

It is Finished

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 19:17-30

Pastor Bryan Clark

There have been many great moments in human history. But without a doubt, the greatest moment of all time is the subject of our story this morning. It is a moment so wondrous, it gives reason for every person hearing my voice to have hope in the most uncertain, difficult times. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 19. We're continuing our study of the Gospel of John. Pilate has just turned Jesus over to be crucified. As I've mentioned several times, none of the Gospel writers give us all the details, so there are some things that John omits. There are other things he adds that aren't found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We pick it up in verse 17:

They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the *place* called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.

(*NASB, John 19:17-18)

It is likely when Jesus is condemned to be crucified, that the second scourging takes place—what Romans would have referred to as level three—which would have been the most violent scourging of all. He then would be expected to carry His cross, meaning the cross beam (the horizontal beam) to the site to be crucified. That was common. We know from one of the other Gospels that partway en route, Jesus collapses under the load, and Simon, the Cyrene, helps carry the beam the rest of the way. Likely, because Jesus was scourged twice, He just simply, at that point, could not continue to carry the cross beam.

John tells us that they come to a place called **the Place of the Skull**; in Greek, *the Cranium*, in Hebrew, *Golgotha*, in Latin, *Calvary*. This place is uncertain. In AD 70, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the walls and the city, and it's just not possible today to figure out exactly where this location was. Nor does anybody really understand why it was called **the Place of the Skull**. Some people think it's because of rock formations. That may or may not be the case. It was not a hill far away; it would have been just outside the city walls. It would have been next to a main road in and out of the city. The whole point was to crucify someone in a heavily populated, heavily trafficked area, as a warning from Rome: "This is what happens when you disobey our laws."

A cross was not really tall, with the crossbeam way up in the air. The feet of the condemned would have been maybe a foot off the ground, something like that. John tells us that Jesus was crucified between two other men. We know them to be insurrectionists; we would call them *terrorists*. It's likely it was planned that Barabbas and these two were to be crucified, but Jesus is now taking Barabbas' cross. You can even hear the imagery in that language. The two terrorists on each side of Jesus essentially represent all humanity. One of them mocked and made fun of Jesus, and one of them reached out for the mercy and salvation of Jesus. At the end of the day, everyone will fall into one of those two categories.

Crucifixion was started by the Persians, but you might say *perfected* by the Romans, meaning *perfected for maximum torture*. The condemned was nailed to the cross, not through the hands, but through the wrists, and also through the feet. But it was not that the feet were laid on top of each other and a nail driven through. We have evidence today that tells us actually the feet were turned forty-five degrees to the left, and then the stake was driven through both feet. The purpose for that was to twist the body in order to accomplish maximum torture on the cross. It was the most horrific of deaths. It was so horrific, it was reserved for slaves and foreigners. It was not legal to crucify a Roman citizen. It was a death so terrible that the first-century historian Josephus recorded it as “the most wretched of all deaths”. This is why Paul, when he talks about it in Philippians 2, says “Jesus humbled Himself to death, **even** death on a cross”. It was the most wretched, horrible death possible. Verse 19:

Now Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written: “JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews’; but that He said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” (Vs. 19-22)

So it was customary that a placard would be made that had the official charges as to why this person was being crucified. Typically, it was hung around the condemned’s neck, worn to the crucifixion site, and then would be nailed to the cross. John tells us that Pilate wrote, “**JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.**” John tells us that the Jews were beginning to gather and reading this sign. This was Passover; the city would have been packed with people. There would have been a very small percentage of people that would have been aware of the trial and the condemnation of Jesus. So people coming and going out the gate, down the road, or perhaps just gathering to watch the crucifixion, are reading the sign, and imagine how confusing this is. “His big crime is He’s the King of the Jews? Why would the religious leaders want Him crucified if He’s the King of the Jews?” So this is why the chief priests go to Pilate and want the inscription changed.

