

John 19:28-30 | “The Cross Was No Mere Tragedy”
Preached on March 24, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to John 19, and we will be in verses 28-30. *[pause]*

We are taking a one-week break from the gospel of Matthew to look at the cross of Christ, since it's the time of year that we reflect especially on the death and resurrection of Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

One of the earliest artistic depictions of Jesus on the cross in history is from the 2nd century A.D.

SHOW SLIDE

This is actually a drawing found on a wall that is making fun of a Christian for worshiping Jesus. *[pause]*

Jesus is depicted as hanging on the cross and he has a donkey's head.

It looks as if a Roman is worshiping Him, and the inscription says, “Alexamenos worships his god.” *[pauseeee]*

This shows you that even from early on, the world didn't understand why Christians worship a crucified Christ, and even made fun of them for that. *[pause]*

Jesus hanging on the cross doesn't make sense to them at all.

This is because the cross looks like defeat, and it looks like Jesus is merely a victim of some tragedy and we worship Him. *[pauseeee]*

When we think of someone going through something horrific like getting beaten or killed, we normally think that they are *not* in control of the situation or winning. *[pause]*

You probably wouldn't believe someone, who was getting beat up or killed, if they said, “I'm in control, guys.”

But what's marvelous and amazing about Jesus' crucifixion is that He actually *was* in control of what was happening to Him.

The cross was a victory, and it was no mere tragedy -- that's what we will see this morning. *[pauseeee]*

Here in John 19, Jesus is delivered over to be crucified, and then we are given certain details of His crucifixion.

And after Jesus cares for His mother by calling on John to take care of her, we come upon our text today.

John 19:28-30 says this....*[READ]*

Here we are given Jesus' final moments on the cross, and though paradoxical, while Jesus was dying on the cross, He was in control at the same time. *[pause]*

Just consider what we see in this passage... *First...*

I. Jesus fulfilled Scripture's prophecies.

Did you notice what it said?

It said, "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'" *[pause]*

Jesus knew that certain things needed to be done before He died. *[pause]*

He didn't see His death as some wrench in the plan.

Rather, He knew that providential details had to come together first before He got to this point.

Specific prophecies had to be fulfilled before He could give up His spirit.

And now -- now is the time where everything that needed to be done was done. *[pauseeee]*

It's almost as if He had a mental checklist of pre-death items that had to be accomplished.

And He made sure to fulfill everything that the Father willed, leaving nothing out nor skipping over anything.

Every little detail was planned by God and was fulfilled and finished by Christ. *[pauseeee]*

If you think about this point, it shows us an incredible truth about Jesus...

Even in the extreme agony of the Cross, He made sure to obey His Father perfectly. *[pause]*

He didn't think, "I'm in agony! All I want to do is just moan and groan, I don't want to focus on doing another task or fulfilling another prophecy."

No, even in the torment of the cross, even in the excruciation of His suffering, His mind was on the will of the Father. *[pauseeee]*

Submitting and obeying His Father was priority number one, and He made sure it happened to perfection.

No matter what He felt physically, mentally, or emotionally, He resolved to finish the plan that was given to Him. *[pauseeee]*

Here Jesus knows that all is ready, so He fulfills one last prophecy on the cross when He says, "I thirst."

For due to His statement, the Romans give him sour wine to drink from a sponge. *[pause]*

Now you may be wondering, what does that fulfill?

It fulfills Psalm 69:21, which says, “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” *[pause]*

In the original psalm, it’s a psalm of David, and shows him to be a righteous sufferer.

Well here we see that it pointed forward to Christ, the perfect righteous sufferer on the cross. *[pause]*

Even the fact that the Romans gave him a drink, and specifically, gave him sour wine to drink, fulfills a prophecy made about a thousand years before! *[pause]*

Some of us have trouble fulfilling a promise we made hours ago, and yet God fulfilled a thousand year old prophecy about a drink! *[pauseeee]*

There are many things in life that you know that you can’t always trust, aren’t there?

You can’t always trust the news, or the science that is put forward.

You can’t always trust the leaders of the world, or a myriad of different things. *[pause]*

Remember when you were little, and someone would try to emphasize that they would keep their word by saying, “I pinky swear.”? *[pause]*

Aren’t you thankful that God’s promises are infinitely more reliable than those broken pinky swears?

It’s more reliable than that, more reliable than anything you can ever be promised.

