3-29-20

John 19:30a

Jesus had been enduring brutal physical suffering and torture. That now continued as He hung on the cross. From the cross, He had spoken several times for the benefit of those around Him. Then He experienced the terrible separation from His Father as He hung silently in the darkness that had fallen upon the land. At the end, He cried out with those bone chilling words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.”

How gleefully satan must have heard these words. Victory seemed to be his; he had brought about the death of Jesus, the Son of God, by the hands of those He came to save. In Jesus’ cry of abandonment, it seemed that God had lost and the One He sent to save humanity had failed. Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” In these words, there is nothing but a frail human who had nothing left; the words are not majestic, they don’t indicate deity. Satan felt he had victory in his hands. He had defeated God; he had defeated the Saviour; now he could have that lofty highest place above all else.

What a shock it must have been to the devil to hear those words, “It is finished.” The words indicate a completion; they mean that there has been an accomplishment. The words are used to say that something ordained by God has been carried out. It is finished. The invigorating taste of victory was quickly evaporating from satan’s jaws. It dawned on him that in actuality, he is the one who had been defeated. God’s plan had been carried out. And even more; satan himself had actually been used by God to fulfill His own plans. Satan was instrumental in bringing about his own defeat and in bringing much glory to God.

So, what was finished? Jesus finished God’s plan to bring about the redemption of those who would accept Him, thus bringing glory to God. This was the completion of Jesus’ work on the cross; which was also the accomplishment of God’s means of salvation begun back at the very beginning of the human race.

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He knew exactly what was going to happen and He was ready. When they sinned, their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. In this, their guilt was exposed and they were ashamed. They made a pathetic attempt to cover their guilt and shame by sewing together fig leaves. This is the basic human condition to this day. We try to cover our own sin; either by hiding it or by claiming it is not sin and flaunting it. Both are attempts to cover our sin and both are equally sorry attempts. As with the fig leaves, it is obvious that we can’t deal with our sins.

God had to step in. God made garments for them out of the skins of animals. Only God could properly cover their nakedness, only God could properly cover their sins. The word “cover” is very important here: Their guilt was not removed; it was only covered; the removal of the guilt was yet to come. The death of the animals to make the clothes is important. When Adam and Eve sinned, death came into the world. They died spiritually; their physical deaths would come later. These animals were the first of creation to experience physical death. Additionally, we see here the death of the innocent to provide for the covering of guilt. The innocent died for the guilty.

Next, in the patriarch Abraham, we learn the role of faith. When Abraham believed God, it was counted to him as righteousness. Not that Abraham was perfect; but his faith became a kind of spiritual covering of righteousness. Again, it was God who counted his faith as righteousness, so it was God who was providing the covering. This faith is the key to any of the people in the Old Testament times being saints; being saved by God. In Christ, we see the connection between the innocent dying for the guilty and the faith necessary by the guilty. All provided by God.

God’s plan progresses with the giving of the law and the sacrificial system. A very important part of this system is given in Leviticus 16: The day of atonement. The day of atonement took place once per year. It was the day that all the sins of Israel were to be covered so that they would be pure in the LORD’s sight. Part of this ceremony involved two goats. Both were taken up to the doorway of the tent of meeting and presented before the LORD.

Then, one of the goats was slaughtered as a sin offering, and its blood was brought inside the most holy place and was sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. The other goat was kept alive. The high priest would place his hands on the goat’s head and confess all the sins of Israel. This goat was led out into the wilderness and left there. It carried off the sins of the people.

Hebrews chapter 10 points out the problems with believing strictly in this system. This was a shadow of what was to come. This ceremony itself didn’t get rid of the guilt of sin. In verse 4 it says, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Again, the faithful participation in this sacrifice would cover sins; it didn’t take them away. The day of atonement had to take place year after year because it was not a once for all cure for the problem of sin. Those who participated in this ceremony with faith in God would be kept safe until Jesus came to take sin away completely.

And, at the perfect time, according to God’s plan, Jesus came to the earth as a man and became the perfect sacrifice that actually removed our sins and took away the guilt. He was presented before God in eternity past as the sinless offering. His blood was brought before the actual alter of God. He had all of our sins placed upon him in reality, not symbolically. He carried our sins away into nothingness. His was the sacrifice that never needs to be repeated because it was perfect and sufficient for all time. If we put our faith in Jesus, our sins and guilt are not just covered, they are gone.

