

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth message in the series entitled, “Words that Shook the World.” There are many records of the final words spoken by famous people. Most of us expect dying people to utter profound truths just before they die, but that’s not always the case. You’ve probably heard of the Mexican bandito, Francisco “Pancho” Villa. He has the distinction of being the only soldier to lead a successful invasion of America. He was renowned in Mexico as a great leader. In 1923 he was shot by an assassin and his last words were: “Don’t let it end like this. Tell them I said something.”

Sigmund Freud was considered the father of modern psychoanalysis. One day he was walking on ice and lost his balance and fell striking his head—it’s what is known as a “Freudian slip.” Not really! Actually, Freud was an enthusiastic cigar smoker and he developed cancer of the mouth. In 1939, after several unsuccessful surgeries he asked a physician friend, Max Schur, to assist him in committing suicide. Dr. Schur The physician injected Freud with three doses of morphine and within hours Freud was dead. As he faced death, Dr. Freud, a confirmed atheist had this to say: “Das ist absurd! (This is absurd) Das ist absurd!” How sad that a man who understood so much about the human mind never came to understand the meaning of life.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who devoted her life to serving Jesus by serving the poor, faced death with a totally different attitude than Freud. Before she slipped into death in 1977 her last words were: “Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you.”

Joan d’Arc was a peasant girl who claimed to be able to hear God’s voice from the time she was thirteen. She later wore the armor of a soldier and led the French armies against the English. She was so devoted to her faith that she was arrested and branded for being a witch and a heretic. In 1431 she was tied to a stake to be burned. As the flames rose around her head her last words were: “Hold the cross high that I may see it through the flames!”

Over the past four weeks, that’s what I’ve been trying to do—to hold the cross high so we can see the suffering and hear the statements of Jesus. Jesus hung on the cross for six hours, and during that time He uttered seven statements. Many people call these the “last words of Christ.” I don’t call these the final words of Christ, because He rose from the dead and He continues to speak today! Instead, I call these the final words from the cross. In the first three hours Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” When He saw His mother standing there, He spoke words of compassion to her and words of restoration to John. To the thief who said, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus promised, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

Then at noon, a supernatural darkness covered the earth as God, who is light, turned His eyes from His son. In this moment Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” As the pain and suffering were overwhelming Jesus He cried out with parched lips, “I thirst!” In response the soldiers gave Him vinegar which only intensified His thirst.

Just before Jesus died, He uttered two more phrases of Words that Shook the World.

John 19:28-30. “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.” (Those three words in English are one word in Greek: Tetelestai) With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Just before He died, Jesus had one more thing to say. We can read His final word from the cross in Luke 23:44-47.

“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’”

1. “It is finished!” THE WORK OF JESUS IS COMPLETED!

The word *tetelestai* meant something was completed. It comes from a Greek word *teleioo*, which means to fully accomplish a task. It was the word used by an artist as he put the final touches on his painting. He would step back and see that it lacked nothing and say, “Tetelestai.”

Isn’t it a great feeling to finish something? When you make that last payment on your car, you should smile and say, “Tetelestai!” You say, “That’s Greek to me.” Bingo! When you compete in a 10K run you can cross the finish line and say, “Tetelestai!” When you finish your Master’s thesis or a doctoral dissertation you can shout, “Tetelestai!”

I can remember being in the third or fourth grade. Mrs. Dean would give us a test or an assignment in class and we would all work feverishly to see who could finish first. There was total silence as everybody worked. The first one who finished would turn their paper over, put their pencil in the little tray on the desk and say out loud, “I’m through!” Everybody else would look at that student and think, “Gosh, you must be smart!” But we soon learned that speed wasn’t always an indication of quality!

That’s what Jesus meant on the cross. He said, “I’m through.” When He said, “Tetelestai!” it wasn’t a cry of defeat, it was a cry of victory. He didn’t say, “I am finished” He said, “IT is finished!” He was overjoyed at finishing His work. So if “it” was finished, what was “it?”