More reliable than a signed, stamped, and sealed contract, for God Himself backs His Word. *[pauseeee]*

I want you to consider this question: why is it that God wanted us to see that Christ fulfilled even these small, precise prophecies? *[pause]*

What’s the answer?

Why tell us this detail? Why point out that prophecies were being fulfilled? That things were being accomplished? *[pause]*

On the one hand, they are showing us that Jesus is truly the promised Messiah, and that God’s plan was coming to fruition, but there’s something else. *[pause]*

Have you ever considered that God wants us to trust Him, and so He loves to prove His reliability? *[pause]*

In grace, the Lord moves us along in faith by proving Himself time and time again.

In grace, He says, “Let me show you My trustworthiness.” *[pauseeee]*

If you are ever doubting God’s trustworthiness, just look to the Cross!

And that means that when you are face down on the carpet in agony or grief...

When you are sitting on the ground with your head between your hands...

When tears are streaming down your face, and your heart hurts, and despair feels like it’s slowly creeping in...

In those moments, God wants you to know that He comes through, for He just keeps pointing His finger towards Calvary. *[pause]*

The cross is like a big signpost declaring, “Promise fulfilled.” *[pause]*

The cross is a public declaration that God can be trusted, for He came through. *[pauseeee]*

This is an encouragement to us!

It’s encouraging because it means that we can look back at what Christ has done and know that what happened, happened exactly as the Father planned.

Jesus is the perfect, sinless Son, whose flawless obedience secured our salvation. *[pause]*

He didn’t make a mistake somewhere and ruin the plan.

He didn’t disobey and go away from what was intended.

His obedience was thorough and without error - it superbly lined up with what the Father wanted.

And that means that we can wholly trust that His sacrifice has the power to accomplish redemption. *[pause]*

We don’t have to worry that He missed a step or forgot to do something important, but He did exactly what was needed.

So you can trust his work on the Cross!

Because of His perfect obedience, He can truly “save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him.”¹ *[pauseeee]*

You can trust what happened on the cross.

You can trust the Savior who hung on the cross, you can trust His work on the cross, for this Savior who hung on the cross fulfilled the prophecies about His death. *[pauseeee]*

¹ Hebrews 7:25.

But we see more, don't we?

We see further Christ's control on the cross in that...

II. Jesus finished the work of redemption.

After Jesus receives the sour wine, we are told that he says, "It is finished." *[pause]*

To the bystander of Jesus' crucifixion and to the unbeliever, this doesn't make sense.

'What's finished? Why did He say that?' *[pause]*

You don't expect someone dying to say, "It is finished."

You may expect them to say, "I am finished!" but not, "It is finished." *[pauseeee]*

When you say something is finished, you are showing that there was a plan or task that needed to be done and now it's complete. *[pause]*

It's showing us that in His death something *more* is going on than a simple death.

It's an indication that there's more than meets the eye when Jesus dies.

A plan and task was completed, accomplished, finished, done. *[pauseeee]*

So what's finished?

Jesus accomplished the plan of God for the redemption of man. *[pause]*

The Savior was promised, the Savior came, and the Savior completed the work. *[pauseeee]*

All the way back in Genesis 3:15, God had promised a Savior. *[pause]*

We needed a Savior, for we had sinned against God, and were under condemnation for rebelling against our Creator.

We needed to be redeemed from the penalty of our sin, which is death. *[pause]*

That's where Jesus comes in.

The Son of God came to the earth, taking on flesh so that He could identify as one of us.

He lived the perfect life we couldn't live, and then died in our place and for our sin, paying the penalty that we deserved. *[pause]*

The spotless Lamb of God became our substitute and was slain.

He completely satisfied the wrath of God for our sin, so we could be forgiven and no longer face condemnation. *[pauseeee]*

So when Jesus says, “It is finished,” He’s saying, “The work is done. The plan fulfilled. The substitute placed. The payment made. And now sin will be atoned for once and for all.” *[pause]*

“It is finished” means forgiveness begins. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus’ death wasn’t just another person dying a terrible death, no, it accomplished so much.

At a time when anyone who saw His death would think that He was being defeated, it was our sin problem that was being defeated. *[pauseeee]*

You see, “it is finished,” is not a cry of defeat -- it’s a cry of victory!

Sin was atoned for! Our substitute took our place! The once-for-all sacrifice was offered. *[pauseeee]*

The cross was not some wrinkle in the plan, it *was* the plan! *[pause]*

Jesus’ death was not some random, unforeseen mishap, for by saying, “it is finished,” Jesus showed complete control of what was happening.