These things had been taking place over several millennia. God provided a way for covering of sins by faith and people continually showed that they desperately needed God to send a Saviour. Jesus is that Saviour, and at the end of His time on the cross, He was able to say, “It is finished.”

In a smaller timeframe, we can look at the life of Jesus as a man on this earth. He came here born of a woman with a specific purpose. He came to redeem us from sin. He came to pay the price in our place. He came to receive the payment that we deserved. The Son of God had to become fully man which He did by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then He had to live a life in complete and perfect obedience to the law. He allowed Himself to be born under the law so that He was subject to it. He had to obey it perfectly or He wouldn’t have been a perfect sacrifice.

We cannot forget the life that Jesus lived before He began His ministry; all those years of obedience are part of what made Him the acceptable sacrifice. His actual ministry was short but vital. He had to set the foundation of the church in place. This work was also completed by teaching the apostles so that the living word of God would spread and His church would grow. In this life and foundation, Jesus could also say, “It is finished.”

We have at least four proofs that Jesus accomplished the work He was sent to do. The first was the rending of the veil that hung in front of the most holy place. Because people are sinful, we cannot approach God. That was shown by the curtain that hung in front of the ark of the covenant. No one could approach the ark, which was the representation of God’s presence, except the high priest, once a year, bringing the blood of a sacrifice. The people had to have an intercessor. Jesus has become our intercessor and the propitiation for our sins. Because of Him, we can now come into the presence of the Father.

The second proof is that Jesus raised from the dead. Prophecy foretold that this would happen. Psalm 16:10 says,

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

Jesus was not abandoned in the place of the dead and He did not undergo decay. This shows that He is God’s “Holy One”. Only God’s Holy One could finish the work He was sent to do and only if He finished it would He be God’s Holy One.

Thirdly, the Bible tells us that Jesus was glorified and brought to the Father to sit at His right hand. Jesus had left behind the glory He shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit to become a man. In order to regain it, He had to complete the Father’s work. God the Son always has been and always will be part of the indivisible Trinity. Now the man Jesus, in His glorified body exists at the right hand of God in heaven. Even so, Jesus is God the Son; it is impossible for us to comprehend these things, nevertheless, we believe because this is what God tells us in His word.

The last proof that Jesus accomplished what He came to do is the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Since we are free from the guilt of sin, God can once again dwell with us. In His grace and mercy, God has sent the Holy Spirit to draw people to the Gospel so that they can be saved. This salvation wouldn’t be possible if Christ had not completed His work.

Here at the end of His earthly life, Jesus was able to say, “It is finished.” It is a finished work of God. It is complete. This is necessary for us because even as Christians, even our best works are tainted by sin. Somewhere there always lurks pride, there is hope of reward, there is a selfish motivation. In ourselves we are incomplete, but we are reassured in Colossians 2:10, “[I]n Him you have been made complete”. We see once more that it is all of God; we are complete but it is through Jesus Christ.

One more thing for us to think about: How powerful to be able to end one’s life by saying “It is finished.” Jesus had work to do that the Father had ordained for Him and He had completed it. We also have work to do that God assigned for us from before the beginning of time. How wonderful it would be to stand before Him one day having finished our work; having completed what God has called us to do. What joy it would be to know that our Saviour was pleased with us.

Jesus finished His work and that is what we must depend on for salvation. If we try to add to what is already perfect, we will only detract from it. But it is also good to be pleasing to our Lord by obedience to His commands. Our salvation is through Christ alone; our works are simply expressions of love and adoration.

Prayer

Merciful and all-powerful Father God. Your Son has perfectly carried out Your will in bringing about the salvation of those who will follow Him. He has brought Your ancient plan to completion. There is still much to come about in Your entire will, but the work for salvation has been completed. Jesus was lifted up on that cross; we lift Him up in praise; You have lifted Him up in glory.

By His work, we who are His have riches beyond our imagination. We have become Your children and we can call You “Father”. You have an eternity laid out for us sharing in the inheritance of Christ. We are so undeserving; we fall before You in worship.

Your word tells us that You have things for us to do. Thank You for the Holy Spirit that He may guide us in these works. In all this, we are still weak and frail; give us the strength and courage and desire to live as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ. Let the light of Jesus shine from us in this dark world.

We praise You in Jesus’ name

Amen