(1) His suffering is over

The first thing that made Jesus shout for victory was His knowledge that the suffering He had endured was coming to a close. Can you relate to that? Have you ever faced a difficult surgery, and when you came out of the general anesthesia, you were still sore, but at least, “tetelestai” the surgery was over. If you’ve ever suffered, you know the exultation at knowing the worst is behind you.

Over the previous 12 hours Jesus had been arrested, beaten, scourged, forced to carry His cross, had a crown of thorns jabbed onto His scalp, and had thick spikes driven into His hands and feet. The excruciating pain He had endured was about to be finished.

As horrifying as the physical agony of the cross was, the spiritual and mental agony of carrying the sins of the world was much worse. As we saw in the last message, Jesus literally endured hell for us. When Jesus took our sin in His own body and experienced the hell of separation from God. He experienced the darkness of hell for us. He experienced the agony and torture of hell for us. As He moved closer to death, death must have seemed to be as pleasant as a warm blanket on a cold night. Praise God, His suffering was over!

(2) Our salvation is accomplished

Another common use of the word “tetelestai” was in commerce. When a merchant had offered credit, he kept a bill listing the amount of money that the customer owed. When the customer paid the bill, the merchant would stamp “Tetelestai” on the bill - it meant “paid in full.” So when Jesus cried, “Tetelestai” He was also saying, “The sin debt has been paid in full!”

The bad news is that we’re all sinners who deserve death and hell. But the good news is the best news you’ll ever hear. It doesn’t matter how many sins you’ve piled up in your life. It doesn’t matter how guilty you are. It doesn’t matter how many skeletons are rattling around in your personal closet. At the cross God stamped this word over the debt of all your sins: Tetelestai—Paid in full. That word is written in the red of the precious blood of Jesus.

Your anger? Tetelestai. Your gossip? Tetelestai! Your selfish ambition? Tetelestai! Your drunkenness? Tetelestai! Your sexual sins? Tetelestai! Your addictions? Tetelestai! Your lying? Tetelestai! Your laziness? Tetelestai! Your pride? Tetelestai! Your disobedience? Tetelestai! That’s just a start. Make your own list of your failures, wickedness, and shortcomings. God has already stamped Tetelestai on any and all the sin in your life.

It’s not the baby in the manger in Bethlehem who saves us; it is the dying Savior on a cross who saves us. Victory does not come from starting, victory comes through finishing. That’s why Jesus cried out in victory, “It is finished!”

Personal Application: You can’t work for salvation, you can only reject or accept the finished work of Jesus

There is not a single calorie of energy you can burn to work for your salvation. There is not a thin penny can spend to purchase your pardon. You can’t pay for something that is already paid for! Not long ago, I was having lunch with a friend of mine in Tyler. We enjoyed a great meal, and when I asked for the ticket, the server indicated the owner of the restaurant had already paid my bill. So, what do you think I did? Did I object and say, “I don’t believe you. Here take this \$20 to pay for my food?” Nope. I thought, “What a wonderful gesture.” As I left I thanked the owner for his kindness and generosity and even sent him a thank you note. It’s the same way with salvation. You can’t pay for something that is already paid for. Salvation is a gift you can either accept or reject.

There is no middle ground with salvation. You either reject it or accept it, there’s no third option. I remember talking to a man once who wasn’t a Christian. I shared the plan of salvation with him, and as I finished, I gave him a chance to trust Jesus. I said, “Here are my two hands. If you want to accept Jesus take my right hand, and I’ll lead you in a prayer.” But if don’t want to accept Jesus, take my left hand and I’ll know we’re finished. This guy was an honest man, and after thinking for a moment he said, “I just won’t take either hand.” I said, “Whether or not you’ve done it with your hand, you’ve taken my left hand with your heart. Salvation isn’t a matter of the head or the hand, it’s a matter of the heart.” Jesus said, “It is finished!” His suffering was over, and the work of our salvation was completed. The second word of victory is:

2. “Father, into your hands ...” THE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IS RESTORED!

Jesus was just moments away from death. With His last ounce of physical strength He summoned the energy to cry out, “Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit!” Mark reports that the Roman Centurion who saw Jesus die and heard His last words said, “Surely, this man is the Son of God.” Let’s examine these final words from the cross.