Now we have been studying this “chess match” between Pilate and the chief priests over power and control. It would be right to say that ultimately the chief priests—the religious leaders—won. They got their way; Jesus is to be crucified. But you might also say that Pilate got the last laugh. He was very intentional in his wording. This was his last shot, and ultimately what he’s saying is, “You are a pitiful people, and here is your pitiful king.” So the chief priests want the inscription changed and Pilate’s not about to change it. “**I have written what I have written.**”

It is interesting. There are two primary players in the crucifixion of Jesus—Pilate and Caiaphas. Both uttered prophecies they did not understand. Caiaphas said, “*It is expedient for one man to die on behalf of the nation.*” Pilate said, “*This man is the king of the Jews.*” Both of them were speaking prophetically in a way they did not understand. Verse 23:

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts: a part to each soldier, and the tunic *also*; but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it, to *decide* whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture: “THEY DIVIDED****

MY GARMENTS AMONG THEMSELVES, AND THEY CAST LOTS FOR MY CLOTHING.” Therefore the soldiers did these things. (Vs. 23-24)

This was customary that the soldiers would receive the property of the condemned. In a first-century world, clothes were of great value. You did not have a closet and you did not have lots of clothing; you had what you wore. Clothes were valuable and they were hard to come by, so they're dividing up the clothing of Jesus. This would have included the headdress; it would have included an outer robe, would have included a belt or sash, and would have included His sandals. It was customary for four soldiers, plus a centurion, to do a crucifixion. So this would make sense; those things are divided four different ways. But there was also an undergarment called the **tunic**, which was the part that actually was against your skin. This was of better quality, and in this case it was a woven garment with no seams. In other words, too valuable to tear into pieces. Now, that doesn't mean this was some unusual, rare garment. It wasn't that uncommon to have a one-piece tunic like this. Some scholars want to make a pretty big deal out of the tunic and what it represents. But it's clear from John, that the point he's making is this was the perfect fulfillment of a prophecy made a thousand years earlier in Psalm 22:18. This has been something John has identified all through this journey to the cross. This is not a plan that has gone badly; this has been the plan all along. And again and again and again, there is the perfect fulfillment of prophecies made—in this case a thousand years earlier—exactly as it was said.

If you put the four Gospels together—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—you come up with what is referred to as “*The Seven Sayings of the Cross*”, meaning seven different things that Jesus uttered while He was hanging from the cross. None of the Gospel writers list all seven, so you have to put them all together. The first saying would have been Jesus saying, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,*” according to Luke. The second would have been Jesus' conversation with the thief on the cross, “*Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.*” The third saying is recorded by John and has to do with care for His mother.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household. (Vs. 25-27)

So John identifies four women: the mother of Jesus (Mary), Mary's sister (who most scholars believe to be Salome, who was the mother of James and John, and this is part of our support for believing that Jesus and John were actually cousins), Mary, the wife of Clopas (an unknown; that's really all we know about her), and Mary from Magdala (known as Mary Magdalene). It is remarkable at this point that Jesus has been hanging on the cross approximately three hours—from nine o'clock in the morning to about noon—yet in the midst of His agony, you still see this heart of kindness and compassion toward His mother.

It would have been very difficult for a widow in a first-century culture to survive. It is believed, by this point, Joseph is dead, and Mary must be cared for. It makes sense that Jesus would commit Mary to John, especially if he is a relative. The language there people identify as official betrothal language or adoption language. It's not just something Jesus said—it has a ring of something more official—and that from this point on, John would treat Mary as if she was his own mother. Now,

something interesting to think about. Mary had other children; Jesus had siblings. But we also know at this point in the story, they do not believe. How are they going to comfort and care for Mary if they do not believe? So, it's John who is chosen to bring the necessary comfort and care for Mary. Most scholars believe, based on the way this is written, that at this point, John takes Mary away from the cross and gets her settled somewhere safe. Part of what Jesus was saying is it was not necessary for Mary to witness the rest of this. Can you imagine a mother watching the horror of this suffering?

