

## **Finished!**

John 19:30

Jack Jasper, the choirmaster of Cloisterham has a ward who is engaged to Rosa Bud. The ward is a respectable young man, but beneath that surface respectability, he is an opium addict and really does not love Rosa anymore. Jasper secretly loves Rosa. Neville Landless loves Rosa, but he hasn't been so secretive. When the young man mysteriously disappears, Neville is arrested. In the absence of a body, he is released. Rosa does have feelings for Neville, but not for Jack. When Jack confesses his love to Rosa, he threatens to further implicate Neville in the possible murder of the young man if she does not return his affections. Eventually, a shadowy figure named Datchery is introduced into the plot. His presence torments Jasper. Who killed the young man, if in fact; he is really dead at all?

I dunno! It sounds like a good story, but unfortunately, the author dropped dead after chapter 23. Don't you hate that? It's worse than having the last chapter of a mystery torn out, because there is no last chapter. The missing man is the title character of the unfinished last work of Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Modern plays are staged where the audience gets to cast a vote for possible solutions to the mystery, but whatever Dickens had in mind, we will never know.

Unfinished work is the legacy of most lives. Procrastination, preoccupation with trivialities, distraction by amusements, sin – all of these things conspire together against our best intentions as hours galore are wasted. Of course, there was one perfect human life that never got sidetracked, and there was one life's work that was completely finished. And, because Jesus glorified His Father by perfectly accomplishing the work He was given, eternal life has been secured for the rest of us.

... <sup>30</sup>When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. – John 19:30

*Tetelestai* is a single Greek word translated: "It is finished." This was a word of accomplishment that a man in any walk of life might use to express the successful completion of an arduous task or of a stressful ordeal. It communicates that there are no details left unattended or loose ends remaining. *Tetelestai* might communicate exhaustion as it no doubt did in the case of Jesus, but exhaustion is not defeat, for *tetelestai* communicates the satisfaction that goes with the completion of a task.

## **I. Finished! God's Law Was Satisfied**

### **A. Every Shadow of the Law Became Reality in Jesus**

When YAHWEH entered a covenant with the Hebrews, He gave them His Law. A theoretical potential for human righteousness resided in perfect obedience to that Law. Of course, that perfect obedience proved to be impossible. All the Law was ever really intended to do was to show Israel what habitual sinners they really were. The Law pointed to a great need for God's grace. The Law pointed to Jesus.

Because God knew that His people could not obey the Law perfectly, He provided a system of sacrifices. All sorts of animals were slaughtered on a daily basis to address all sorts of sins. There were adult sheep and lambs, bulls and calves, goats and kids (that would be kid goats, young people). Also, because His people were sinners, YAHWEH would not reside among them. Instead, He descended to them once a year in the presence of a single representative man, the high priest. This took place on the annual Day of Atonement and only in the inner sanctum, the Holy of holies of the tabernacle and later the temple. A heavy, thick curtain concealed this most holy inner chamber.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sacrifice a bull for his own sins. Then, he would sacrifice a goat for the sins of the people and enter into the Holy of holies to sprinkle some of its blood on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, sometimes called “the mercy seat.” God’s presence would descend in a thick smoke, and atonement between God and His people would be secured. In the meantime, a second goat was released into the wilderness after the sins of the people had been symbolically placed upon its head. This scapegoat portrayed the removal of the peoples’ sins.

Another special time of annual sacrifice was Passover, which involved thousands of lambs every year. The Passover celebration looked back to the time that God had to compel the Pharaoh of Egypt to release the Hebrews from slavery. Each ancient family sacrificed a lamb and marked the doorframe of their house with its blood. The LORD passed through Egypt, killing every firstborn son in the Egyptian households, but He “passed over” every Israelite home appropriately marked. Every year, Israelite families commemorated the first Passover, by reenacting this sacrifice.

Of course, animal blood could never *really* atone for sin or save anyone from the wrath of God. The sacrifices, rituals and personnel of the ancient system were just shadows. Today, we are free from God’s wrath not because some lamb’s blood is smeared on our doors, but because our Passover Lamb, Jesus, satisfied God’s wrath in our place. He became both the sin offering and the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement ritual. He is our High Priest who entered into God’s presence and destroyed the barrier that kept us away. This was vividly evidenced when the temple veil was mysteriously torn at the moment Jesus died. The reality behind every shadowy aspect of ancient sacrifice was brought into full light on the day Jesus died.

## **B. Every Prophecy of the Law Was Fulfilled By Jesus**

By prophecy, I mean not only the things that prophets foretold, but also every historic enactment of the story of Jesus. God provided a sacrifice in place of Abraham’s son just as He provided His own Son in our place. Jonah’s three days in the belly of a fish pictured Jesus’ three days in the tomb. God told the serpent that had tempted Eve that One coming from the seed of woman would one day crush his head. Melchizedek was a priest who predated the nation of Israel and for whom there is no record of his birth or death. Hebrews calls Jesus a priest like Melchizedek, greater than the priesthood of the Law and without beginning or end. He is Jesse’s seed and a King from David’s line.

Of course, there were also those details foretold of One to come that were fulfilled in Jesus. Isaiah spoke of a deliverer born of a virgin. Micah identified Bethlehem as the place of His birth. Zechariah announced that He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey. David said that He would be betrayed by one of His own. Zechariah pinpointed the price of betrayal at thirty pieces of silver. Isaiah tells how He would be treated brutally, put to death among transgressors and that He would pray for His enemies. David prophesied that they would give Him vinegar to drink and divide His garments among them.