(1) He is reunited with His Father.

We noted in the last lesson that in those hours in which Jesus became sin, His union was somehow broken with God the Father. God is too holy and pure to even look upon sin, so as the Father closed His eyes, the world got dark. Moments before Jesus died, the darkness had dissipated, and once again, Jesus was re-connected to His father. He drops the impersonal address He used when He said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He slips back into the affectionate name He used for God, “Abba.” He says, “Abba, Daddy, into your hands...”

Somebody sent me a video link to a tearful homecoming that was featured on the NBC Today show this week. Bill Haas is a sailor from Seattle who was deployed to Iraq for seven months. When he returned last week, he wanted to surprise his 6-year-old son, John. John didn’t know his dad was back when Bill showed up at John’s kindergarten class. Little John looked up at the man in uniform, and when he realized it was his dad, he burst into tears and went running across the class room and jumped into his father’s arms. He said, “Daddy, daddy!” If you can watch that without crying, you have a cold, cold heart.

That made me think of the joy Jesus must have experienced as He was once again restored to His relationship with His heavenly Father. Hebrews 12:2 describes the cross with these words, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame...” What was the joy before Him? Being restored with His Father. The reuniting of the Father and the Son wasn’t the only thing that happened when Jesus died. Also:

(2) We are invited into His presence.

(Matthew 27:51) At first, you might think the statement about the curtain in the temple being torn is insignificant, but it is a profound detail. This curtain was 60 feet tall and 24 feet wide and as thick as a man’s hand. It hung from the ceiling as a partition between the Most Holy Place and

the Holies of Holies. Only one man could enter the Holy of Holies: The High Priest. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest would lift the corner of the curtain and enter the Holy of Holies where the Jews believed the Shekinah glory of God dwelt. He carried with him the blood of a perfect lamb and sprinkled the blood on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, which was called the mercy seat.

In essence, this curtain separated God from every other person on earth. It communicated that God is so holy He can only be approached once a year by one man, and only if he is carrying the blood of the lamb. When Jesus died, God tore the partition down. It’s interesting that the Bible says it tore from TOP to BOTTOM. A man or men could stand at the bottom and tear it, but it was torn from the top, indicating Divine involvement.

It was God’s way of saying, “No longer am I unapproachable. Because of the blood of the Lamb slain on the cross, there is no more barrier.” There is no curtain, or human high priest to stand before you and God. Now the Bible says “Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence.” (Hebrews 4:16) God ripped the curtain of religious ritual away and said, “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Personal Application: The safest place in the universe is in the hands of God.

Jesus placed His future in the hands of God. That’s a great place to be. I can’t help but think about the contrast between the hands of men and the hands of God. In the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was being arrested He said, “The hour is near, and the son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” In the previous 12 hours, Jesus had suffered in the cruel hands of men. But now, He was placing Himself in the comforting hands of God.

You can do that too—place yourself in God’s hands. We’ve all seen the commercials that say, “You’re in good hands with Allstate.” After Katrina, a lot of people found that some insurance companies weren’t reliable. Let’s just say, “You’re in GREAT hands with God!” His hands are big and strong. For instance, this is a big universe, and God holds it in His hands. To give you an idea of how big outer space is, imagine for a moment that the thickness of a page of paper represents the distance between the earth and the sun (93 million miles). To measure the distance to the nearest star would take a stake of paper as tall as a seven story building. And to measure just the diameter of the Milky Way, would require a stack of paper 310 miles high. And the Milky Way is just one of millions of galaxies. Now hold that thought. The Bible says in Isaiah 40:12 that God has measured outer space with the breadth of His hand. His hands are big and strong enough to hold you securely.

Have you placed your life in God’s hands? Have you said, “Father, into your hands I commit my life...my finances... my relationships...my hobbies...my pain...my job...my family?” That’s the safest place in the universe to be.

