

It is finished. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 6 April 2016.

This week we have reached number six of our Lord's so-called 'Seven sayings from the cross'; namely, 'It is finished'.¹ And our Bible passage for today reads as follows:

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished ... said 'I thirst'. There was there a jar full of sour wine, and having filled a sponge with the sour wine ... they put it up to His mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished', and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit'.²

It was after He had been on the cross for six hours – three of which He spent in unnatural and uncanny darkness – that, as we just read, the Lord Jesus knew that all was then 'finished'.

But He not only knew it – He wanted others to know it. Hence His cry, 'I thirst'. And, having had His parched lips and dry throat moistened by the sour wine, the Saviour raised His voice that His mighty cry might resound over Golgotha that mid-afternoon.

I suspect that His loud declaration, 'Finished', echoed – not only around Golgotha – but through the very courts of heaven itself, broadcasting that the storm of God's wrath (which was by rights my eternal destiny) had spent itself ... that the darkness which had enveloped Him (the Light of the world) was forever past ... that the momentous work which He had been given by the Father to accomplish had been fully and forever completed.³

I know that some of you are familiar with the name Hudson Taylor.⁴ James Hudson Taylor spent about 50 years as a missionary to China in the second half of the nineteenth century. As it happens, this month (April) marks the anniversary of his 11th and final journey to China. During his many years of service there, the China Inland Mission which he founded brought 849 missionaries to the field, trained some 700 Chinese workers, and established a Chinese church of 125,000. It has been said that at least 35,000 were converted through Hudson Taylor personally, and that he baptized in the region of 50,000.⁵

I was interested to discover several years ago that the story really began when, as a lad in his teens, Hudson Taylor read a pamphlet from his father's library - which pamphlet made much of the words, 'The Finished Work of Christ!' 'There dawned upon me', he later wrote, 'the joyful conviction that, since the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid upon the Cross, there was nothing for me to do but to fall upon my knees, accept the Saviour and praise Him for evermore!' ⁶

And Hudson Taylor is only one among thousands to whom this cry of Jesus has come to mean so much. But, far more important, is the question, 'What did this cry mean to Jesus Himself?

Surely, at the very least, it must have been a cry of immense relief.

I don't know if anyone here ever saw Mel Gibson's famous film, 'The Passion of the Christ'. That very graphic film is now over 10 years old, but only last week I came across the following comments of a Director of a Seminary in the United States ... I quote:

'I never saw a more difficult film to watch', he wrote, 'than ... "The Passion of the Christ". For most of that movie I wanted to avert my eyes. It was horrible to watch even a [movie?] version of a crucifixion⁸ ... I had studied the crucifixion before, and knew in my head what Jesus experienced. But seeing a visual presentation of His suffering was almost more than I could bear. When "The Passion of the Christ" was over, I felt [tremendous⁹] relief. Thank goodness it was finished'.¹⁰

And when I think of those words, 'I felt [tremendous] relief. Thank goodness it was finished', I remember that these words simply express the reaction of someone who had *watched a film about* our 'Lord's passion' – and, indeed, a film which itself depicted only the Saviour's physical sufferings. With how much greater relief must He who experienced – not a mere viewing of a film about His agony and anguish – but who experienced Himself that very agony and anguish (and who, above all else, endured the spiritual suffering of bearing my sins and of being forsaken by God) ... with how much greater relief must the Lord Jesus have cried out, 'It is finished'.

Some three years before, He had said that (metaphorically speaking) His very food was to do the will of Him who had sent Him, and to 'finish His work'.¹¹ And now that He had wholly completed – that He had 'finished' – 'the work' His Father had given Him to do, He could leave the world into which the Father had sent Him, and could return to the Father.

Surely then, as I said, at the very least, our Lord's loud cry 'Finished', must have been a cry of immense relief.

But it was much, much more than a cry of relief. It was most certainly also a mighty word of triumph ... a cry of glorious victory.

For, contrary to all appearances, our Lord's crucifixion and death were no tragedy. This was not the despairing moan of a helpless martyr. This was not a sigh of exhaustion, pain, despair or defeat. Jesus died with the cry of the victor on His lips.

Recently some of us heard in this room a talk about the rather strange biblical character Samson. We were reminded then that, according to scripture, Samson only 'began' to deliver God's people Israel from their Philistine oppressors¹² – leaving others – Samuel, Saul and notably David – to finish the work after his death. Well, the Lord Jesus was no Samson, and, unlike him, the Lord Jesus finished what He had begun.¹³

More or less exactly 11 years ago, there was an attempted break in at the back of the house where Linda and I live. The break in failed, but it did leave us with a damaged kitchen window. As you can imagine, the company¹⁴ who replaced the window were not slow in sending us an invoice. And, when we paid the excess required by our insurers, the invoice was clearly stamped – in red – with the single word, 'Paid'!

You may wonder what this has to do with our text for this morning. Simply this, that scholars assure us that, in New Testament times, the single Greek word translated 'It is finished' in our text was written on business documents or receipts to show that a bill had been paid in full.¹⁵

Today, as was the case with our house, many use a rubber stamp to do the same – to confirm that there is no more owing.

I am confident that the significance of John's report that our Lord used that actual word 'Finished' before He died would not have been lost on his Greek-speaking readers ... that, in His suffering and death, the Lord Jesus had paid for sins – and had paid in full.

