

Sunday Sermon  
Famous Last Words: "It Is Finished"  
April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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*30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. 31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. 32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.*

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*33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."*

- John 19:30-37

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*Jesus said, "**It is finished.**" With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

- John 19:30

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*Tetelestai – It is finished*

It was typical of Jesus to use common everyday situations and words and to ascribe them with spiritual meaning/significance. That's how it was with the word "tetelestai". People used this word every day as they went about their business. Let's look at some examples.

- Servants said tetelestai to their masters when they had completed a task. It meant, "**It's finished. I've done what you wanted me to do.**"
- Artists said "tetelestai" when they stepped back and painted the last stroke of the brush or shaped the last contour of clay with their fingers. It meant, "**It's finished. It's absolutely perfect.**"
- Jewish priests said "tetelestai", when they examined a sacrificial animal and found it to be without any defect or blemish. It meant, "**It is complete. I find nothing wrong with this animal.**"
- Archeologists have found piles of canceled debt and tax receipts made of papyrus from accountants and debt collectors stamped "tetelestai". They would use the word

“tetelestai” when they received full payment for a debt. It meant, **“It’s done. It’s paid in full.”**

- Similarly, prisoners, when completing a jail sentence or paying the fine for the crime, would have his case marked with “tetelestai”, meaning, **“It’s finished. The debt has been paid.”**

Scripture tells us that Jesus, hanging on the cross, knowing that all was now complete, said “tetelestai”. It is finished... But what did He mean?

Tetelestai was a word of victory, a joyful declaration, and yet here was our Lord, bleeding and dying on the cross. It would have made more sense to declare it when Jesus grabbed the hand of Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter and raised her from the dead. It would have made sense to declare it aloud after feeding 5,000 men with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. It would have made sense to shout it out when he cast out a legion of demons from the tormented man living in the tombs, setting him free. It would have made sense, when the whole city of Jerusalem waved their palm branches and welcomed their Savior, riding on a donkey, cheering, “Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” I can imagine Jesus’ disciples, walking behind Jesus, adrenaline pumping through the veins, hearing the shouts and cheering with the crowd and saying to themselves, “We made it! We are famous! All of this time giving up of our lives living like bums have finally paid off. Tetelestai, boys!”

It probably would have made the most sense if Christ, after drinking the sour wine, had bowed his head and said, “I...am finished”. But that is not what He said. He said, **“It is finished.”** What was the work that Christ set out to do? What did He finish?

In an earlier time and a different place, Jesus encountered a struggling woman at a well, and being thirsty, asked her for a drink of water. He sent his disciples along to get food, and when they came back, they found him talking alone to the woman. When they had finished talking, they urged him to eat some food they have bought, and their Rabbi refused, saying:

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*“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*

- John 4:34

Jesus’ food, his passion, his mission, is to do our Father’s will and finish His work. Okay we’re getting warmer, so what was the Father’s work Jesus set out to complete, and what was the Father’s will? To answer that we need to go way back, to the very beginning of the creation of humanity, back in the Garden of Eden in Chapter 1 of Genesis.

After the 6 days of the 1) creation of light, 2) the land from the sky, 3) the plants and vegetation, 4) the separation of day and night, and 5) the creation of the animals to fill the water, land, and air, God looked at all he made and saw that it was good. After making humankind, he blessed them and gave them this command. Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it.

God made humankind in his image, and being in God's image, gave humankind the authority to peacefully co-rule with Him and have dominion over the earth. Then in the very beginning of chapter 2, it says everything was completed when God finished his work by the 7<sup>th</sup> day and rested. Life was very good.

But when Adam and Eve rebelled against God by doing the one thing God asked them not to do, to eat of the tree, sin invaded not only the human heart, but all of creation and sent everything into chaos. Instead of perfect order, with God as King and humankind ruling the earth, humankind set itself up as king, and ever since then we have been at war with God, with creation, and with each other.

To help restore a right relationship with God, God lovingly set up a sacrificial system with His first chosen people, the Israelites, where a priest would spill the blood from a chosen goat that would pay for the people's wickedness and rebellion, and a second goat would be left alive, but that priest would put his hands on its head and confess all of the sins and rebellion of the Israelites, and then send the goat far away in the wilderness. Year after year, the Israelites would have to present themselves to a priest and have countless animals sacrificed on behalf of their sins in order to have a right relationship with God and receive all of the blessings of being in right relationship with God. But because the sacrifices were imperfect, our relationship with God was imperfect, and our hearts would wander farther and wander further away with fear, distrust, and shame. All of the work that God finished, that he designed to be "very good", ended up in chaos, chained captive by the sinfulness of the human heart.

So, God sent His only Son, the only perfect sacrifice whose blood would cleanse the sins of the unrighteous but would also perfectly carry the weight of sin of the entire world, so that whosoever would believe in Him would not die, but have eternal life. That was Christ's mission; to reestablish order within the human heart to have God as King, and for all of God's children to work together to establish God's kingdom's rule and reign. It is His desire that we be fruitful and make disciples of Christ, so that together we can live out God's intent for us by taking back the domain of the earth from Satan's grasp and subdue the earth with God's love and justice.

When Jesus declared "tetelestai":

- Jesus was the suffering servant that said, "Father, the work that you have sent me to do is done. It is finished"
- Jesus was the master artist that painted the last stroke of the brush that said, "My children, it is finished. You are all masterpieces of heaven."
- Jesus was the true high priest that said, "Your sins are finished. I am the Lamb of God, who will take away the sins of the world."
- Jesus was the one held captive on the cross, whose death for us meant, "Your sins are paid for, not just in part, but paid for in full."

But what makes Christ's declaration truly unique is the Greek tense that Jesus used when He said, "Tetelestai". Jesus spoke in the *perfect tense*, which is very rare in the New Testament, and this tense has no English equivalent.

The perfect tense is a combination of two Greek tenses: 1) the present tense 2) and the aorist tense. The aorist tense means that something happened at a specific moment in time in the past. The present tense means something that happens and continues on into the future. The combination of these two tenses in the perfect tense as used in John 19:30 is really good news for us. When Jesus says, "Tetelestai" ...what He is actually saying is "It is finished...and it will continue to be finished".

"It is finished" means that your sin and the power of your sins are finished, and they no longer have power over you. We can be sure of this, because Jesus is not only the Author of our lives, but He is the Perfecter of our faith.

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*"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

- Philippians 1:6