

The Glory of the Cross (4)

The Sayings from the Cross (19.26-30)

v.28: John records *three* cries the Saviour uttered from the cross. There was a cry of *sympathy* (vv.26-27), *suffering* (vv.28-29) and *service* (v.30). 'Jesus knowing' (omniscience) is a theme of John's gospel. He knew His hour had come (13.1). He knew all His hour involved (18.4). Now He knows His hour is forever past (19.28) and the work His Father has given Him to do is complete. The word 'accomplished' (*tetelestai*) is the same word translated 'finished' in v.30 and links, grammatically, to what precedes (three hours of darkness) and what follows. Christ crucified is the accomplishment of all things and yet there is one further Scripture to be fulfilled (Psalm 69.21) and thus Christ makes a statement of fact, 'I thirst'. This is not a complaint, but a statement of real suffering and true manhood – the physical consequences of crucifixion (Psalm 22.15). It is incredible to think that the Lord said 'I thirst' in a gospel which is full of water. 'Fill the waterpots with water' (2.7). 'Give me to drink' (4.7). 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst' (4.14). 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink' (7.37). 'After that he poureth water into a bason' (13.5). 'Forthwith came there out blood and water' (19.34). He is the Fountain of Living Waters (Jeremiah 2.13) and the spiritual Rock that accompanied and quenched the thirst of two million Israelites in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10.4). Why is such a Person now thirsting? Aside from the *physical* cause, there is the *spiritual*. The rich man in hell, experiencing the judgment of God against his sins, was not only in torment but felt desperate thirst (Luke 16.23-24). The thirst of Christ was the result of enduring Divine judgment for our sins. The cup was drunk. He was made sin for us, treated as the guilty sinner, and yet He knew no sin (cf. Psalm 69.5). *He thirsted on the cross, that we might drink the water of life and thus never experience the thirst we rightly deserve.*

v.29: This is the last of *three* drinks offered to Christ. Prior to crucifixion, the soldiers offered Him 'wine mingled with myrrh' but He would not drink because it acted as a sedative (Matthew 27.34; Mark 15.23). The soldiers repeatedly offered Him vinegar in mockery, as a toast to a king (Luke 23.36). Now, He drinks vinegar (*oxous*), a cheap, sour wine used by soldiers and a favourite beverage of the lower ranks of society. This vinegar was no sedative, but would rather prolong life and therefore pain. Remarkable then, that so soon after taking the same, the Good Shepherd lays down His life (v.30). He has total control over death. The sponge of vinegar was placed around hyssop (a small, bushy and common plant) and held to His mouth. One notes the clear allusion to the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12.22).

v.30: 'Finished' (*tetelestai*) is a word full of meaning. This is a cry of triumph and victory, not defeat. The Lord did not say 'I am finished' as others of God's servants in the past (cf. Numbers 11.4; 1 Kings 19.4), but rather 'it is finished'. The word is in the *perfect* tense, thus this is a past action with on-going and permanent (eternal) effects. It was a word commonly used by four kinds of individuals:

- **Servants.** When work assigned to a slave had been successfully completed, he would return to His master with the declaration '*tetelestai*'. So the Perfect Servant has finished the work His Father gave Him to do (4.34; 17.4).
- **Priests.** When a priest in the temple examined an animal for sacrifice, if no blemish could be found he would declare it to be '*tetelestai*' – perfect, complete and whole. Thus the Perfect Sacrifice has been made. The Lamb of God has offered Himself without spot unto God for a sweet-smelling savour.
- **Artists.** When an artist put the finishing touches to a masterpiece, he would declare it to be '*tetelestai*'. Now Christ has fulfilled all the types and prophecies of the OT that speak of His death. *Acts 13.29: When they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.*
- **Merchants.** When a price or debt had been fully paid, the invoice was stamped with the word '*tetelestai*' (paid in full). Christ shed His own precious blood on the cross (it did not require the spear of the soldier). The ransom was paid and propitiation was complete. Every aspect of the Saviour's work Godward was done. He had given Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2.6).

There are *three* great works in Scripture that were finished which make a wonderful comparison and contrast. The work of: *creation* (Genesis 2.1), *Solomon's temple* (1 Kings 6.14) and *Christ* (John 19.30).

- **Who** completed these works? Creation: God created all things by Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3.9). Temple: A workforce of 183,850 men (2 Chronicles 2.2, 17-18; 1 Kings 5.13). Calvary: By Himself He purged our sins (Hebrews 1.3). Who His own self bare our sins (1 Peter 2.24).
- **How long** did these works take? Creation: six days. Temple: seven years. Calvary: a matter of hours.
- What is the **duration** of the finished work? Creation: has lasted for 6,000 years and counting. Another 1,000 years is required for the millennial reign of Christ after which this world will be folded up like a vesture. Temple: c.370 years before it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 52). Calvary: Eternal (Hebrews 10.12).