Jesus conscientiously attended to some of these prophecies. In His *Sermon on the Mount*, He said that He had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them to the letter. That meant not only perfect obedience but also that He would satisfy every demand of prophecy to support His claim that He was *messiah*. He spoke directly to these matters to certain experts in the Scripture:

<sup>39</sup>You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, <sup>40</sup>yet you refuse to come to me to have life. – John 5:39, 40

In this very chapter of *John*, several prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' final hours. His seamless garment was not torn. Lots were cast for His clothing. He said, "I am thirsty." Each of these details was in keeping with prophecy. He appeared a victim, but He was very much in command of the circumstances. A fascinating prophetic fulfillment followed His death. Typically, crucified bodies were left hanging for days as a warning to potential rebels against Roman rule. However, the next day would be a special Sabbath, and the same chief priests who pressed Pilate to crucify Jesus urged him to remove the bodies from the cross. Rome often yielded to Jewish scruples to keep the peace.

To hasten the death of a crucified man, the soldiers would break the shins of the man with an iron bar, a procedure the Romans called *crurifracture*. That way, the man could not push himself upward against the footrest beneath his feet, which he had to do in order to inhale. The victim quickly suffocated. When they came to Jesus, He was already dead. Even this fulfilled a prophecy of David and also pictured in the law governing the Day of Atonement sacrifice; "Not one of his bones will be broken (19:36). Just to ensure that Jesus was dead, a soldier thrust a spear into His side. This fulfilled a prophecy of Zechariah; "They will look on the one they have pierced" (19:37).

Earlier, He had made this claim:

... <sup>17</sup>The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." - John 10:17, 18

Jesus was no victim of circumstance. He did not will Himself to die until all had been accomplished. "It is finished." All prophecy was fulfilled. There must be no opportunity for skeptics to challenge the truth that Jesus was the anointed Lamb of God on the basis of some oversight. There were no loose ends. Every "t" was crossed and every "i" was dotted in regard to the Law and the Prophets.

## **II. Finished! The Father's Love Was Perfected**

### **A. Jesus' Mission Was to Make His Father Known to Us**

Everything about God that we can behold was made known to us in Jesus. There was never before such a clear picture. In the Old Testament, the love and the kindness of God is easily lost in the severity of His holy judgments against Israel's sins as well as against her neighbors. God is to be feared always in that even His beloved children must approach Him in reverential awe. But, there was something truly terrifying about Him before Jesus made Him know more completely. This fuller picture of God that Jesus brought to man is a dominant theme in *John*. The gospel begins:

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. - John 1:1-5

That is prologue. The story of Jesus in this world begins in verse 14:

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14



### **III. Finished! The Son's Labor Was Completed**

#### **A. Atonement Was God's Ultimate Agenda for Jesus' Life**

Jesus always understood His role as God's Son. When, at age 12, He came up missing after Passover, His parents found Him in the temple. He said, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Jesus resisted three temptations to shortcut His task of rightly establishing God's Kingdom by resorting to tricks, giveaway programs and compromise. When He fed the 5000, He withdrew from them because He knew they would try to set Him up as a bread king. God's righteousness needed to be established, not just His power. Jesus knew that a cross lay in His path. He spoke of it candidly and often. He knew Who He was, and though His life was filled with numerous enticements to get sidetracked, He persisted along the course set for Him by His Father.

Sometimes, I regret that I will not accomplish my full potential in this life. God's grace won't allow me to wallow in that, but the fact remains that sin, procrastination, bad habits and fear have already robbed me of all that I might have accomplished in a lifetime. At the end of my life, I would like to be able to announce, "It is finished," because nothing remains to be done that should have been done. Since that opportunity is lost, I will instead rejoice in the fact that Jesus said, "It is finished" in my place. He covered my shortcomings and failings by completing His life's work perfectly. Jesus always understood His life's agenda, the atonement of the human race by way of the cross.

#### **B. No Loose Ends Remained**

The words describing Jesus' death emphasize that He set His life aside because His work was done: "... he bowed his head ..." "Bowed" means that He placed His own head into a position of rest. This was the same word used of a man laying his head back on a pillow at the end of a hard day. "... he gave up his spirit." This word means that He was in command of the moment of His death. The language could be accurately paraphrased, "He laid His head to rest and dismissed His Spirit."

Christ would take up His life again. His Resurrection would become God's proof to us that sin and death really are defeated. Still, Jesus knew that the moment of victory was His death. A righteous Sacrifice had died in the place of sinners. Sin was beaten. Divine justice was served. After the Resurrection, Jesus no longer moved among the masses, feeding them or healing their diseases. Man's greatest need, deliverance from sin, was complete. Jesus appeared to His Own and gave them their marching orders, but the price of redemption had been paid in full. By the way, do you know what single word was written across ancient bills of sale when a balance was paid in full?

*Tetelestai*

(Paid in full ... It is finished.)

Most of our lives are only half-done. Not so with Jesus. What more was there for Him to do? He came to mediate between righteous God and sinful men. Redemption's price was paid. God's work of atonement was complete. *Tetelestai* – "It is finished." Jesus' work was thoroughly and remarkably complete. His business in regard to man's salvation was finished. How about you? Is your business in that regard finished? Have you embraced the atonement Jesus secured for you?