The cross was no mere tragedy, nor was it defeat!

It was not a failure or an accident. *[pauseeeee]*

A central tenet of our faith is the death of Jesus, and we don’t rejoice in a mere tragedy, for how horrible would we be?

We rejoice because the cross was no mere tragedy, it was the plan of God being accomplished.

It was redemption accomplished, so that redemption could be applied. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s think further about what “it is finished” means...

The fact that Jesus said, “It is finished,” shows us that *we* didn’t accomplish the work, but *He* did. *[pause]*

Jesus hung on the cross and said it, not us. *[pause]*

Not some other random person, but Jesus.

He could rightfully say, “It is finished,” for Jesus did the work that we could never do, nor anyone else in all of human history could do. *[pause]*

We could never redeem ourselves, for we are sinners, and no amount of our good works could erase our sin debt. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus didn’t say, “You must come up here and face this too, so that it will be finished.”

No, out of love, He went through death for us. *[pauseeee]*

You see, the main thing that “it is finished” means is that *the work is done*. [pause]

There’s no more to do!

Christ, in His obedience and effort, accomplished it all.

Christ, in His love and mercy, completed what was needed.

‘It is finished’ can’t just happen out of thin air, but something had to happen to finish it, and Christ did it. [pauseeeee]

You cannot add or subtract to a finished task. [pause]

Jesus didn’t say, “OK guys, I got you mostly there, but what I’ll need you to do is make sure you don’t sin anymore, do this many good works, and then you’ll be good with God, and then you’ll be able to say it’s finished for yourself.”

No --- what’s finished is finished.

The cross means it’s all done! [pauseeee]

He didn’t say, “It will be finished.”

He didn’t say, “It may possibly be finished, I think.”

He said declaratively, “It is finished.” [pauseeee]

Jesus’ death is a reminder that salvation comes from outside of yourself, not from yourself.

You can’t add some good works to Christ’s “it is finished”.

You can’t say, “I am enough,” for then why did Jesus die, if you are enough?

You can’t think that you are good in and of yourself, for then why was Jesus there in the first place? [pause]

He was there because of your sin, because of my sin, which needed to be atoned for.

And were you there atoning for your sin? Were you there adding to the work?

Were you there capping off the work of salvation with the joy set before you?² [pause]

Did you hang on the cross?

No, *He* hung on the cross and said it, for He did it for you.

So stop trusting in your own righteousness to save you!

² A reference to Hebrews 12:2.

Stop trusting in your good works to add to your salvation! *[pause]*

Salvation is an accomplished work that is simply applied to us when we put our faith in Jesus, who did the work for us.

We receive salvation as a gift. *[pauseeee]*

If you keep thinking that you have to save yourself, that you have to add something, that you have to do some kind of good work...

...You are essentially negating Jesus' "it is finished" and saying, "It's not done yet. I have to do something to finish it." *[pause]*

No, sit back, rest in, and find relief in the glorious, joy-inducing words: "It is finished." *[pauseeee]*

Oh, the victory in those words!

Oh, the relief for those who have been weighed down by guilt!

Oh, the rest for the burdened sinner!

Oh, the joy for the sorrow-hearted repentant! *[pauseeee]*

When we first came here on moving day, I was dreading all of the effort and work that it would take to unload the truck, and set things up in the parsonage.

And as I considered all of our stuff, I was burdened with the amount of work it would take to get settled. *[pause]*

But on moving day, there were so many of you there to work that you did most of the heavy lifting and setting up, and Kate and I mostly just pointed where things should go. *[pauseeee]*

At one point, I came down and to my shock, the whole truck was already emptied - it was done.

And the relief that I felt was amazing, for I knew -- 'it's already done, it's finished'. *[pauseeee]*

How much more relief, rest, and joy is there to know that the work is already done of salvation?

You no longer have to walk around in guilt before God.

You no longer have to live under condemnation before a holy God.

You no longer have to work and think that something you do will gain God's favor.

But you can simply rest in faith in the finished work of Christ, for He did it. *[pauseeee]*

His sacrifice takes away our sin guilt, provides us forgiveness, and gives us favor with God.

Glory to God!

We receive this gift of salvation by faith in what Jesus did - that's it! *[pauseee]*

This means that on your worst day, when you have done sin after sin, and you feel like an utter failure.

You can look back to the finished work of Christ, and say, "I know that I've sinned, I feel like a failure, but Christ took my sin on that cross, paid for it, and said, 'it is finished'.