It probably also explains why there's about a three-hour gap in John's information. He, as an eyewitness, leaves, and approximately three hours later picks up the rest of the story. But what happens in those three hours is highly significant. From 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock—as best we can figure this out—we would say this is the time period when somehow, some way, in ways we cannot fully comprehend, Jesus took on the sin of the world. It is not correct to say Jesus just had to die. Jesus couldn't just show up on earth and die somewhere. Rather, the assignment was to pay for sin—not just the physical death—but the spiritual death and separation that comes with sin.

Paul said that Jesus became sin *for us*. It is somewhere in this time period where Jesus utters the statement, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” It was a moment in history, so horrific, that creation itself mourned. And from 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock, darkness covered the land as if it was night. This is not only recorded by the Gospel writers; it's recorded by at least three extra-biblical historians from the day—that for some strange reason, in the middle of the day, everything became dark. It is in those moments where there was a great earthquake that shook the earth to such a degree, the Roman centurion uttered, “Surely this man *was* the Son of God.” It was in those three hours where the veil in the temple was miraculously torn from top to bottom. The veil in the temple was not some thin shower curtain. It was a massive veil that dozens of men could not have possibly torn. Yet, in that moment, the veil was torn, reflecting the truth that because of what Jesus had done on the cross, sinful men and women would now have access directly into the presence of God through Jesus. What exactly was happening for those three hours is a mystery.

Jesus, when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, in agony, and sweating drops of blood, asks the Father, “Is it possible for this cup to pass Me by?” The cup is reflective of the wrath of God. This is what He was seeing. We make a significant mistake when we focus on the physical sufferings of the cross. None of the four Gospel writers linger on that, and I've chosen not to do so either. That is not the real suffering of the cross. Many people have been tortured to death; thousands of people were crucified in the Roman Empire. But the suffering that went beyond what any human can even imagine, was that a holy God would take upon Himself the sin of the world and experience the wrath of the Father!

When Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, you remember what Jesus said? “Peter, don't you understand that I must drink of this cup.” This is what He was referring to. This is what was necessary. You may find yourself thinking this morning, “I'm not that big of a sinner.” But you need to understand, according to God, that's what was necessary for your sin to be paid for. This is why it is so utterly ridiculous to think a few good works makes me acceptable to God. Why it is so foolish to think some religious activity somehow can make me right before God. What was necessary was for Jesus to make payment on the cross and experience the wrath of the Father, that sin might be paid for once and for all.

In verse 28, when John says, **After this**, that's what he's referring to:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture...

So Jesus knows that everything has been **accomplished**. That's the exact same word that is translated shortly after, "It is finished." It's accomplished...it's finished...it's complete. At this point, sin has been paid for; the debt has been paid. *Scripture has been fulfilled*. This goes all the way back to Genesis 3, and the promise that was made. It's been pictured; it's been imaged; it's been waited for now for thousands of years. And this was the moment in history where the Scripture was finally fulfilled, and Jesus has accomplished the mission. So Jesus utters the next saying, from the cross—the fifth—saying:

"I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a *branch* of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. (Vs. 28-29)

So the fifth saying from the cross is, **"I am thirsty"**, the One who had declared Himself to be *the water of life*, now hanging from a cross in His humanity, *declares His thirst*. This may be as simple as Jesus needing something to drink, in order to make the final two declarations from the cross. It is likely He has had nothing to drink since the Garden of Gethsemane. People hanging on the cross dehydrated because of the significant blood loss. So this all makes sense, just from a practical medical point of view. The idea of **a branch of a hyssop** and the **sour wine** or cheap wine was probably there for the soldiers, but may have occasionally been used for the condemned. The idea of the *hyssop* is a very generic term. It refers to over eighteen different variety of plants. But some people see the significance in the fact it was the branch of the hyssop that was used to paint the blood on the door frame of the house on the first Passover. And this is connecting Passover with the blood of Jesus being shed on the cross. So they give Jesus something to drink. Verse 30:

