

LAST WORDS
John 19:26-30

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Every baby book has a section which is to be filled in by the mother or the father. It goes something like this: “Baby’s First Words.” Usually it is Mama or Dada – we hope it’s one of those two. Baby’s first words. The first words pronounced, uttered, enunciated by our little precious bundle of joy.

Many tales of supernatural intelligence have attached themselves to Albert Einstein. The best one relates to his first words – at age 2 1/2 – which were an eloquent complaint that his milk was too hot. His stunned parents asked why he hadn’t spoken earlier. “Because,” the little genius supposedly replied, “previously everything was in order.” (www.freepublic.com/focus/news/800220/posts)

But what about last words? If the first words we speak are important enough to be recorded for time immemorial, perhaps our last words are important, too?

General John Sedgewick, Union commander in the American Civil War, was shot at the Spotsylvania Courthouse in 1864 while looking over a parapet at the enemy lines. “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this dist...”

Or, how about Leonardo da Vinci, the Italian inventor and artist who died in 1519. Perhaps he was a little hard on himself. He reportedly said, “I’ve offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”

Or what about executed criminals who get a chance to share last words?

Sean Flanagan, who died June 23, 1989, who was executed by injection in New York, said to the executioner, “I love you.” Wow! That would make for a tough job, wouldn’t it?

Robert Alton Harris, who was executed April 21, 1992, said, “You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everyone dances with the Grim Reaper.”

But there was another man who was condemned to die, another man that was strung up with common criminals. This condemned man’s name is Jesus. What are His very last words? Do His last words have any meaning? Do they make any difference?

John 19:16-30

19:16-22

Let's set the stage for the last words of Jesus. The Lord reigns from the wood of the cross, as He is high and lifted up. He, himself, had said in John 12:32, "And I, when I am hoisted up, will draw all people to Myself."

He begins in verse 16 by saying, "And so he then delivered Him to be crucified."

In verse 17, it tells us that they took Jesus, carrying His own cross, to the Place of the Skull, which is called Golgotha. Two titles both contribute to the gravity of the place. All of humanity will be changed by this awful place, the place of the skull – a gaunt picture of death will become the place of a new life, the ground of cosmic reconciliation.

God's description is so simple: "There they crucified Him" (v. 18). No gory details. No screams. No emotive prose at all. Just an adverb, a subject pronoun, a verb, and an object pronoun. The absence of histrionics impresses. What a simple way to describe a horrific event. "There they crucified Him."

Two others were with Him – one here and one there, and Jesus in the middle.

The crucified Christ is the whole message of the church. The church has one center, one heart – the person, word, and work of the crucified and risen Christ.

Paul put it this way (1 Corinthians 15:3-8): "For I delivered to you that which is of first importance, and which you also welcomed, that Christ died for our sins in accordance to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared...."

In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he says, "I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

Pilate writes a description, and places it on the cross: "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews" (v. 19). There, near the city, plainly stated on the pathway in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, we learn in verse 20. Pilate probably meant his sign as an anti-Jewish joke. "Here's your king, you stiff-necked people." But if so, the joke was on Pilate and all who have mocked this crucified figure ever since, because this mocked Jesus has, in fact, been accepted as king by multitudes in multiple lands through the centuries.

Oddly enough, Pilate has the distinction of giving us the first written record of the historical Jesus, carved by the highest representative of the Roman Empire in the land. Word for simple word, it says a great deal. "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews."

The cross speaks in tongues the moment it is planted – Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. It spoke to the religious in Hebrew, to the political world in Latin, and to the intellectual, commercial world in Greek.

They beg him not to leave it. “Change it,” they said. “Change it. Don’t write ‘King of the Jews,’ but that He said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate responded, “What I have written, I have written.”

In fulfillment of Psalm 22, the soldiers – four of them – take their tip, each getting a piece of Jesus’ clothing. One, a sandal. Another, a turban. One, the outer garment. And one, the sash. But His tunic was too nice to waste by ripping it into scraps. They play their plebeian dice game to see who wins. There they are below, casting dice for a garment, not realizing that above their heads, just a few feet, is a central event in world history occurring.

At first there are four soldiers throwing dice. Now, in verse 25, there are four women keeping the faith. Four women and one man – the beloved disciple.

Jesus sees His mother. He sees the disciple John, the beloved disciple, standing nearby. He says to His mother, “Look, your son.” He says to the disciple John, “Look, your mother.” And it says (v. 27), “From that very hour the disciple took her into his own home.” Even dying on the cross, the Lord looks after his mother.

