

IT IS FINISHED

Good Friday 2020

It's finished! Have you ever said those words? I'm sure many of us have. They could be said in many contexts –

Jubilantly, for instance, perhaps after working for months on a project we enjoy. Our daughter Bethany used to love jigsaws – huge, complex jigsaws, that she'd work on for weeks. Finally the last piece would go in and she'd yell, "It's finished!!" and everyone would be rounded up to admire it.

Or perhaps we've said it matter-of-factly – after plugging away at some nuisance of a task, such as the tax, or a school or course assignment.

Or it could be said in great relief, after a period of enormous stress, or burden or anguish. Many a woman breathes those words as she finally brings a baby into the world after hours of painful labour.

I doubt that any of us could fully understand the intensity of those words as Jesus uttered them just before he died.

In those words, "it is finished" was the fulfilment of over two thousand years of covenant promises. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the heavens, and that he would be his God, and the God of his descendants, and they would be his people. But so much time had passed the Israelites had angered God and been judged by him so many times; they'd been given so many second chances that they'd blown it again and again; that they'd almost given up. They'd been exiled and dispersed and occupied by hostile forces. Their hope in a coming Messiah was waning. When Jesus cried "it is finished" it was the end of the waiting, and the end of the separation.

One of the most significant events of Good Friday was the rending of the temple in the curtain from top to bottom. That curtain symbolically separated a holy God from a sinful people. Behind the curtain was the Holy of Holies, where God manifested his presence. No-one was allowed back there except for the high priest, and only once a year after being ceremonially purified. The normal people couldn't just come into God's

presence – they were too sinful. When the curtain was ripped apart, it showed that through Christ's cry "it is finished" the people now had access to God's presence! He was truly able to be their God, and they were able to be his people. The barrier had been torn down!

One of the most significant 'aha' moments I had in my theological study was when I realised the power of one little Greek word. That word is *naos*. It's the word used to describe "the Holy of Holies" – that incredible, awesome, unreachable place where the very presence of God was to be found, that the common person had no access to. Then when Jesus died and rose again, and the Holy Spirit came, Paul was able to say "You are the *temple* of the Holy Spirit" The word for temple? *naos*. The Holy of Holies is *within us*, because when Christ cried out "it is finished" the temple curtain was torn in two! The very presence and power of God lies within us who believe. The very same power, says Paul in Ephesians, that raised Christ from the dead! No wonder Paul prayed earnestly that the Ephesian church would be given revelation to *know* this power within them.

And of course, in those words "it is finished", was the final physical and spiritual release, as Jesus completed the most horrifying, agonising and critical mission creation has ever known – the defeat of sin and death, and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Those words announced the end of the power of sin over God's people. SIN is finished! Paul tells us in Roman 6:14 that "*sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*"

Those words announced the end of the power of death over God's people. DEATH is finished. In John 11, Jesus tells Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*"

It is finished.

With those words, announcing the end, also came **new beginnings** for God's people.

With the end of the power of sin and death, there came new life for the people of God. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, 5:17 *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

One of the greatest differences between Christianity and other religions is the fact that through Christ, we are offered cleansing and renewal. In other religions, people are reaching out to God, trying to improve themselves and to please him. In Christianity, GOD takes the initiative, and through Christ deals with the problem of sin, allowing communion between God and people.

So perhaps a good question to ask ourselves is, “have we availed ourselves of both what has finished and of what has newly begun through Christ’s death on the cross?”

Or are we still struggling under the burdens of sin and death, as if nothing of any impact happened on that first Good Friday?

I wonder how often we feel defeated by sinful thoughts and practices?
I wonder how often we struggle to feel acceptable to God - wondering whether we are ‘good enough’ as Christians.

Christ’s final words on the cross, “It is finished” – tell us that even though we fail – sin has no more power over us. Sin no longer has the power to lead us to death - eternal. And every time we fail – Jesus offers us a new beginning. Our God is the God of new beginnings.

When our older two kids were younger we had a toy that they loved. Can’t remember the name of it, but it was like a screen in a frame. You drew on it with a magnetic pencil, and you could let your creativity run free. If you made a mess of your picture, you simply took hold of a knob at the bottom of the frame and slid it across the length of the picture. And miraculously –all the marks made by the magnetic pencil disappeared! The screen became totally clean – as pure and unmarked as when we first bought it. That’s what Jesus does with our sin. When we come to him and repent – when we say we’re sorry and determine in his strength, to change our ways, he says, “it is finished!” – and offers us a new beginning.

When we gave our lives to Jesus, we became a new creation. And even though we might fail, God looks at us, and sees the perfection, the righteousness of Christ. We are not the same anymore!

Every time we sin, and we turn to Jesus and say “sorry, Lord” – he says, “it is finished!” He also says, “Behold, I make all things new.”

We need not feel defeated by sinful thoughts and practices. Okay – we’re going to sin. We’re human. But God’s power is there. God’s forgiveness is there. A new beginning is there.

We need not struggle to feel acceptable to God – the new beginning Christ won for us means God looks at us and sees the perfection of his Son – not our imperfection. And even before that, he loved us. Paul tells us in Romans, that even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

So let’s not live as if the first Good Friday was just another day. “It is finished!” cried Jesus. Let’s instead give thanks for what has finished and let’s embrace what has newly begun.

The Lord be with you.