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said (and the other Gospel writers say..."*said loudly*"), **"It is finished!"**

One word in Greek: "Tetelestai". It is a word that means, "*It is complete; it is accomplished, literally paid in full.*" We have examples of tax receipts from this time period that have the word stamped across them—Tetelestai—paid in full. Because you and I owe a debt we could not pay, Jesus paid a debt that He did not owe. What He's saying here is so important to understand. "*There's nothing left to do. There's no religious activity. There's no good works. There's no purgatory. There's nothing else that's necessary.*" That's the whole Tetelestai—paid in full! It was finished in this moment. John closes by saying,

And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (Vs. 30)

The other Gospel writers tell us Jesus gave His last saying from the cross, "*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.*" John simply says **Jesus bowed His head**. The language is odd. He handed over His spirit. You remember there have been multiple times in the Gospel of John where the chief priests wanted to kill Jesus, and Jesus consistently said, "It's not time; the hour is not yet come." It was necessary for Jesus to go to the cross to make payment for sin. Jesus' utter, "It is

finished,” is not a cry of *agony*; it is a cry of *victory*. Mission accomplished! It's done...**finished!** Now that the mission was complete of His own volition, He bows His head, and He hands His spirit to the Father. And there—Jesus dies!

So what do we do with this? We have spent a long time in the Gospel of John, seeking to understand who Jesus is and what He did for us...why He came. This is the culmination of that mission. It is tempting to beat ourselves up because we're such lousy sinners, and “Look what we've done to Jesus,” and walk out the door feeling terrible. That's not what Jesus is asking. That accomplishes nothing. As a matter of fact, that is to miss the point of, “***It is finished.***” It was horrific, but it is over. He's not still hanging on the cross. He's not still suffering. What He asks of you is to ***believe***. John says it himself, “*These things are written that you might believe,*” —believe Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, and that He is the Son of God, and that you might have life in His name. That's what He's asking. He's not asking you to go out and get religious. He's not asking you to go out and try to be a better person. He's asking you to believe that this is who He is, and this is what He did for you. Why would he do that? Because without that payment for sin, you have no hope.

These are crazy, uncertain times. But there is every reason for hope in Jesus. Perhaps the most familiar verse in John's Gospel is 3:16, ***For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.*** But the reality of that verse clearly tells us, “Whoever does not believe, **will perish** and **will not have everlasting life**. Jesus has told us this. “If you do not believe, you are still under the wrath of God and under his condemnation.” There is nobody in the room today, nobody watching on the livestream that has sinned *too much for Jesus*. All our sins were covered at the cross.

Jesus Himself gave us the imagery in chapter 16. When a woman is in labor, it's painful; there's anguish. But the anguish turns to joy when a new life is born into the world. Jesus is not asking you to *anguish*, but rather *that the anguish turns to joy* when you understand this is what Jesus has done for you, and He offers it to you freely as a gift, if you're willing to believe.

We want to give you an opportunity this morning to settle this. We don't do this often, but we have spent months working our way up to this moment in the story. And there's great value at times in our lives, stepping out and saying, “I'm in; I get it! I like the language; I put a stake in the ground; I'm in.” Meaning, “I understand I'm a sinner. I understand who Jesus was. I understand what Jesus did for me. I understand it's finished. I understand and I believe. I put a stake in the ground. I want you to know, I'm in!”

Now many of you have made that decision. But there are others of you that perhaps, somewhere in our study of the Gospel of John, have come to understand this truth and have made your decision, “I believe; I'm in.” But for some of you that moment of decision is today, saying, “*Okay, I understand; I get it. That's what Jesus did for me, and I choose to believe. I want Jesus to be my Savior.*”

So I'm going to invite the band to come back on the stage; we're going to have a closing song. And during this closing song, if you have made a decision to trust Christ anywhere in our series of the Gospel of John, or, for some of you, it's today, I'm going to invite you to get out of your seat and to come down front. You can stand; you can kneel; there's plenty of room. If you want someone

to talk with you or pray with you, we'll have staff available. But mostly it's your declaration: “*Okay, I get it, and I make a decision. I'm in; I believe.*” I'd asked you to remain when the song is over. I just want to pray for you, and then we'll be dismissed.

