

Explore the Bible: It is Finished

May 2, 2023

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for May 14 focuses on John 19:17-30.*

The words “It is finished”—as they relate to Jesus’ death on the cross—carry different meaning depending on the view one has of both Jesus and his purpose on the cross. For some, these words signified the end of a rebellion led by a radical cult-leader. For others, these words signified the end of a revolution led by an incompetent Messiah-wannabe. In these two camps, no matter which way you spin it, Jesus failed and authoritarian institutions won.

However, through the perspective of John—and, subsequently, through the perspectives of those who would encounter the resurrected Jesus—these words are evidence of God’s purpose to finally defeat sin and death through the cross.

For three years of ministry, Jesus had accumulated quite a gathering of people—people who adored him, people who devoted their lives to following him, people who believed that he was the Messiah coming to redeem God’s people and revive God’s kingdom in Israel. Therefore, you can understand the confusion they experienced when they looked to their Messiah bruised, beaten and bloody on a slab of wood. The crowds then swarmed in on Jesus. The light they thought they saw in Jesus had grown dim. Darkness filled their skies. They mocked him. They shamed him.

Yet, what looked like yet another failed messianic experiment was indeed the culminating work of God’s redemptive love overcoming all of the world’s darkness with light.

Knowing That Everything Had Now Been Finished (John 19:28)

Even in this episode of supposed defeat, John gives us hints of God's sovereignty and Jesus' authority: (1) title of "King of the Jews" displayed at his crucifixion (John 19:19, 21); (2) fulfillment of Psalm 22:18 (see John 19:24); and (3) fulfillment of Psalm 69:21 (see John 19:28). Jesus' suffering was not unexpected nor was it defeat. Rather, this was the intention all along. Jesus alone would suffer for the salvation of humankind.

Before sin had even entered this world, God's plan was to send the Son, and Jesus knew this was his purpose as he suffered on the cross. With his own blood filling his lungs, and as his breaths grew fainter and fainter, he chose to use what little oxygen was left to muster up these words: "It is finished."

These words are a beautiful promise of divine accomplishment to the ears of those who belong to Jesus in faith. However, to others on that day, these words might have implied something quite different: "It's over! The deed is done—Jesus is dead. We finally got rid of him. We no longer have this alleged-Messiah rebel running amok and threatening our establishment." To others: "It's over! Hope is gone—Jesus is dead. Our savior has failed us. We have nowhere to go to now."

Before long, though, all human history would be changed forever. The Messiah would return from the dead, and his finished work on the cross would bring change to the dying and broken world.

Gave Up His Spirit (John 19:30)

Jesus puts all the broken pieces back together on the cross. How amazing it is that we can look back on this moment in history and know how it all fits together in God's great story of redemption. When Jesus says, "It is finished," these are not words that bring a story to an end; these are words

that give us a new beginning. Thus begins the wonder of God's divine work in us.

A swift gloss through Scripture reveals God's mercy to humanity, to those who were made in God's image and had resorted to false idols for comfort and hope. For the people who brought death and contempt into this world, for the ones who broke God's covenant over and over, God brings life through death, ends hatred through sacrificial love, and is faithful to the end.

Knowing this about God begins to bring clarity to the cross. It is precisely this world—filled with broken and unfaithful people—that God “so loves.” God's love reaches as far as heaven's reach is to earth. God loves us so much that God came to us, to indwell human flesh, and to dwell among us.

Moreover, it is us, the very people with whom God dwells, who marred the very flesh God indwelled for us on the cross. Somehow, the Creator of the universe, the Holy One who sits on the throne of heaven with all power and authority, submitted himself to the cross.

Jesus “gave up his spirit” that our spirits would be revived through him. He did not pander, nor did he retaliate when it came to his work of salvation. He had every right to abandon us, to relinquish himself from the suffering and shame of the cross; however, his love is what kept him there, and his love is the power that broke the curse of death for us.

Jesus' sacrifice satisfied the justice of God in overcoming and defeating sin. It is a sacrifice that we could never fully grant to God, and here we are left with the mystery and grace of God granting it to us.

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