

The Words of Victory

William Henry Harrison, the ninth president of the United States, delivered the longest inaugural speech on record. It was over 9,000 words. Harrison must have been awfully proud of that speech because it was a cold, rainy, January morning. He refused to wear an overcoat or to abbreviate his address. After standing in those miserable conditions for two hours he contracted pneumonia and died less than one month later. Somebody quipped that, "No president has ever said more and done less."

Now contrast that with what Jesus did when he hung on that cross on a hill called "Calvary." His statements were few. We only have seven recorded. They were brief. Not one is more than ten words long in English. But as few and as brief as they were, all eternity was altered by what he said. I suppose one could say "No man has ever said less and done more."

The best of all His statements were the words of victory: "It is finished." "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (John 19:28)

That phrase comes to us in the English in three different words: It—is—finished. But in the original language, the Greek, it was just one word: *Tetelestai*. *Tetelestai* was a powerful word. It was a very terminating phrase that indicated something had been totally consummated. It is absolutely finished. Some had thought that this was a cry of desperation. Jesus yelling, "Oh it's finished!" It wasn't. Others thought it might be a sigh of relief, "Ohhh, it's finished." It wasn't that either. I'm convinced that this was a word of triumph, not tragedy. This was a word of jubilation, not lamentation. This was a cry of victory, not a cry of despair. In fact, he could have shouted "*Tetelestai*!" IT IS FINISHED!

But, what was finished?

1. Jesus' earthly work was finished. It's a lot easier to start something than it is to finish it, isn't it? Whether you're talking about a project, a college degree, a marriage, a commitment, a life, whatever: it's just a lot easier to start than it is to finish. That's why we only give rewards to those who finish. You don't see t-shirts that say, "I Started the Boston Marathon," do you? Nobody gets a diploma the first day of school. You don't get the gold watch at the beginning of the second month on your new job. You're rewarded when you finish. Frankly, most of us have a difficult time finishing what we started, but not Jesus. He was a finisher.

This word, "*Tetelestai*," is used three other times in John's gospel and all three times it comes from the lips of Jesus. "'My food,' said Jesus 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.'" (John

4:34) "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, that which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me." (John 5:36) This man is saying early on I am set to finish what I started.

Just hours before he would go to the cross, he's in prayer with his Father and said, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing" (there's that word, *Tetelestai*) "by completing the work that you gave me to do." (John 17:4) Hours later, he cries out while hanging from his hands, "It is finished." (John 19:30) When Jesus came to this earth, he didn't come with a random "fly by the seat of your pants" approach. He had a specific plan. He knew exactly what needed to be done. He knew the prophecies that needed to be fulfilled, the men that needed to be trained, the miracles that needed to be performed and the message that needed to be communicated. He said, my job is to do the will of He who sent me and I'm going to finish that work.

The reason so many people feel so unfulfilled in life, so frustrated, so unhappy, is that they simply don't follow Jesus' example. They have no life plan. They chase every rainbow, every source of instant gratification and drink out of every pleasure pool. But they stay perpetually thirsty. Jesus, by contrast, said I want to know what my Father wants me to do and I'm going to do it until I finish it. People, that's the same secret for fulfillment in your life. We are on this earth for the very same purpose that Jesus was here. We're here to bring glory to the Father. This might surprise you, but we're going to accomplish that exactly the same way. We're going to accomplish it by simply being obedient, by going to our own cross symbolically and by letting ourselves be crucified so that God can live and reign in us. We're going to be fulfilled by staying the course and by finishing the race.

That last thing is the hardest thing to do. Some of you are asking "How do you do that? How do you stay motivated? How do you have the courage to run the entire race of life right to the finish line and do it well?" Let's examine what the Bible shares with us about Jesus' secret.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the 'author and,'" (look at the word) "finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2) It tells us how to finish! Here's how we finish, we look at Jesus. Where was Jesus looking? "The joy set before him he endured the cross," he hated the shame, but he went through it. Why? Because he knew just on the other side, he was going to be seated at the right hand of the throne of God having provided the way for man to be reconciled to Them. We keep our focus on where we're going. In an age of immediate gratification where we want instant satisfaction, we must remember that our reward is in eternity.

Now don't misunderstand. I wouldn't trade the Christian life for anything because as we seek to fulfill our purpose and finish the race God bears fruit in our life. We've studied those: Love, joy, peace, patience, all nine fruits of the spirit from Galatians 5. Nobody can experience those in the same measure as a Christian can.

But there's another side to that coin. Being a follower of Christ will make demands on our life. It will require sacrifices if our walk with God is genuine and tells us how we cope with that sacrifice, with the demand and with the annoyances of life. "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross despising the shame and now he's sitting at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

Some of you are on the verge of quitting. Some of you studying this lesson may be on the verge of quitting a ministry, you're beginning to feel frustrated and maybe it seems fruitless. Are you a Bible school teacher who's wondering, you should just quit because you think "I'm not getting through to any student?" Are you a personal worker who's the same way? Are some of you thinking about quitting your marriage? Are some of you thinking, I don't know if I'm going to keep this church-stuff up?"