People often ask me how I pray for someone who is obviously dying. Do I ask God to heal them? Sometimes I do. And sometimes God heals them. But most often I pray, “Father, I place this dear brother/sister in your hands, because I know that’s the safest place in the universe to be.”

CONCLUSION

So there have the words of Victory from the cross. Those words of Jesus spoken 2,000 years ago still contain hope and promise for us.

When Andrew Jackson was President of the United States there was a sensational crime committed where robbers hijacked a federal payroll train. One of the robbers, George Wilson, shot and killed a guard. After being arrested and tried, Wilson was sentenced to die by hanging. There was a growing public sentiment against capital punishment and because there were some questionable details about the crime, President Jackson issued a full pardon to George Wilson. Unbelievably, Wilson refused to accept the pardon. Officials said that he had no choice, since the President issued a pardon, he must accept it. He still refused, so the case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1829 Chief Justice John Marshall made this ruling: "A pardon is a parchment whose only value must be determined by the receiver of the pardon. It has no value apart from that which the receiver gives it. George Wilson has refused to accept the pardon. We cannot conceive why he would do so, but he has. Therefore, George Wilson must die."

Wilson was executed by hanging not long afterwards. You may think he was a fool for refusing a pardon, but he is no more foolish than the thousands of people around us who have refused the offer of pardon by Jesus Christ! Today, Someone with much more authority than the U.S. President is making you an offer that is hard to refuse. He says, "You're guilty, and you deserve to die. But I am offering you a full and free pardon for you sins." Will you accept Jesus? He is your pardon.

There are three ways people try to spell salvation. One way is D-O. Sadly, most people think there is something that they must DO in order to be saved. That's why they DO so many religious acts and so many good deeds. The second way to spell salvation is DON'T. Still other people believe that you go to heaven for the things you DON'T do. If you don't drink, cuss, smoke, dip, or chew, or go with boys that do, you'll get to heaven. Wrong. The right way to spell salvation is D-O-N-E. Jesus has already DONE all that is necessary for us to be saved, so stop you're doing and start trusting Him.

Ira Sankey was a song-writer and music leader for Dwight L. Moody, the famous evangelist during the 19th Century. Sankey compiled hundreds of old hymns and choruses that are seldom sung any more. There is a fascinating old song in his songbook that describes the power of the cross. The words are both beautiful and blunt:

*It is finished!" yes, indeed.
Finished every jot:
Sinner, this is all you need
Tell me, is it not?
Weary, working, burdened one,
Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing; all was done
Long, long ago.*

*Till to Jesus' work you cling
By a simple faith,
"Doing" is a deadly thing
"Doing" leads to death.
Cast your deadly "doing" down
Down at Jesus' feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.*

Before we finish our visit to the cross, let me ask you, "What will be your final words just before you die?" None of us know how and when we're going to die, but you can choose the words you want to say if you find yourself in that situation. Have you thought about it? You don't want to be like Pancho Villa who said, "Tell them I said something." Right now you have the luxury of preplanning your final words. I don't think you can find any better ones than the last eight last words that Jesus spoke, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Those were the final words from the lips of Augustine. Those were the final words of the Protestant reformer, John Hus, as he was being burned at the stake. Those were the last words of Christopher Columbus before he died.

When we were kids we were taught to pray, "Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep; If I should die before I wake; I pray the Lord my soul to take." That was a pretty scary prayer to pray when we were little because we didn't want to think much about dying! No matter how old you are, why don't you make this your new bedtime prayer? "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When you wake up in the morning, pray, "Father into your hands, I commit my spirit." When you eat, or work, or sit at a traffic light, pray, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Who knows? Maybe your last words will be, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit." If they are, your first words in heaven will be, "Hello, Father, I'm home!"

OUTLINE

1. “It is finished!” THE WORK OF JESUS IS COMPLETED!

(1) His suffering is over

(2) Our salvation is accomplished

Personal Application: You can’t work for salvation, you can only reject or accept the finished work of Jesus

2. “Father, into your hands ...” THE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IS RESTORED!

(1) He is reunited with His Father.

(2) We are invited into His presence

Personal Application: The safest place in the universe is in the hands of God.



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes