

The God who died for us

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[0 : 00] Have you ever wondered or thought what your last words are going to be? You know, the words that you say just before you die. Have you planned what you're going to say?

Have you got it written out? Have you got it all prepped? Not that you'll necessarily have a chance, but have you ever wondered what your last words are going to be? It's worth thinking about because generally your last words are how people are going to remember you when you're gone. So let me share with you some of my favorite famous last words. Some are quite profound, like the famously deaf composer Beethoven, who, by the way, never got to hear some of his greatest works.

He said moments before he died, I shall hear in heaven, which I think is quite inspiring. It's quite a way to go with that hope in his mind.

But then, of course, while those are quite profound thoughts, provoking words, some are quite unexpected, like those of General John Sedgwick in the American Civil War.

[1 : 01] He was reprimanding his men on the front lines who were ducking for cover from stray enemy bullets, and his last recorded words were, don't worry, they couldn't hit an elephant from this distance. He wasn't exactly expecting those to be his last words, but they were.

And then you get Conrad Hilton, the founder of the famous Hilton hotel chain around the world, who was asked on his deathbed if he had any words of wisdom.

And he did. In his dying breaths, he looked up and said, leave the shower curtain on the inside of the tub. Not as profound as you might expect, but, I mean, it's good advice.

But it's interesting, isn't it, to consider people's last words. Some of them are quite inspiring. Some are mundane. Some of them are quite, you know, ordinary.

But when it comes to last words and how we remember people, there are none more important to our lives than the last recorded words of Jesus Christ, moments before he died.

[2 : 00] We read them in John 19, verse 30. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

It is finished. Those are Jesus' last recorded words. Three simple words that literally changed everything. And words that, if you understand them, will have a profound impact on your life.

I can promise you that. And this morning, I want you to see just why, just what is the significance of these three simple words. Now, normally, I'd preach on an entire passage, a section of Scripture.

But this morning, I want to do something slightly different. I want to concentrate just on those three words. That is our text this morning. It is finished. I want us to consider each separate word in turn, because there's something we can learn from each.

So let's look at the first word, it. Jesus says, it is finished. Well, what? What is finished? What is he talking about? Well, the next thing that happened was that he died.

[3 : 01] So maybe he's talking about his life. He's saying, well, my life is finished. And then he died. That makes sense, doesn't it? Well, no, not really, because we know that his life wasn't finished at that moment, because he rose from the dead.

And he knew that he would. So that can't be what he's talking about. So what is he talking about? Well, the surrounding verses that Michiel read for us give us a little bit of a hint as to what he's talking about.

Did you notice when Michiel was reading how many times John, who wrote this, mentions that the things that happened leading to Jesus' death were done to fulfill Scripture?

He makes quite a point of it. He says it quite a few times. Just little things, almost mundane events surrounding the death of Jesus. But John stops and said this fulfilled Scripture.

So verse 24, by gambling for Jesus' clothes, the soldiers were unknowingly fulfilling Scripture. They were actually doing, without planning or knowing it, I mean, these were sort of pagan Gentile

soldiers.

They didn't know the Jewish Scriptures, but they were actually fulfilling to the letter what had been prophesied would happen centuries before. Verse 28, Jesus receiving a drink from the soldiers was in fulfillment of Scripture.

[4 : 08] It's exactly what would be said would happen. And that wasn't normal. It wasn't actually usual for the soldiers to give the convicted people a drink, but they had compassion at that moment for Jesus, and they gave him a drink, but that was fulfilling Scripture.

Verse 36, the soldiers leaving Jesus' bones unbroken, also very unusual for crucified victims, was a direct fulfillment of Scripture.

And verse 37, Jesus' body being pierced with a spear, was exactly what the prophecies said would happen. So what is John trying to tell us by pointing out all of these fulfillments of Scripture?

What he's saying to us, everything that happened here was planned. The way that Jesus was going to die was planned right down to the intricate detail by God.

Effectively, by Jesus himself, God the Son. He planned what was going to happen. Imagine that. Imagine planning the minute details of your own execution.

[5 : 11] It's quite a thing. It seems crazy, but that's clearly what happened as we read John's account. God planned his own execution. All of it was according to a plan that he had put together way before any of this ever happened.

In fact, he'd been planning it for thousands of years, before the prophets even wrote their words. And that's what Jesus is talking about when he says it.

It is finished. This plan is finished. This plan that God has been putting together before the creation of the world, and what everything up until this point has been leading up to, and what Jesus had been teaching his disciples about, this plan is now, in this moment of history, finished.

