

## THE WORD OF TRIUMPH

JOHN 19:28-30

I have a theory time actually speeds up the older you get. It's kind of similar to the value of a dollar over the last 50 years. Just like one dollar buys you far less than it did back in 1972, the value of time seems to be less than when I was growing up. I just don't know if a minute is really as long today as it was when I was 10 years old. I have my doubts! Instead of lasting a full 60 seconds, one minute now feels like about 30 seconds. An hour seemed like an hour when I was 15. A year seemed like a year back then. Now a full year feels like three or four months instead. The older I get the more time speeds us – or so it seems. Can anyone here relate? The longer we live the shorter life seems. If I'm fortunate enough to reach the age of 85 – 20 years from now – I expect a full year to feel like just a week!

The brevity of life is often amplified by an uncomfortable sense we just haven't accomplished very much. Even people you might consider to be very successful in life often confess to feeling they've actually accomplished very little. Even Christians can have those feelings. We know what truly matters in life is whatever God by His grace allows us to accomplish in helping to build His Kingdom in this world. We know God could care less what salary bracket we're in, what sort of house we live in, or who thinks we're important and why. God cares about whether we're growing in enjoying our relationship with Him more every day. God cares about whether we're becoming more like Jesus every day. God cares about how we're using the gifts and abilities He's given us to advance His work in this world. Everything else is unimportant to Him.

If you knew today was the last day of your life, could you say, "I've become completely the person God wants me to become. I've accomplished everything God wants me to do"? Wouldn't honesty compel us to say instead, "There was that person I should have helped, but I didn't. There was that other person I should have spoken to about Jesus, but I didn't. There are mistakes I've made, opportunities I've missed, and sins I've committed"? Not one person here today or listening online – young, middle-aged, or elderly – can say, "I've become completely the person God wants me to become. I've accomplished everything God wants me to do." Jesus could. Jesus is the one and only human being who accomplished everything God wanted Him to do. He's the only person who could say at the end of life, "Mission accomplished" and know that statement was absolutely true and correct before God.

We're nearing the end of our Lenten study of several statements Jesus made over the six hours He hung on the cross dying in our place. *Cross Words: Jesus' Statements Before He Died* is the title of this series of messages leading up to Easter Sunday. Let's read the statement we want to reflect on today. **READ, p. 1073.** "It is finished!" (Jo. 19:30 NLT) Let's call it the word of triumph. John was the only one of the four Gospel writers who told us Jesus made that statement. Matthew and Mark mentioned Jesus gave a great shout just before He died, but only John recorded Jesus' actual words. On the one hand, the meaning of Jesus' words are rather obvious. He was expressing relief at the nearness of death and an end to the tremendous pain and suffering He'd endured. On the other hand, there is more than just relief here. Much more. The full

impact of “It is finished!” meant “Mission accomplished!” Let’s ask and answer two questions as we discern the meaning of Jesus’ word of triumph. First...

## WHAT WAS FINISHED?

Did Jesus refer to the fact His physical life was about to end? Yes, but He meant more than that. The word for “finished” meant more than coming to the end of something. It meant to carry out and fulfill the task given to you by someone else. It meant to complete an assignment or accomplish a mission. We can find Jesus’ awareness of His task, His assignment, and His mission everywhere. For example, Jesus said to His Father in prayer, “I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” (Jo 17:4 NLT) What work was Jesus referring to? Healing people? Performing miracles? Teaching and preaching? Revealing God’s power? Absolutely! But Jesus’ work meant far more than all those wonderful acts and activities.

The Bible clearly teaches the primary purpose of Jesus’ work was to reconcile you and me with God, His Father. Reconciliation required Jesus’ death. I realize that might sound ridiculous and barbaric to some people, but that’s because we don’t consider human sinfulness to be as big a problem as God does. God clearly stated His eternal attitude toward human sin in His Word. “The person who sins is the one who will die.” (Ezk 18:20 NLT) “For the wages of sin is death.” (Ro 6:23 NLT) Written into the spiritual structure of the universe God created long before human beings arrived on the scene was the spiritual law that the penalty for any and all sin is death. If you dislike or disagree with that bedrock truth, check out the Bible for yourself. It’s not my opinion - which matters very little anyway. It’s what Scripture teaches.