Most significantly, however, perhaps, is the fact that Jesus is creating the new family, the new people of God. In this setting of the story of the crucifixion, the creation of the new family of God, we have Jesus’ final words.

As Mary is given into the care of John, this is the last time we meet her. Think back, all the way back, to John 2 (the first time we meet Mary), when it was Jesus’ very first miracle. Mary tells Him, in Cana at the wedding celebration, “Jesus, they’ve run out of wine.” She tells the servants, “Do whatever He asks you to do.” Jesus commands the servants to fill the water pots with water. They fill them to the brim. And as they drew out some water and took it, at His command, to the head waiter, the waiter declared, “This is the very, very best wine.”

But the oddity of this story of Jesus on the cross is that now Jesus is thirsty. And the One who had made the very best wine so that the head waiter was shocked at its quality, is now forced to sip sour wine of such a low grade that it was used by the common soldier as he drank on duty.

Jesus was thirsty. He was the one who had so often spoken of water, whose very first miracle was turning water to wine, who told the woman at the well that if she would drink of the water that He had to offer – the living water – that she would never thirst again. And again in chapter 6, He said that those who came to Him, the Bread of Life, would not hunger. And the one who believed in Him would never thirst again.

Knowing that Jesus is the supplier of living water and every abundance, our horror is heightened when we see our Lord and our Master Himself thirsty. What had happened? How could the giver of living water thirst? How could He who claimed that those who would come to Him would never thirst – how could He Himself thirst? It makes no sense. Had the water of life failed? Had the wine run out for good? He saved others; could he not save himself? As with the crown of thorns and the mocking purple robe, this is part of the truth of it all. Jesus has come to the place of everyone else: the place of thirst, the place of shame,

the place of death. And that, too, John says is the fulfillment of scripture (Psalm 69:21). (Tom Wright, *John For Everyone, Part. 2*, p. 130)

But John has told us that even when Jesus is lifted up that this will be the moment of God's glory shining through Him in full strength. As if to confirm that all is done according to the plan, that, indeed, the living water is still in control, He has Jesus cry, "It is finished."

It's not really Jesus' famous last words. It is Jesus' famous last word. It's only one word in the Greek – *tetelestai*. What does it mean, this last word of Jesus, "It is finished." Don't be fooled. He doesn't simply mean, "I'm dying." It's not a temporal perspective. It doesn't mean that life is coming to an end.

When Jesus declares it is finished, He is saying that He has accomplished everything that God has sent Him to accomplish. His work on earth is done. He has been faithful, even faithful to death on the cross. God's plan of salvation has come to an end. Jesus has died on the cross.

I want us to look at what it means for Jesus to say, "It is finished."

I. When Jesus cries, "It is finished," He means He has accomplished the will of the Father.

Turn to John 8:28-29.

When you lift up the Son of Man (*Jesus speaking of His own crucifixion*), then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.

Jesus lived His life in obedience, to please the Father. "At the moment when I'm crucified, when I'm lifted up on that cross," He says, "then you will know that I am the Messiah, and that I lived My life to please the Father. I have yielded My will to the will of the Father."

Look at John 10:30

I and the Father are one.

John 10:32

I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?

Jesus, again, is indicating that He is one with the Father, His will is yielded to the will of the Father, and the works that He accomplishes are the works that come from the command of God.

Paul says in Romans, "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of one, then many will be made righteous."

When Jesus declares "It is finished," He is saying He has done everything required of Him by the Father. It's all done.

II. “It is finished” means the bill has been paid.

Archeologists have discovered on ancient papyri, ancient business documents written in *Koine* Greek (the same language in which the New Testament is written), the repeated use of the expression “*tetelestai*.” Do you know where they found it? Merchants had written the word *tetelestai* across receipts for bills that were paid. It would be like a rubber stamp that said, “Paid in Full.” When the Greeks wrote *tetelestai*, it meant it is finished, the obligation has been met, the price has been paid.

Paul says in Romans 3:24 that we have the redemption which is in Christ Jesus – whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation – as a satisfaction – of the debt owed to Him in His blood through faith (Romans 3:25). Put another way, you and I owed a debt we could not pay, and He paid a debt He did not owe.