And only now, it's only now when Jesus breathes his last, that this age-old plan that's been put together for eternity past is now completed.

Now, it's like, you know, if you plan to build a house, you might spend a long time planning the house. Months or even years getting the plan down on paper, sourcing the materials, getting, you know, counsel permission, whatever it is.

[6 : 29] But even after you've done that, and you've got everything together, and you've got all your ducks in a row, and you've got all the plans down on paper, the plan is still just a plan. It's only when you get on site, and you actually build a house, and you put that last brick down, and you stand back, it's only then that you can say, it is finished.

Well, you see, for thousands of years, that's what God had been doing. He'd been laying out this plan to save people from their sins. He had been building this plan, and revealing this plan in the history of the nation of Israel.

And, in fact, even further back, from before Israel was even created, from the very moment humanity fell into sin, which God, by the way, knew that they would do, it was all part of His plan, He'd been, from then, working on this plan to undo that sin and bring people back to Himself in a loving, willing, free relationship.

Not forcing us to love Him, but putting this plan together, where not only would He somehow undo the sin that we've done, and the mess-ups we've made, but He would bring us into the most amazing relationship with Himself.

That was His plan. And the whole Old Testament in the Bible is about Him putting together that plan. If you want to know why it's in the Bible, the Old Testament is there. Sure, it's there, you know, to give us some great examples of faith, and it's there to tell us some history, and to show us the actions of God in the human history.

[8 : 03] But the primary reason the Old Testament is in our Bibles is to lay out the plan, bit by bit, to show us how God was laying out this plan, plan, but only when Jesus actually came on site to earth, and only when He came to the point of dying, which is the final brick in God's plans, could He say, it is finished.

Imagine kind of the relief of this plan that had been put into place for thousands of years, now finally being finished. The culmination of all of God's plans, everything that He had ever done before, recorded in the Old Testament.

It's what the whole Bible is centered around, this point, when Jesus says these words and breathes His last. The whole Old Testament is pointing towards it. The whole New Testament is reflecting

back on it.

It is the center of the Bible, and it is the center of history. And so reading any of the Bible, you know, opening your Bible and reading it without understanding it in light of the death of Jesus is really quite pointless.

Now, if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you'll agree with that. Obviously, the death of Jesus gives meaning to everything else in the Bible, but many, many people don't. Many people read the Bible and they don't understand that it's all talking about God's plan culminating in the death of Jesus.

[9 : 23] Many people just read the Old Testament like Jews today. Many Jews all over the world still only read the Old Testament, the Jewish scriptures. But I hope you see this morning that that's quite pointless.

It's like reading the blueprints without ever seeing the house that they describe. And so remember that when you read your Bible, that anything you're reading only makes sense in light of the death of Jesus and what it means.

And so it's so important. That's the central point in the Bible. It's the central point in human history. If you don't understand what happened on that cross when Jesus breathed his last, you won't understand anything else.

But also, you know, this series that we're doing is called Getting to Know God. And the reason I wanted to look at this passage is because the fact that God had planned all of this to happen down to the minute detail tells us something about God himself, doesn't it?

It helps us to get to know God. First of all, it tells us that he is completely sovereign over everything, over even the most evil acts and even the most mundane things. Even the enemies of Jesus, the Roman soldiers and the Jewish priests who wanted him dead, were completely under the control of God.

[10 : 37] Don't you see that here? You just see God's complete sovereignty. Everything is going according to his plan. These people are dancing to his tune without even knowing it. And so I guess the first thing for us as Christians is that that's a huge encouragement, isn't it?

Because we live in an evil world. We face evil, both external to us that brings pain into our lives as well as internal evil. But be encouraged that when you face evil in any form, it is never out of God's control.

God is completely sovereign. I read a prayer the other day which just encourages me so much. It just says the God of perfect peace, the God in perfect peace. God is always in perfect peace.

God is never fretting. God is never worrying. God is never wondering whether what he wants will come to fruition. No, he is sitting back totally at peace that all of his plans will come exactly like he has planned them despite all the evil in this world.

So be encouraged. Also be encouraged by his attention to detail. Don't you love how there's nothing too small to escape God's attention? You know, Jesus says not one bird falls to the ground without God knowing about it.

[11 : 52] The hairs on your head are numbered. Our God, it doesn't, isn't too far away to take note of the minute details of life, of your life as well.

You know, what God wants to show us in how his son Jesus died is that nothing is random in this world. Everything from the good to the bad, from the big to the small is all under the control of God. So rest in that fact when life seems out of control, when life just seems random, when you just seem to be assaulted on all sides by the pressures of life.