Can I give you one little bit of the best counsel? Look where Jesus looked. Re-focus on eternity. "This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through. My treasure is laid up somewhere beyond the blue." If you don't believe that, you're going to have a hard time ever finishing life, Paul said "...at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9) Don't quit. *Tetelestai*. Jesus finished his work.

The plan of redemption was completed. He knew the plan of redemption was finished. That word, "*Tetelestai*" is an interesting word. It was often used in the first century in a commercial sense. For example, if somebody had a loan that required installment payment, that man might walk in on the last day and slap down that little bit of money and say, "*Tetelestai*," it's finished, it's paid off, it's done. And the lender would look at him and say, "Congratulations!" When Jesus cried out, "*Tetelestai*," all of those around the cross would have made that association. It's paid, it's finished. What's paid, what's paid in full? The answer is the payment for sin, the purchase of redemption.

Just how did Jesus purchase our redemption? How does that work?

The requirement of the law was that anyone who sinned would die. That was the curse of the law. Now remember the word "die" means separation. If you sin, you would be separated from God eternally. That was the way it would work. Somebody would have to come in and cancel that debt, wipe it out, pay for it. From the beginning of time, God decreed there had to be a blood sacrifice. I don't know why, we'll ask God when we get to heaven. We've got some clues. We're told that life is in the blood. Sin is

death; life cancels out death, which was going to be the payment. It had to be a blood payment to take away our sins.

Now for centuries God had allowed the blood of animals, rams, bulls, goats and heifers, as a symbolic payment for that sin. But "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to really take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4) No, if our sin was ever going to be taken away, the sacrifice that would adequately pay for it and cancel the debt would have to meet three criteria: 1) It would have to be human; 2) it would have to be sinless and 3) it would have had to live under the law, the old Law of Moses fulfilling every jot and tittle perfectly. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights as sons." (Galatians 4:4) Therefore the sacrifice had to be a human and born under the law. Jesus met all three of these criteria. Consequently, He could and would make the payment for us.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature," (look at this) "God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us." (Romans 8:1-4)

We've been set free from sin and death because God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be our sin offering so that the righteous requirements of the law might be met in us. Notice it reads "met in us" not "met by us." We can't meet the requirements of the law. Nobody could except Jesus.

The greatest part of the whole thing to me is in verse three, that last line of the verse, "He condemned sin in sinful man." Do you know what that says? That when God looks at me, a sinner, but a sinner who's in Christ, a Christian, he doesn't look at me and say "I condemn you, you sinner." Instead, "He condemns sin in sinful man." He says I condemn your sin, I put your sin on the cross and I let you have the righteousness of Jesus." *Tetelestai*. As the song says, "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain; he washed it white as snow."

The power of mortality was finished. The natural enemy of humanity is death, isn't it? Someone said, "Man wants to be happy, but man can't be happy because he does the very thing he doesn't want to do, he dies." That describes most of humanity.

How many times do we try to postpone death? How many times do we try to avoid that monster? How many times do we dance around it and pretend it's not there? We try to duck its grasp, but we all eventually end up in its stranglehold. I've got great news! Jesus has broken the stranglehold. Jesus never preached a funeral service. In fact, Jesus messed up every funeral he ever attended. They were

mourning for Jairus' daughter, and he had just brought her from the grave. They were leading the widow's son out from Nain. He just made him rise up. They had been weeping for Lazarus for four days. Jesus said "Roll the stone back. Lazarus come forth." Jesus destroyed every funeral he ever attended.

In the three days that encompassed his death and resurrection, he stripped death of all its power. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first-fruits; then when he comes, those who belong to him." (1 Corinthians 15:20)

When they took the lifeless body of Jesus off the cross that Friday afternoon, they placed it in a borrowed tomb. Knowing his claims about coming back to life and fearing his followers, the soldiers rolled a stone across that tomb, sealed it and placed a guard around it. But, they could not contain the seed of life. On that Sunday morning Mary and the other women were there when He, life, had burst forth. He was the first-fruit. The first to be raised from the dead, never to die again. When he comes again all who've died in him, will come out of the grave given a new, imperishable and incorruptible body. "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

Folks, when Jesus said, "*Tetelestai!* It is finished!" he turned death from a bottomless pit into an exit ramp, taking us off one road and putting us on a better one. The way we face death is the acid test, the ultimate measure of our faith. Do you have that kind of faith, that kind of trust, that God will raise you up from this dust? He can – you can count on it because he broke the stranglehold of death, and he came back never to die again. It's finished. It's now up to you! Lesson #1257 Steve Flatt, April 7, 1996