Paul says again in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “You are not your own. You have been bought with a price.” Through our rebellion against God, through our sins against God, we ran up a bill we’d never be able to pay, a bill that would cost us our very lives. But Paul says, “Don’t worry. Jesus came – the one who had no debt to God, the one who had no sin – and paid the price. He satisfied God on your behalf and my behalf.”

It is finished. We have been ransomed. We have been set free from the slavery of sin by the payment of the blood of Jesus Christ. It is all done. It has all been paid.

I had a sizeable bill with a local merchant. I had placed the order by telephone. It was something necessary for me to have, but I wasn’t looking forward to paying for it. I went up to the counter, pulled out my credit card, and the lady said, “Oh, don’t worry. This has already been paid for by credit card.” I imagined they must have my credit card on file. They just run the number through. “They don’t need my signature this time,” I guessed.

But the bill never showed up on the credit card. It never came through. Someone else had quietly stepped forward. Someone else had beat me to the register. Someone else had paid the price – paid a debt they did not owe. And I was set free from the obligation because it had already been paid in full.

III. “It is finished” means our sins have been forgiven.

It is finished. God has been satisfied. We are no longer slaves to sin. We have been set free.

Paul says in Romans 6, “Do we not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death, knowing that our old self was crucified with Him that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin.”

“The day is coming,” He promised Hosea, “when I will remember their sins no more.”

“And someday,” wrote David, “the mistakes of men will be tossed as far as the east is from the west.”

That day took place 2000 years ago in a location known as The Place of the Skull. And on this day, my sins and your sins, as we profess our faith in Jesus, were wiped away.

Without the cross, there is no forgiveness. But because of the cross there is complete forgiveness for our sins.

Think of all the lambs slaughtered in the Old Testament era for the forgiveness of sins – lambs that accomplished nothing, but simply lambs that pointed to the Lamb of God, the Son of God? Remember the words of John the Baptist, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

Because the Lamb has been slain, because of the sacrifice of Jesus, our sins have been forgiven.

What about the writer of Hebrews? Do you remember what he said? The sacrifices year by year of the Old Testament were nothing but a reminder of sins. “For,” he writes, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Then in Hebrews 10:10-12, 14, he says, “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but Jesus, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.... for by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Put plainly, the sacrificing of lambs and goats did nothing. But the sacrifice of the Holy Lamb, the Son of God, finished it all. It is finished. It is complete. There is no need for any more sacrifices. This final sacrifice has brought about the forgiveness of sins.

IV. “It is finished” means we are freed from the power of death.

The author of Hebrews writes in chapter 2, that Jesus “partook of flesh and blood that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Put another way, because Jesus died, we don’t have to die. As Paul would say, we have died with Him, and, therefore, we will be resurrected with Him. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:21-26, “Since by man came death, by man also came resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

Death loses its sting. Death loses its power. Upon the death of Jesus, all who believe in Him die with Him. Therefore, those who believe in Jesus will never, ever die.

Jesus said in John 11, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

When Jesus shouts “It is finished,” He means death no longer has victory over humanity because with His forthcoming resurrection death will be absolutely defeated.

Death has taken its last victim when it comes to the people, the children, of God. The Grim Reaper’s grip has been broken, its stranglehold released. For death cannot hold Christ, the first fruits. And death will not be able to hold Christ’s brothers and sisters in the family of God, the second fruits of the resurrection.

It is finished. Death has been defeated.

Do you and I understand this morning the enormity of what it means for Christ to die, to be obedient to death on the cross, to take your place and my place?

It is finished. All has been done. There is nothing left for you to do this morning. There is nothing left for me to do this morning but to respond in faith. For when it is finished, Christ has completed the will of the Father. Our debt has been paid in full to God. We are forgiven for our sins. And death has been defeated.

Of all the last words ever uttered from the lips of a dying human being, no words have been more powerful than the one word that Jesus shouted. “Finished.” It has been finished. A perfect tense verb meaning it happened one point in history, but the results continue throughout all the ages. It has been accomplished. It has been fulfilled. It has been paid. It has been finished. It is over. And yet, because it’s over, the cosmos will never be the same again.

Would you take the gift of Christ? Would you let His sacrifice be your sacrifice? His death be your death? God has acted in time and space in the person of Jesus, especially in His death and burial and resurrection. It is finished. All is made available to you. It is accomplished. It is fulfilled. It is paid for. It is finished.

But it is only finished for you when you respond in faith, when you respond in obedience, when you believe.

“It is finished.” The greatest last word of history.