Just sit back and go, God is a perfect peace. God is in control. He knows what he's doing. That's what we learn here about God's plans.

They always come to fruition. But another thing we learn about God here is that he takes sin very seriously. I mean, why?

[12 : 51] Why put this plan into place at all for thousands of years? Why plan your own execution? You know, and far, in fact, far longer back than thousands of years.

Why was God planning for Jesus to die in order to save people from sins? I wonder if you've ever asked yourself that. Wasn't there an easier option? You know, this seems awfully unnecessary. Even Jesus in the garden asked his father the night before he died, if there is any other way, father, let this cup pass from me. But there wasn't. Why?

Why was there no other way? You know, couldn't God just forgive our sins? Couldn't he just do that? Couldn't he just, I mean, he's God, he can call the shots. Couldn't he just say, you're forgiven, okay?

The slate is wiped clean. Without going through all this rigmarole of Jesus coming to earth and dying. And spare himself all the pain. Why didn't he do that? Have you ever wondered that? Well, the answer is firstly because sin is much more serious than we tend to think it is.

[13:56] You don't just sin against the honor of the eternally glorious God and think you can walk away unscathed. You know, it's like, it's like thinking that you can walk through the Kruger National Park pulling the tail of every lion you see and you'll be fine.

And that's just stupid. And yet, of course we wouldn't do that. And yet we walk through this life flaunting our independence against God, displeasing him, angering him, consciously doing what we know is against his will, pulling the tail of the lion and then thinking we can walk away unscathed. No, it's not going to happen. Sin is much more serious than that. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. The only right response to a willful rebel against the source of life is to be cut off from that life, death, an eternal death in hell.

Sin is much more serious than we think. But the second reason why God couldn't just forgive us and ignore our sin and sweep it under the carpet is that God is more holy than we think.

You see, these are the two mistakes that we always tend to make. We think our sin is not as bad as it is and we think that God is not as magnificently, amazingly, perfectly holy than he is.

[15:20] You know, the Bible tries to describe it in human terms by saying God dwells in inapproachable light. It's just too, he is too holy for sinners to approach. Now, we would expect a good judge in a court of law to dispense justice.

That's their job. We wouldn't like it if we went to a court of law and the judge said to the accused who's got all the evidence against him, says, you know what, I'm a good judge, so I'm going to let you go.

I'm going to let you go free. Okay, how about that? You know, that wouldn't be a good judge. A good judge has to dispense justice. A good policeman has to arrest a criminal who's just committed a crime and not just say, well, I'm a good policeman, so I'm going to let you off.

No. Now, we expect justice from a judge. We expect justice from a policeman. How much more should we expect justice from the God who is the source of justice to make sure that justice is done for every sin that's committed in his world?

And yet we don't. We think, well, God will let us off. He doesn't. God will never, the Bible says, God will by no means spare the guilty. It's talking about each one of us.

[16:30] Don't think for a moment that God will sweep your sins under the carpet and just ignore them. That's a profound misunderstanding of the mercy of God. He never does that. And that's why, in order to save you but still be consistent with who he is, his own character, you know what he did?

It's incredible. If we stop and just think of what he did, he came as Jesus to bear the weight of his own justice for your sins on himself. And that just blows my mind.

And only, only that could have solved the problem. Only that could have satisfied the justice of God and still caused our sins to be forgiven.

It's the only way, only the death of a sinless, eternal son of God could have paid that price. And that's why you can be forgiven freely today if you come to him.

But, don't think that because salvation is free it was cheap. It's not. It wasn't. It cost the ultimate price. And the only way you'll ever respond and live properly in light of Jesus' death as you should is by realizing just the immense price that he paid on the cross for your sins to earn your forgiveness.

[17:47] forgiveness. And that, and that that's the only way that you could ever have been saved. There's no other possibility because Jesus was willing to go through what he went through for you.

He didn't have to. But he did because he loves you. And that is why God put this plan of salvation into place which culminated on the cross.

That is the it that Jesus is talking about. Secondly, is. Now this is the verb of the sentence. It's a very neat sentence. It is finished. It's got a subject, a verb, and an adjective.

It's very simple but very profound. Is. What can we possibly learn from this word? Is. Well it's also important because notice that Jesus doesn't say it will be finished.

Okay? The tense is very important. He says it is finished. It is. It's 2,000 years when he said it it was already done. It was already finished. But it's even more than that.