But, thank God, that’s not all the Bible teaches. God is loving and He cares for human beings – His creation – deeply, passionately, and completely. How could He show us His love, but still do justice to our sin at the same time? It was our problem, but only God could solve it. And He did solve it in the person of His Son, Jesus. Jesus took upon Himself your sin and then God judged Jesus for your sin and mine. The Bible says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor 5:21 NIV) Jesus became your substitute on the cross. He paid the penalty for your sin. He died in your place. Any other explanation of what Jesus did destroys the significance of the cross. Because justice was done to your sin, God now extends to you the offer of eternal reconciliation with Him. Your sins are forgiven. You get a new sense of intimate connection with God as your Father and the peace and joy that goes with it. The Holy Spirit enters your spirit to dwell there. You receive the assurance of an eternal home in Heaven. All that amazing stuff God sums up in one word: grace. Most of you probably know that helpful little acronym. Grace is **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**. All that God is and all that God offers becomes available to us through the sacrificial love of Jesus at the cross.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, the people of Israel were commanded by God to put the blood of a slain lamb on the doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death passed over them. Inside, the members of each family ate a hasty meal in anticipation

of their departure from slavery in Egypt. The Passover Feast became one of the most important yearly spiritual events the people of Israel observed. It commemorated God's mighty deliverance. The traditional Passover Feast includes drinking from four different cups of wine as a part of the meal. One cup is called the Cup of Redemption which symbolized God's saving love for Israel. As the family drinks from this cup, the head of the family announces solemnly, "Finished. Completed. Accomplished." It's a reminder God's work of miraculous deliverance has been achieved.

This was what Jesus was saying moments before He died. The task was finished. The work of providing salvation was complete. The mission of making it possible for human beings to be reconciled to God, His Father, was accomplished. The Passover Feast actually points back both to the Exodus and to the cross of Jesus. The massive sin problem has been solved. Payment in full has been made. Both God's justice and His love are upheld. Finished. Completed. Accomplished. The rest of v. 30 seems almost anti-climactic, doesn't it? "Then he bowed his head and released his spirit." (Jo 19:30 NLT) The word "released" or "gave up" meant more than just dying physically, however. The word was often associated with settling back on a pillow to rest. It meant Jesus yielded up His life willingly out of His great love for the Father and for us. Jesus' death was not an accident, not a defeat, and not a failure. It was, is - and always will be - the absolute triumph of God. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" it was far more than relief His pain and suffering was coming to an end. It was a shout of triumph!

When famous people die tragically, doesn't it seem like their influence and impact becomes greater sometimes?. Would John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr. be as respected or immortalized today if they hadn't been assassinated? I don't think so. Somehow dying tragically enhanced their influence. Another example. When Abraham Lincoln was shot and killed by John Wilkes Booth, Edwin Stanton was his Secretary of War. Historians tell us Stanton had little respect of Lincoln. He thought Lincoln was rude and uncultured. He made no effort to hide his contempt for the President. But as he looked down on Lincoln's lifeless body on that sad day, Stanton was heard to say, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen."

It's been suggested Jesus was never more majestic and triumphant than He was in death. The Bible described one hardened, cynical Roman soldier at the cross that day. "When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, 'This man truly was the Son of God!'" (Mk 15:39 NLT) The cross has the same effect today. Somehow the cross and the death of Jesus draws people to Him far more than even His life, His deeds, and His words. In a conversation with a man named Nicodemus, Jesus Himself recognized the power of the cross, He said, "The Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." (Jo 3:14-15 NLT) There's a painting that depicts a pivotal moment during World War 1. It depicts an engineer repairing a telephone line essential to the communication ability of his army. He's just completed the hook up when he's fatally shot. There's a one word title for that painting: "Through!" The man had given his life so that the essential message could get through.