I know we also have a lot of people watching by the livestream. It's been great over these months, not just to hear from people in our community, but from people around the country that are joining us in this study. We want our friends watching by the livestream to join us. So, if you're watching at home, you'll notice a button that says, “***Raise my hand.***” That's your way of coming forward. It's your way of joining us and saying, “I get it. I understand. I believe; count me in.” So those at home, I'd invite you to join us as we make our decision together.

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Fall 2020 // WEEK 8

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // October 31/November 1, 2020

It is Finished // John 19:17-30

Introduction

This week, we see Jesus do what he came to do. We see Him submit to the cross. He did this with us in mind, and we've seen what it cost Him.

Take some time to think about the entire crucifixion story as you go over this week's questions.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What's your favorite cold-weather activity?

2. What is your favorite cold-weather food/meal/snack/drink?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For openness to what you're learning together
 - c. For friendships to deepen and grow
 - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 19:17-30 to the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) John reminds us many times that these events are the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In fact, God's redemptive plan was even foreshadowed in the Passover, the festival happening at this time.

Read Exodus 12: 5-7, 12-14, 17.

- a. **What similarities do you see between the first Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus?**
 - b. Often, we tend to think of the Bible as a bunch of little stories broken up across many books. **How can viewing the Bible as a single story deepen your faith and appreciation for God's redemptive plan through Jesus?**
 - c. The Jews were experts when it came to the scriptures. **Why do you think they missed the fulfillment of those scriptures through Jesus?**
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- 2) Knowing the pain and shame inflicted on Jesus at the crucifixion, the conversation we see in v25-27 is a little surprising.
 - a. At this moment, we would expect to see Jesus weakened by what has been done to him and what was still yet to come. However, we see His heart shining through. **What does this conversation reveal about Jesus?**
 - b. Sometimes, it's hard to love others, especially when we're tired, angry, afraid, or in pain. Although we can't do anything to add to the completed work of Jesus, we should all aspire to be like Jesus in these moments. **Why should we love others, even when we don't feel like it or when it comes at personal cost?**

- 3) The Jewish officials were notorious for adding to the law (like not going into Pilate's home for fear of defilement) and wrongly applying it (when they didn't want Jesus to heal on the Sabbath). However, when Jesus said, "It is finished," he was using the Greek word *tetelestai*. It's a word that means paid in full. Even though Jesus says the work is finished, we sometimes struggle to believe His work is final.

a. **What is finished?**

b. **For you personally, why does it matter that the work is finished?**

c. Sometimes we believe our sins are too great. Sometimes we fear God only sees our failures. **What lies do you believe about yourself? What keeps you from remembering your debts have been paid in full?**

d. On the other end of the spectrum, we can also be like the Pharisees. We see ourselves as better than others and think we can earn favor with God. **How can we have more compassion for those we might see as sinners, misfits, and losers?**

- 4) In the service this week, Pastor Bryan provided some time for us to look back—both through our study of John and our lives. John wrote this book so that we might believe, and he has provided us many opportunities to reflect on the life and work of Jesus.

a. **What did you reflect upon during this time? What parts of this study have impacted you personally?**

- b. We have talked many times about how the church is more than a building, and we've talked about how the church is a family. **How does sharing in the lives of other believers help deepen your own faith?**

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

In what ways would you like to see God work in your life this week? Do you want His peace, protection, healing, or hope? Or do you want to see Him act in a specific way?

If you're not in the practice of doing so already, over the next seven days, try to commit yourself to daily prayer on behalf of your Life Group.

Before Group: Think of a prayer request—something that will be relevant for the next seven days.

At Group: Share that request with your Life Group. Write down the other prayer requests shared.

After Group: For the next seven days, try praying daily for the other requests shared in your group.