[18 : 48] English can't quite capture the the meaning of of the original language where this word by the way Greek which is what the original language is has more tenses than just our three past, present, future.

And the tense that this word is in in the original is what's called the perfect tense. And the perfect tense describes something which is a completed action which can never be undone. So let me try to explain to you in English if I say I dived into the water that's not the perfect tense because just saying I dived into the water doesn't doesn't tell you whether it's certain I ever made it into the water just because I dived into the water.

You know sure I dived in but maybe I I hit a rock on the way down or maybe a giant I don't know eagle caught me in mid-flight and took me away before I hit the water. Just saying I dived in doesn't say the action was completed.

But if I say this in the perfect tense I'd say something like I have dived into the water. It still doesn't quite capture it but that is I'm already in the water not only did I dive but I completed the action and you can't undo it.

I'm wet I'm in the water. You can't undo my diving in the water. And I hope that kind of helps you to see the tense that I'm talking about. The perfect tense and that is the tense that the is of Jesus' final words here is in.

[20 : 09] So he's saying not only is God's plan to save people finished but it is so finished that it cannot be undone. It cannot be resisted. It cannot be thwarted.

It cannot be reversed. It is completely finished. It's set in stone. You see when God chooses to set a plan in motion nothing can stop it.

But when God chooses to set a plan in motion in his mind it's already done because he is sovereign. Unlike our plans. You know our plans we plan but we don't know whether that plan will ever come to completion because things situations people can come in and upset our plans.

But God's plans can never be upset. That's why he dwells in perfect peace because his plans are all perfectly in the that's what's called the perfect tense because they're already done.

the moment he puts them into motion. And you know what? That applies just as much to your individual salvation as it does to his plan to save the world.

[21 : 13] If God has planned to save you which is proven by the fact that you trust in Jesus if you sit here trusting in Jesus properly truly in your heart of hearts you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior which is only faith that God can give you and he would only give to you if he planned to save you if you have that faith that means that God has planned your salvation he's planned your eternal destiny and nothing and no one can get in the way of that plan because when God makes a plan it's already done.

Doesn't that encourage you? Not even you can mess up your salvation which is a huge relief because if I could mess up my salvation I would have long ago.

Yes, your faith is not how it should be Yes, you're not living the life you know you should live but if God has given you even a mustard seed of saving faith if you genuinely believe that Jesus is your Lord and Savior here this morning God's salvation of you is so certain that Paul can write in Ephesians for all who believe he has already seated us with Jesus in the heavenly realms.

That's what Paul says about Christians. It's as if you're already in heaven because nothing can mess it up. Everything that needed to happen to save you has already happened 2,000 years ago when Jesus said those words it is finished.

Nothing more needs to happen. And so you never have to doubt your salvation if you're a believer because it's not anything that you've done it's everything that Jesus has done already done and dusted set in stone if you're a believer but maybe you're not a believer I'm not assuming everyone who comes to church is truly following and trusting Jesus as their Lord and Savior and truly knows where they're going when they die in fact maybe you don't and that's why you're at church because you're still exploring you're still discovering maybe you have no idea where you're going when you die well I want to tell you that you can know you've come to the right place because you can have assurance you can know where you're going when you die if only you too will come to believe these words of Jesus it is finished that's all you've just got to believe that what he says is true it is finished and all you've got to do is accept that accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord the Son of God who died for your sins nothing more is required because you see you know it's as if in his dying breath

[23 : 48] Jesus is calling you to rest in the assurance that his death brought that you can know that you're saved if only you would trust in him will you do that will you come to him will you trust in him

because Jesus in his dying breath was calling you to do just that that's is then finally finished the original word here means not only finished but it speaks of accomplishment accomplishing a goal fulfilling a goal a completion of something it implies that nothing more needs to be done nothing more can be added to what Jesus has already done to save us which really comes out in the last word as well but something that the word finished here implies is that it doesn't have to be repeated because it's finished it never needs to happen again ever in in history in life so

I'll contrast for example with the Old Testament in the Old Testament before Jesus came the Israelites had to sacrifice animals for God to forgive their sin now of course with hindsight we found out later those sacrifices themselves could never save people from their own human sin animals the blood of animals could never wash away human sin but they only pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus which could save humans from their sin and did even that sacrifice in the future from the Old Testament people saved them when they trusted in God's plan of salvation even before Jesus came but the point is that these animal sacrifices they made were only ever the blueprints of that reality but the thing is in the Old Testament you needed to keep doing that you needed to keep bringing the sacrifices to the priest because you'd keep on sinning so you'd bring the sacrifice to the priest you'd have a lovely worship service on the Sabbath and then you'd go home and guess what you'd sin again and so you'd go oh man now I've got to go get another lamb or another dove or another sacrifice to bring to the priest it was this ongoing reminder of sin and the reminder that we constantly need a blood sacrifice to pay for sins but you see when Jesus died everything changed when Jesus died he could say that all of that the need for these continual sacrifices was finally finished and that's why

