, our minds may not truly appreciate the depth of obedience Jesus exhibited, nor might our hearts adequately thank God for joining humanity and willingly sacrificing, meeting our heartbreaks and experiencing human suffering.

Without the crucifixion, there's no need for a resurrection.

He humbled himself

What Jesus did there finished the work for making intimate, personal relationship with God possible for all eternity. Without the crucifixion, we're too sinful to enter into God's presence. Our humble response not only is to be awe and gratitude, but also obedience to the one "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Will you today, in this moment, bow your knee, and with your tongue "acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11)? Will you then live in surrendered obedience to his lordship? Obedience is the response of grateful love; it is the response he desires (John 14:23).