So did Jesus. He died so that God's essential message of love, grace, and forgiveness could get through to you and me. Beyond the blood, sweat, and tears of the cross, we can see the glory and majesty of God Himself. Finished. Completed. Accomplished. What was finished? Actually, that first question can't be fully answered until we answer a second question.

## WHAT WAS STARTED?

“It is finished!” (Jo. 19:30 NLT) Jesus' work didn't come to an end at the cross. In another sense, His work really just began there. Here's an analogy. A wedding ceremony begins a marriage. When the wedding itself is over, certain things are finished, done, accomplished, and completed. Vow are exchanged. Certificates are signed. Cake is eaten. Bride and groom are congratulated. Now something new starts – the marriage relationship itself. Yes, something is indeed finished – the wedding ceremony. But the conclusion of the ceremony means something else begins – the marriage. Enduring and dying on the cross was an essential act Jesus successfully accomplished and completed. Something was indeed finished. But something else was started.

It comes down to the difference between the work of the cross for me and the work of the cross in me. When Jesus died, the work of the cross for me was finished and done. It's in the past. My salvation was purchased. Forgiveness of my sins was secured. Reconciliation with God was made possible. But the work of the cross in me just got started. The effect of the cross continues on. The work and the mission of Jesus continues on into the present and the future. Here's a question to ask yourself this Lenten season as we get closer and closer to Palm Sunday next Sunday, then Good Friday, and Easter Day. Having experienced the work of the cross for me – salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation with God – am I experiencing the work of the cross in me?

Well, what does the work of the cross in me look like? Years ago, I read a book where the author expressed something I believe answers that question. First, the work of the cross in you makes it possible for you to be with Jesus now in a spiritual sense. I love the verse that tells us what Jesus did regarding the twelve disciples. “He appointed twelve that they might be with him.” (Mk 3:14 NIV) Sometimes we can get so focused on being like Jesus – character stuff – or trying to do things for Jesus in terms of service or ministry that we fail to appreciate fully the privilege of simply being with Jesus. We are called first and foremost to enjoy and delight in Him. There's nothing more wonderful than simply being with Jesus spiritually. A wonderful statement puts it this way, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. (Westminster Shorter Catechism) Someone has made this subtle, but significant change to that statement. “The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.”

Most of the time, we tend to make a relationship with God a duty rather than a joy. We make it all about being as good as we can be and doing our religious duty. The result can be our daily lives and even our worship on Sundays can take on an unattractive dullness, stiffness, and lifelessness that doesn't honor God in the least. The Bible

says, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires.” (Ps 37:4 NLT) Do you delight in the Lord? Do you enjoy God? Really? The Bible also says, “You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.” (Ps 16:11 NLT) Do you find pleasure in being with God today? Is being with Jesus something you want to do or something you feel you ought to do?

Jesus said, “And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.” (Jo 17:3 NLT) Eternal life isn’t found only in a place called Heaven. It’s not just about living forever and ever. According to Jesus, eternal life is about a relationship with a Person. Eternal life is about knowing God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus. The greatest result of the cross is the fact we get to know God – not just know about God, but we get to know Him personally and experientially. That’s a result that never has an end. You’ll never find yourself saying, “Well, now I know everything there is to know about God. I’m done now. Let’s move on to whatever comes next.” Won’t happen, not ever!

First, the work of the cross in you makes it possible for you to be with Jesus. Second, the work of the cross in you makes it possible for you be like Jesus now. That’s the character stuff and it’s very important for sure. It’s a lifelong process whereby you gradually begin to resemble the Lord Himself in your attitudes, your actions, in how you treat other people, in everything. The Bible give us many examples of what being like Jesus looks like. Maybe the most definitive list is called the fruit of the Holy Spirit. “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Don’t get the cart before the horse! If you focus first on becoming like Jesus, but fail to enjoy Him and neglect being with Him, you’ll turn becoming like Jesus into a duty and drudgery. The more we are with Jesus, the more we want to become like Jesus.