Hebrews says when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down don't you love that picture he says he sat down at the right hand of God Jesus says it is finished it's kind of one of those I don't know if you've ever heard the phrase drop the mic you know when someone stands up and says something so profound that no one can answer him back and he drops the mic and walks back Jesus was dropping the mic when he said it is finished he sat down at the right hand of God nothing no one could respond nothing else needed to be done he sat down at the right hand of God for by one sacrifice it continues he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy think about that he's talking about Christians he has made perfect past tense forever those who are being made holy those who are still being sanctified and yet in God's sight because his plan is so unchangeable in God's sight you are already perfect that's what Hebrews is saying he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy if you believe in Jesus that's what Jesus meant when he said finished one perfect priest making one perfect sacrifice fulfilling all the sacrifices that went before and saving so completely that nothing more ever needs to be done and let me get controversial now that is why we are not Roman Catholics that's why we don't go to the church next door where you still need to go to the priest to have your sins forgiven every week where you still need to re-sacrifice the blood and the body of Christ at every mass but you see as lovingly as I can

I must say that that goes against the clear teaching of scripture there is only one priest that we ever need to go through and he made one complete sacrifice for your sins and not only the sins you've already committed but the sins you're still going to commit once done completed no need for repetition that's how finished the salvation Jesus earned for you is if you trust in him now of course that doesn't mean we don't confess our sins regularly we do because they grieve us and we want God to know that our sins grieve us and we want his help to change and we must confess but the difference is we don't need to continue to earn God's forgiveness over and over again you see no that forgiveness has already been earned once and for all when Jesus said it is finished and that's why whenever you confess your sins through Jesus Christ as a Christian you don't have to sit there and wonder if God has forgiven them you can know the moment you confess your sins if your faith is in Christ God has already forgiven them and you can move on you don't need to do anything more you don't need to wait you don't need to wonder it's done it's finished when Jesus said that he was saying he's done it all and that is the basis of Christian faith that is what makes a Christian a Christian someone who believes those last words of Jesus it is finished that God's eternal plan of salvation was completed on the cross which means if you believe in Jesus not only can you never mess up your salvation but there's nothing you can ever add to it that is what Jesus meant when he said it is finished

I would end there but some of you if you've been listening and paying attention might have a question and your question might be well if that is the case if it is so finished why are we still here if it's finished why aren't we already in the new creation where God saved us to be surely that's finished surely it's not finished yet no well Jesus said it is finished so why are we still here why have we been for 2000 years since he said that well the answer is while it is true that Jesus did everything necessary for people to be saved by simply believing him and what he did on the cross people can't do that unless they hear about it first and you know what people aren't going to hear about it unless we tell them and that's why we're still here it's the only reason we're still here to proclaim this amazing message that it is finished so not only did Jesus say it is finished but he left his people in the world to make that message known because it is the most important message that anyone can ever hear that God is ready to forgive all those who simply trust in what Jesus did and we are to proclaim that message that's why we're here we're to proclaim that message if you're spending your life as a Christian doing anything other than what you think is more important than the task of making Jesus known then really you're wasting your time you know rather wait for heaven to enjoy life we're here to do a job only one job and that is to proclaim the message of Jesus for the rest of our days and so in closing

[31 : 16] I ask you will you join St. Mark's in the year ahead 2017 and play your part in that great task because this is where you do it by being involved in Christ's body you use the gifts that he's given you as part of this great task that he's left us on earth for and such an exciting task it is will you be involved in it in the year to come let's pray yes Lord Jesus you're alive today you hear our prayers you are seated at the right hand of God in heaven your father who's our father too through faith in you we thank you again as we've just considered this morning what you did for us we thank you and praise you from the bottom of our hearts for your willingness to take your own justice for our sins Lord we praise you we thank you and we ask Lord that you would just capture us with this great message of the gospel cause us to be so excited about it as Christians that we can't keep quiet about it

Lord help us to continue to let your final words it is finished ring throughout this community that people would come to hear just what it means that it is finished that they can be saved that they can have the sure hope of eternal life Lord help us to be willing and bold messengers of that great message we pray this in Jesus name Amen