That means it has been paid for! It has been atoned for!

I stand forgiven! I have never lost the favor of God! I am not condemned!

He loves me! He never stopped loving me! Christ showed that He loves me and showed it by what He did on the cross!" *[pauseee]*

The guilt you feel. The shame. The feeling of being distant from God...

The sense that you don't measure up to God's standard, and even the tendency to trust in your own works are all cured when you soak in the wondrous words of Christ, who said, "It is finished." *[pauseeee]*

How much we need to be reminded of those three few, but power-packed words. *[pause]*

So write them on your heart, put them as frontlets between your eyes.

Do whatever you need to do to remember Christ's magnificent pronouncement that it's all accomplished, completed, and done. *[pauseee]*

There's one more way that we see Christ's control on the cross, and it's when He dies. *[pause]*

Now you may be thinking, "Wait a second, how can you be in control when you die? Jesus was being killed by the Romans. How was He in control?" *[pause]*

Look at verse 30, where it says, "and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." *[pause]*

What else do we see, but that...

III. Jesus finalized His sacrifice by giving up His life.

Jesus died. *[pause]*

He wasn't just "knocked out" or simply unconscious.

He actually, truly, and historically died.

"He bowed his head and gave up his spirit." *[pause]*

There was a *finality* to Jesus' death, and this is so important, for by dying, Jesus finalized His sacrifice. *[pauseeee]*

If He didn't actually die, then He wouldn't have been the Lamb slain for us, but only the Lamb beaten up and let go.

He had to die for us to complete the sacrifice, and He did! *[pauseeee]*

In a way, through the saddest moment of history, Jesus opened up the way to endless joy for scores of people. *[pause]*

When Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit, He made the way for us to have our heads lifted up in forgiveness and given new life through the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

Thank the Lord for His sacrifice that was truly finalized, for if He never died, we would still be in our sins. *[pauseeee]*

But something else we see is that Jesus *gave up his spirit*.

The verb used here is one meaning "to hand over". *[pause]*

I believe that John used this word very intentionally here.

Even in Jesus' death, He was in complete control, for He gave up his spirit. *[pauseeee]*

His sacrifice was a voluntary sacrifice. *[pause]*

Earlier in the book of John, Jesus said that no one takes his life from Him, "but I lay it down of my own accord."³ *[pause]*

Jesus was only there because He chose to be.

He laid His life down of His own accord, as a willing sacrifice. *[pause]*

The Romans may have looked like they were in control, but He went there voluntarily, and that's why John points out that He "gave up his spirit." *[pauseeee]*

The cross is no mere tragedy!

Even Jesus' death was in His hands, as He gave up His spirit.

This is why Luke says that Jesus calls out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last."⁴ *[pause]*

Jesus' last act on the cross was one of giving over of Himself in trust to His Father as a sacrifice pleasing to Him.

³ John 10:18.

⁴ Luke 23:46.

And in that momentous last act, the sacrifice was finalized, salvation secured, and love was conveyed. *[pauseeee]*

So what does this all mean for us?

It means what the hymn, “Jesus Paid It All,” proclaims:

“And when, before the throne, I stand in Him complete. ‘Jesus died my soul to save,’ My lips shall still repeat.” *[pauseeee]*

You see...

Jesus’ death on the Cross accomplished the plan of God to save sinners!

It was all according to plan, and what a gracious plan it was. *[pause]*

Scripture was fulfilled, the work of redemption finished, and Christ’s sacrifice finalized.

And this means that we follow Christ, who was not a victim of blind fate, but who hung on the cross to complete a much-needed, eternity-impacting work.

And then He rose again, conquering death and showing that the sacrifice was accepted for us. *[pauseeee]*

So going back to good ol’ Alexamenos, who was made fun of for worshiping Jesus, who died on the cross.

As one writer said, “Call me Alexamenos,”⁵ and I say the same thing: “Call me Alexamenos,” I don’t care.

Though others may mock it, others think it foolish, or not understand it...

I rejoice in Jesus’ death on the cross, for it means forgiveness and life for all who believe in Him. *[pauseeeee]*

“It is finished.”

I just love that statement, don’t you?

It rings sweetly in my ears, and brings joy to my heart. *[pause]*

Tis so sweet to hear those words, and to rest in His work for me.

To know that He is Lord of lords, and that He gave His life for me.

⁵ Chad Bird, found on his Instagram post: https://www.instagram.com/p/C4IOEOhSWaV/?img_index=1.