

Good Friday April, 10, 2020

Scripture Reading: [John 19-28-30\(Click here to read\)](#)

“It is finished” could be used in several contexts with different meanings. We might hear “It is finished” as a person makes the sucking noise on a straw after emptying the milk shake glass. “It is finished” could be shouted as the runner crosses the finish line. “It is finished” could be the expression of relief as a colleague puts the final footnote on a thesis. “It is finished” might be the proud exclamation of a graduate. “It is finished” could be the words of an artist as he or she puts the last touches on a masterpiece. “It is finished” might be the words of one who finds the last piece to the puzzle. “It is finished” could be the words that accompany the final frame of a movie. “It is finished” might be the verbal equivalent of throwing in the towel. “It is finished” are the words of Jesus as he gives up his spirit. We can only guess at the intent.

Jesus says, **“It is finished.”** There are many ways the phrase could be interpreted. To his enemies—for the Roman authorities and the Jewish hierarchy, for the Pharisees and Scribes—this was a cry of resignation and defeat. This response would have given some relief and satisfaction to those who saw Jesus as a disruptive force, a troublemaker, a liberal do-gooder. Jesus had questioned their authority, denied their legalism, maligned their motives and doubted their sincerity. He had endangered their standing and jeopardized their livelihood. The detractors of Jesus would hear “It is finished,” and they would say, “Good riddance” or “It’s about time.” Their confrontations and run-ins would be over. It would be a return to the status quo, without the criticisms from the upstart and would-be messiah. Back to business as usual.

For his followers and disciples, the statement “It is finished” was an exclamation point on a tragic conclusion of a fateful week. Their three year campaign seemed to have come to an end. No more miracles, no more adoring crowds, no more parades, no more mentoring and tutoring, no more ambitions of a new kingdom, no more hope for positions in the cabinet of the messianic king.

Commentators over the years have emphasized the translation of the phrase as “It is accomplished.” It is certainly the way the faithful have preferred to understand the phrase. But let me, for one heretical moment, suppose an unorthodox understanding. There is a part

of Jesus that may have exclaimed, “It is finished” and meant just that. It’s over; done. It is the end. Jesus was realistic. As life ebbs from his body, he realizes that there is nothing left. It is a fact—it is finished. The attempt to mobilize the people to a new understanding of the covenant and the kingdom had failed. His message about grace had fallen on deaf ears. His countrymen and countrywomen were not going to reform their religious legalism or transform the religious landscape. It was finished.

Jesus could have been unaware of what was to happen next or unsure of what was to come. His statement “It is finished” may have reflected his own sense of frustration and futility, his own acknowledgment of an end to what he had tried to achieve.

And it was accomplished. If the calling of Jesus was to self-sacrifice, it was completed and fulfilled. The aftermath of the crucifixion is immaterial, extraneous and irrelevant for most theories of atonement. Salvation is not dependent of a postscript or a resurrection, because it is the death of Jesus that is supposed to redeem us. The resurrection is a bonus, a finishing touch, that is an autograph of the scenario as God’s handiwork. The resurrection validates and verifies the identity of the one sacrificed.

Jesus had followed the course that God had established. He had been obedient up to this point, though the way had been difficult. The words might have meant “mission accomplished.” If we interpret the statement to mean “it is accomplished; it is complete,” then there can be a sigh of relief and a sense of fulfillment. There can be congratulations and high-fives. There can be satisfaction and celebration.

But there might also be a letdown, a sense of anti-climax, a complacency. If it is accomplished, finished, over, complete, then a follower could easily assume that there is nothing left to do. It’s all wrapped up. One reaction could be inertia, disengagement or smugness. Whether you hear “It is finished” as a concession or as a boast, the response of onlookers and followers can be resignation. There can be resignation because it’s over and done or resignation because it has all been done.

In the most extreme views of God's grace, the Christian has no responsibility, no accountability. It is all up to God. But I do not subscribe to that stance. We say, "It is finished" when we complete a course, but our work is not done. Even when we think something is finished, it seldom is. We have hang-ups and dysfunctions, habits and customs, that are residual effects of our past. Most of our experiences have after-shocks. There are ramifications and repercussions to most of our actions.

When Jesus says, "It is finished," he can only refer to a phase, a step, a stage in the drama. There is a cliché that warns us not to put a period where God might place a comma. God may place an addendum, an appendix, a postlude, a sequel on something we had considered complete. Yes, the role of Jesus on earth was almost complete, but it was God that took the next steps. It was God who elongated the drama and continued the campaign. We can only conclude where we are, but God may have other plans.

"It is finished" cannot be an opportunity to rest, to resign, to recede. It is the end of a chapter, but not the end of the volume. It is not a signal to rest on laurels or to declare a premature victory. There is plenty to do. The disciples wonder, "What next?" and Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." The disciples look for direction, and Jesus says, "**Go and make disciples.**" The disciples are bewildered about their role when Jesus is gone. Jesus says, "**Love one another as I have loved you.**"

Look around. There are homeless to house, hungry to feed, naked to clothe, sinners to forgive, peace to be pursued, wounds to heal, relationships to reconcile, spirits to nurture and people to love.

One cliché says, "It ain't over until the fat lady sings." Another declares, "It ain't over until it's over. Or maybe it isn't over until God is finished. Check it out. Does it look finished to you? It is finished? I don't think so!

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Pastor Kelly