Make no mistake, nothing needs to be added – indeed, nothing *can* be added – to the work of salvation which He accomplished on the cross – not by me or you – nor (and I say it reverently) even by God Himself. For the work is complete.

As far as the Roman authorities were concerned, when they nailed Jesus to His cross, it was all over. Jesus was finished and done with.

As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, when they saw Jesus nailed to His cross, it was all over. Jesus was finished and done with.

What is more, as far as our Lord's *own* disciples were concerned, when they witnessed Jesus nailed to His cross, it was all over. Their teacher and Lord was finished and done with.¹⁶

But they were all wrong! He didn't cry out, 'I am finished', but 'It (the work of salvation) is finished'. And I note that neither did He call out, '*I have* finished' – that is, 'I have done my part; but now, by your own endeavours and best efforts, you must do your part'. No, indeed!

And I can do no better that close with the words of Hudson Taylor which I quoted earlier, 'since the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid upon the Cross, there was nothing for me to do but to fall upon my knees, accept the Saviour and praise Him for evermore!'

Notes

¹ In one sense, in creation the sixth day was the day on which God finished His work (but see Gen. 2. 1). On the cross the sixth cry was the triumphant cry, "It is finished".

² John 19. 28-30.

³ 'It is finished'. This is the last of three great 'It is' sayings of our Lord recorded for us in the gospels - sayings which were spaced fairly evenly over the three and a half years between His baptism and His death - the first coming at the very outset of that period, and the third at the very end, being more or less the last thing He said before He died. First, there was His threefold 'It is written' - spoken to the tempter in the wilderness - when He resisted Satan's final onslaught with the words, '*It is written*, Man shall not live by bread alone ... You shall not tempt the Lord your God ... You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve'. Second, there was His 'It is' - spoken to His disciples on the Sea of Galilee according to Matthew 14 when, at sometime after 3 o'clock one morning, they were in a boat, then well away from the land, 'tossed/distressed/harassed by the waves, for the wind was contrary'.³ And, when - seeing Him coming towards them through the darkness, walking on the water - they cried out 'It is a phantom' - immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, '*It is I*; be not afraid'. I guess His 'It is written' points us to *His sinless person* - for, as we read, 'when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him for a season'³ ... the enemy had spent all his ammunition and his fiery darts had utterly failed to discover any combustible material in Jesus. Our Lord's 'It is' points us to *His comforting presence*, assuring us that He is unfailingly with us through our times of anxiety, trouble and distress. But His 'It is finished' points us to *His completed - His perfect - work*.

⁴ 21 May 1832 - 3 June 1905. On April 17th, 1905, Hudson Taylor arrived in Shanghai for his final visit to China. <http://truthandtidings.com/1996/02/profiles-in-christian-character-james-hudson-taylor-6/>. In April, 1905, Taylor returned to China for the 11th and final time. He passed away on Saturday, 3 June, 1905, age 73 in the capital of the last province opened to the gospel.

<http://www.jesusloversincleveland.org/English/biographies/taylor/hudson%20taylor.htm>

⁵ <http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/biotaylor2.html>]

⁶ <http://www.teachingresources.org/issues/1997Winter/Hudson%20Taylors%20Favorite%20Text.htm>

⁷ 'Cinematic' in the original.

⁸ 'And it was beyond comprehension to think that this actually happened to somebody, and not just to anybody, but to my Lord and Saviour', Mark Roberts added at this point.

⁹ 'Palpable' in the original.

¹⁰ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markroberts/2013/03/29/the-seven-last-words-of-christ-the-sixth-word/>

¹¹ John 4. 34.

¹² Judges 13. 5.

¹³ The Lord Jesus didn't fall into the category of those of whom He once spoke who undertake a work which, in the event, they are unable to finish - 'which of you', He said in Luke 14, 'intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it ... lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish'.

On one occasion, in the face of the many problems confronting him, Moses was all set to give in. Concerning his task, he said that he was not able to bear the people alone, '*It is too heavy*', were his words, Num. 11. 14. Similarly, on one occasion, the prophet Elijah found the way too hard, became thoroughly despondent and was all set to throw in the towel, crying, '*It is enough*', 1 Kings 19. 4. The Lord Jesus faced waves of opposition altogether unknown to either prophet, and yet He continued, undeterred and undaunted, until He could say - not 'It is too heavy' or 'It is enough' - but '*It is finished*', John 19. 30.

¹⁴ Solaglas.

¹⁵ The word '*tetélestai*' was also written on business documents or receipts in New Testament times. This one word has been found written across several ancient tax documents. 'Receipts are often introduced by the phrase *tetélestai*, usually written in an abbreviated manner, e.g. P Grenf II. 50(a) (b) (c) al., mostly belonging to ii/A.D', *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, by J. H. Moulton and George Milligan, 1929, page 630. But why would they write "It is finished" on a tax document or receipt? It is because "*tetélestai*" also means... "Paid in full". See http://www.bible.org/qa.asp?topic_id=30&qa_id=28.

¹⁶ See Peter's coming 'to see the end', Matt. 26. 58, and the words of the two on the road to Emmaus, 'we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel', Luke 24. 21.