

"Yes: It is Finished"

Preaching Text: John 19:28-30

Good Friday-2 April 2021

Salado UMC, Salado, Texas 76571

John's Gospel includes several distinctive features by way of contrast to the Synoptic New Testament Gospels- Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three Gospels share so much in common that scholars refer to these three as the "Synoptic Gospels"- as seen with "one eye". Examples of the differences include a one-year time frame for the synoptic account. Yet, John's story requires three years seen in three different Passovers mentioned in the story. John, in addition, is the only canonical Gospel that refers to Jesus as plainly divine and pre-existing. Further, John alone portrays Thomas as doubting. Certainly, there are many other aspects of John's Gospel that are exclusive, but let's focus on John 19:28-30, our

Good Friday text:

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:28-30)

To understand Jesus' phrase, "*It is finished*," we recognize John's slant on Jesus' crucifixion. In John's crucifixion story, the principalities and powers execute Jesus at the same time the temple functionaries sacrifice its lambs. Also, John's timing of the crucifixion is one day off from the Synoptic Gospels narration. For John, Jesus does not merely symbolize the Passover lamb- Jesus is the Passover lamb. Passover represents for Jews liberation from the bondage and oppression of Egypt. So too does Jesus as Passover lamb provide liberation for all people from the manacles of sin and death. What clue does John offer that would lead us to this conclusion?

One clue John supplies is the allusion to hyssop- a small flimsy plant. This is in response to Jesus' exclamation: *"I thirst"*. For those "botany-types" who would recognize such an oddity, they might arch their brow when we read in the text: *"They put a sponge full of wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth."* This hyssop plant would be a strange choice to lift a heavy sponge full of wine to a height of seven or eight...or more feet off the ground. The hyssop plant is much too flimsy and insubstantial to do the job. Yet, John is not so much interested in reality as John is committed to theology. This is why he mentions the hyssop plant.

In Exodus we read Yahweh's firm directive for Passover to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: *"Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin"* (Exodus 12:1,22a). Later that night, as the angel of death made a sweep over the land of Egypt, Yahweh shields the Hebrews from the avenging angel of God by sparing their first-born. Thus, hyssop plays a role in liberation of Israel and the rescue of humans from sin and death. Our lesson has two of Jesus' seven last words in the Gospels.

The seven are:

Luke 23:34: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.

Luke 23:43: Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

John 26:26-27: Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.

Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

John 19:28: I thirst.

John 19:30: It is finished.

Luke 23:46: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

No matter what John tries to convey theologically with his biblical allusions, we still have a problem. This problem is that when Jesus says, *"It is finished,"* most current and practical minded folks like us think it means "He is finished". That is, the experience of Jesus has finished him. These words do not inspire the confidence of faith that most of us need. Rather, these words remind us of a

thousand different ways that “He is history” or “He is done for.” In sports, young people often speak of a victory over an opponent with words like, “We smoked them,” “We burned them,” or “He is finished.” Thus, to our ears, or at least the ears of modern people who live around us, when Jesus says, “It is finished,” we hear rather “I am finished”.

While all that may be true to our perception, the truth is that the Bible and John’s Gospel have a slightly different agenda for understanding what being finished means. It is finished-but it is not over. This apparent end of Jesus is simply a new beginning for God. *“It is finished, but it is never over.”* It is finished from John’s point of view means, “it is settled, decided, certain, complete, and incontestable.” While it is true that the cross suggests that Jesus’ earthly life ends, what we forget from our earthly point of view is that Jesus’ heavenly reign now begins.

For John, “It is finished” means Jesus’ work on earth is complete. Now God moves to the human project of working through the disciples, apostles, and the early and late church to send the message of redeeming love to all humankind. And this may be the most important things to say: From God’s point of view, the human project cannot fail because God has inserted himself into it via Jesus and the work he has finished. When Jesus says, “It is finished” he means that the work for which God sent him to complete is finished. He could have just as easily have said, “Mission accomplished!” Yet, our work is before us, even as Jesus’ work is behind him.

We are in mission for Christ and this is the work with which he has left us. When one stands too close to the church, we may not see the beauty of what God has created. We can say the same when looking at artwork in the form of either Mosaic art tiles or a finely woven tapestry. Sometimes, we can be so near that we do not get the deep perception we need to appreciate both the art and the artist. Stepping back from Jesus’ Seven Last Words can give us a perspective that we need to see our part in God’s great plan.

[A charge to the congregation for Good Friday:]

Tonight is Good Friday. I would ask you to pray silently for a moment and ask God to reveal to you that thing that God wants you to accomplish by Easter sunrise. There may be a person in your life that needs your forgiveness. You may need to take the first step. Pray about that. There may be a deep and persistent grief gnawing at your being, a sense of loss that you cannot shake. Pray about that.

Perhaps, you have never forgiven yourself a secret sin that no one knows about. Pray to God about this and your Father in secret will forgive you. Most of all, pray that God reveals to you some great work for you that is unfinished. God has placed us where we are because God can use each of us. Pray for God's guidance that God may find you your place of service in Jesus' name. Pray now and pray to the one who sent Christ to give us all abundant life. Amen.

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