The work of the cross in you makes it possible to be with Jesus. Then, it makes it possible to be like Jesus. Third, the work of the cross in you makes it possible to be for Jesus now. This is the serving the Lord piece. This is finding a place of ministry inside the church or out in the community and doing it with all of your heart out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for you. This is contributing time, talent, tithe, and treasure to help build the Kingdom of God. It has everything to do with your spiritual gifts and how you put them at Jesus’ disposal day in and day out. Again, don’t get the cart before the horse! If you focus first on just getting busy for Jesus but don’t find ways to delight in Him and experience life with Him on a daily basis, you’ll run out of steam in serving Him for very long. The more you are with Jesus, the more you’ll want to be for Jesus.

I know for sure I still live with only a superficial awareness of the abundance, the largeness, and the unbelievable bigness of what’s being offered to me now and today because of what Jesus achieved on the cross back then. So much got started on that hill outside Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago. God wants to give us so much more of Himself and yet so often our capacity for Him is so miserably small. I can just sense that there’s a depth of joy I haven’t touched yet, a well of peace I haven’t experienced yet, a wealth of meaning I haven’t entered into yet, ministry and service I haven’t

explored yet, and fulfillment I haven't dreamt of yet that is the unclaimed legacy of the cross in my life. What about you? Jesus died on the cross so that you could be with Him, so that you could be like Him, and so that you could be for Him. That's the work of the cross in you. That's what was started when Jesus said, "It is finished!"

It was originally known as the Barberini Vase. It's an exquisite Roman glass vase from the 1<sup>st</sup> century made of a deep, violet-blue glass overlaid with opaque, white glass. It eventually became the property of the Duke of Portland, a member of British nobility and was renamed the Portland Vase. Eventually, the Duke lent it to the British Museum for display in 1810. As the story goes, an employee of the Duke had a falling out with him and was fired. He now hated the Duke and brooded on a way to bring personal distress to his former employer and his family. His scheme centered on the Portland Vase. He made his way to London and found where the vase was located in the British Museum. Eventually, all visitors left that area of the museum and no museum employees were in the room. The man got to the vase, picked it up, and dashed it to the ground. The crash resounded throughout the British Museum, employees rushed to the scene, and the man responsible was taken into custody. Whether or not his act was aimed at causing the Duke of Portland injury or not is sketchy, but the fact is this man vandalized the Portland Vase in 1845.

This incredible, beautiful masterpiece was shattered into over 150 different pieces. Shocked and saddened, the employees swept up and gathered all the shattered pieces carefully. The precious work of art was broken beyond repair. Or so it seemed. Over the next few years, however, several restoration attempts have successfully repaired the Portland Vase. With great skill and endless patience, craftsmen took each broken fragment and found its place in the original vase. Each piece was delicately fixed back to where it belonged. You can still see the Portland Vase in the British Museum in London today very faintly marked by its remarkable and miraculous restoration.

Satan is like that vandal. Because of our sin, it's like he picked up humanity – God's masterpiece – and smashed us into a thousand pieces of broken glass. Restoration looked impossible. But Jesus is the master craftsman. By His death on the cross He began the work of salvation. He's even now putting back together all the broken pieces of your life and mine. He's skillfully putting it all back just as God intended. But there's one important difference between the Portland Vase and us, however. Despite its remarkable restoration, the vase can never be as perfect as it was in its original condition. But when Jesus gets a hold of your life and mine, the end result will be a perfect beauty only eternity will fully reveal. Jesus said, "It is finished." It was and still is His word of triumph. Something was finished at the cross that day. And something was started. Two questions. Have you ever experienced what was finished? Are you experiencing today what was started?