

Seven Sayings (6) John 19:30

One of my favourite hymns was penned by a Welshman, William Rees - it was known as the 'love song' of the 1904 Welsh revival. It goes like this:

Here is love vast as the ocean, Loving kindness as the flood, When the Prince of life, our ransom, Shed for us his precious blood. Who his love will not remember? Who can cease to sing his praise? He can never be forgotten, Throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion, Fountains opened deep and wide; Through the floodgates of God's mercy, Flowed a vast and gracious tide. Grace and love, like mighty rivers, Poured incessant from above, And heaven's peace and perfect justice, Kissed a guilty world in love.

We have taken five steps on our journey into the heart of Jesus when we have explored the first five words that he spoke from Calvary. Words of pardon, assurance, compassion, anguish, and suffering - today, in number six, we contemplate a cry of victory when Jesus shouted at the top of his voice, 'It is finished.' Here is the overwhelming triumph of Golgotha - for these are not the words of a hapless victim, these are the words of one who is an all-conquering Saviour.

When Jesus died it was a classic case of mission accomplished. He died in dreadful pain but he died with no regrets. He didn't need more time to teach or preach another sermon, to heal one more paralytic, or create one more loaf of bread. He died with a profound sense of satisfaction, it

was a job well done - and a job done well. All the Father asked him to do, he carried out in full.

This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr, it was not an expression of satisfaction that his suffering was terminated, it was not the last gasp of a worn out life.

If it wasn't that, let me tell you what it was - it was an emphatic declaration before heaven, earth, and hell that his purpose for coming into the world had been accomplished. It was a pronouncement so great and glorious, that ever since Jesus said it, the devil has tried to hide its meaning from the hearts of sinful man.

The searching question is, what was finished? At the age of 33 most people are saying, life is only beginning, my best years are ahead of me - but, at the age of 33, Jesus was saying, it's finished. He did not cry out, I am finished. No, this was not the end of him nor was it the end for him!

That single word in the Greek - tetelestai - dealt a lethal blow to the legions of hell, a fatal blow to the auld enemy - Jesus was saying that Calvary covers it all. It means, it is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished. For that's what we read in Hebrews 9:12, 'Having entered with his own blood into the holy place, Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for us.'

Ah, yes, the difficult work of suffering, the difficult work of being separated from the near presence of his Father, the difficult work of being treated like a sinner - all of that was over. The price was paid. Paid in full. Finished in time. Finished for eternity.

The word 'tetelestai' is a word that people in the day would've been very familiar with - you might have used the word after you had paid your bills or had run a race. A servant who completed his assignment would use the word to report back to his master. With that in mind, let me suggest that it speaks of a few important truths:

The consummation of the prophetic Scriptures

One person who would use the word 'tetelestai' is the artist. When he'd painted a masterpiece in oils, he'd step back, look at it once, then a second time - only when he was satisfied that it was ok would he say 'tetelestai' ... meaning, the picture is now complete.

When we read through the Old Testament we have a picture - there are ceremonies, types, symbols, prophecies - these are like colours on a canvas. It was God's picture gallery in the shadows. But when Jesus came, he completed the picture, he turned on the light. And so, as the Lord Jesus, looked down the corridor of time and viewed the entire scope of the prophetic word, he cried out with a loud voice, 'tetelestai'. Finished. Why? Because, in the words of John W Peterson:
Before the stars were hung or planets fashioned,
Before the clay was formed to make a man, Christ
was the Lamb of God for sinners offered, This
was redemption's one and only plan.

The culmination of his personal sufferings

Here we are standing on holy ground - the soil around Calvary is sacred, this is God's hallowed acre. I hesitate to portray the sufferings of our Lord - the indescribable anguish - so fitting that he should be called, the Man of sorrows.

He suffered viciously at the hands of evil men. He suffered vindictively and vengefully at the hand of Satan. He suffered vicariously at the hand of God.

From his earliest days, Jesus walked amid the shadows the cross cast across his pathway - for example, at the marriage feast in Cana in John 2, he said, 'Mine hour is not yet come.' Calvary was always in the front of his mind.

Now, that which his soul shrank from is now over, the Lord has bruised him, the cup is drained dry, God's wrath has spent itself - the sword of divine justice is sheathed - sin's wages have been paid - that's why he cried, 'it is finished.' The purchase price is paid - paid in its entirety ... so we sing:
Jesus paid it all, All to him I owe, Sin had left a
crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.

The bottom line is that we owed a debt we could never pay, and Jesus paid a debt he did not owe!
Well, might we sing with Lucy Ann Bennett:

O teach me what it meaneth, That cross uplifted
high, With one, the man of sorrows, Condemned
to bleed and die. O teach me what it cost thee, To
make a sinner whole, And teach me, Saviour,
teach me, The value of a soul.

The completion of a perfect sacrifice

The word 'tetelestai' was also used by priests who were serving in the temple. When the Jewish people brought their sacrifices to be examined, if they were acceptable, the priest would say the Hebrew version of the same word.

When Jesus died on the cross, he was a perfect, faultless sacrifice - he was a Lamb without spot or blemish. Because innocent blood was shed, the demands of justice were met, the requirements of

holiness were satisfied, and the offering of Jesus as God's Paschal Lamb met with the Father's full approval. That means, my sins are all on Jesus, not on me!

When the high priest went into the Holy of holies on the Day of Atonement - Yom Kippur - there was provision made, but it only lasted for a year. He would go through the same rigmarole, year on year. His work was never complete, that's why there was no chair in the Tent of Meeting ...

But when Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom - heaven intervened - and a new way was opened up. No more would the blood of bulls and goats need to be found on Jewish altars. No more would the blood of a lamb have to be taken and sprinkled on the mercy seat. Why? Isaac

Watts gives us the answer in his lovely hymn:
Not all the blood of beasts, On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace, Or wash away its stain. But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away; A sacrifice of nobler name, And richer blood than they.

Jesus finished the work and, as we read in Hebrews 12:2, 'having endured the cross, despising the shame, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.' As our great high priest, he did what no one in the priestly fraternity ever did before. Well, might we sing with Thomas Kelly:

The head that once was crowned with thorns, Is crowned with glory now, A royal diadem adorns,
The mighty victor's brow. The highest place that heaven affords, Is his by sovereign right, The King

of kings and Lord of lords, And heaven's eternal light.

The conquest over the power of Satan

By his death on Calvary, Jesus conquered death. He dealt efficiently and effectively with man's last great enemy. The cross sounded the death knell to the power of the devil. On Skull Hill, the devil met his Waterloo!

He is a vanquished foe, a defeated enemy - the tables turned on him at the cross. Now, for you and me, no fear of Satan can daunt us, no foe of hell can haunt us for, as Paul says, 'we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.' We are on the victory side, we're on the winning team. The battle was fought and won. So we sing along with Phillip Bliss:

Lifted up was he to die, It is finished was his cry,
Now in heaven exalted high, Hallelujah, what a Saviour.

Ah, my friend, the bells are chiming because of all that happened that day at Calvary - there's a song of victory in the air - let us never forget:

There was no other way, A God of love could find,
To reconcile the world, And save a lost mankind, It took the death of his own son upon a tree, There was no other way, but Calvary.