- What was the **cost** of these works? Creation: merely cost God His word. He was not impoverished or diminished by the exercise of power in creation (Psalm 33.6, 9). Temple: in the region of £140 billion using today's prices in relation to the gold and silver used. Calvary: cost God His only begotten Son, and cost Christ Himself. No wonder Spurgeon says: *'It is finished'. An ocean of meaning in a drop of language. It would need all the other words that ever were spoken, or ever can be spoken, to explain this one word. It is altogether immeasurable. It is high; I cannot attain to it. It is deep; I cannot fathom it. IT IS FINISHED is the most charming note in all of Calvary's music.*

If the work was finished, why should the Lord Jesus not come down from the cross? Why does He now 'bow His head and give up the ghost'? Whilst His precious shed blood has dealt with what I have *done*, what I *am* must yet be finished in death. Christ must enter into death in order that I, in identification with Him, might also be put to death and raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Romans 6.4). Thus He 'bows His head', the same expression used only elsewhere in Matthew 8.20. There was no place that Christ could rest His head here on earth, except on the cross. He had found a resting place now His work was finished. In the OT, bowing the head was an expression of worship and submission. This is therefore the greatest act of worship the world has ever seen. He has become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He places His head into a position of rest and delivers up His spirit to Another. It should be noted that whilst Christ was closing one work, He was opening another. Luke tells us of all that 'Jesus began both to do and teach' (Acts 1.1). He has left a work for us to do. *John 20.21: As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.* We are to manifest Christ here below and preach the gospel to the lost.

The Soldiers at the Cross (19.31-34)

v.31: The 'preparation' was a technical term used in Judaism for Friday, the sixth day of the week. The day was generally spent preparing what was necessary to avoid work on the Sabbath. This particular Sabbath was special (high day) because it was also a Jewish feast day – the beginning of Unleavened Bread. Whilst Romans would leave victims on the cross until they died (which could take days), the Jews were keen to avoid any defilement of the land (Deuteronomy 21.22-23) and therefore sought Pilate that their legs might be broken to hasten death. How ironic. *Ironsides: Those who, in fact, had not only been indifferent to Christ, but had hated Him and who had insisted upon His crucifixion, were now very punctillious to carry out the letter of the law.* **v.32:** Soldiers would normally smash the legs of the victim with an iron mallet. This prevented victims pushing themselves up in order to breathe. **v.33:** But Christ was already dead, a fact which caused Pilate to marvel (Mark 15.44).



v.34: The spear was likely the Roman lance (pilum) which was 3.5ft long with an iron point and wooden shaft. We sometimes sing: *'The very spear that pierced Thy side. Drew forth the blood to save'* (James G Deck). But hymnology is not always scripturally accurate! Christ had already (internally) shed His blood. Propitiation did not depend upon the spear of a Roman soldier! Rather, this is the external witness of what Christ had already accomplished. Whilst the flowing blood and water is a proof of genuine manhood we should never seek to explain it *medically* (e.g. a broken heart or pericardial effusion). There is an important *spiritual* meaning. In John's writings, blood and water both speak of *cleansing* and *life* (John 7.38; 1 John 1.7). **Blood** (propitiation) speaks of *judicial* cleansing from the *guilt* of sin. **Water** (purification) provides *moral* cleansing from the *defilement* of sin. **Blood** represents life *given up* in sacrifice. **Water** is life *given out* (imparted) through the Spirit. These truths are all typified in various ways in the OT, including the brazen altar (blood) and laver (water) of the Tabernacle and consecration of the priests (washed all over and sprinkled with blood). Thus blood and water have met the two great needs of mankind. *1 John 4.9-10: God sent His Son that we might live through Him (we were dead). Herein is love, not that we love God... sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (we were guilty).*

The Scriptures and the Cross (19.35-37)

v.35: John's eye witness record of these events join that of John the Baptist (1.7-8, 15, 32, 34), His miracles (5.36; 10.25), the Father (5.37), the Scriptures (5.39), Himself (8.18) and the Holy Spirit (15.26). **v.36:** John's record is written that we might believe with certainty that Jesus is the true Messiah and Son of God (20.31), but the record of Scripture and its fulfilment also bears witness with John. Again, our attention is drawn to Christ as the true Passover lamb by referencing Exodus 12.46 and Numbers 9.12. With 27 bones in the hand and 26 in the foot it was a miracle of Calvary that none were broken. The Lord truly guarded the bones of the Righteous One (Psalm 34.19-20). **v.37:** The reference to Zechariah 12.10 is not spoken of as being fulfilled as it has a yet future fulfilment in relation to Israel. In that day there shall be great mourning and repentance, and a fountain of water shall be opened for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13.1, cp. Ezekiel 36.25). Clearly then, the whole chapter speaks of the *glory* of the cross. Further meditations might be enjoyed in relation to the **servants** by the *cross* (vv.38-40) and the **sepulchre** near the *cross* (vv.41-42).