

It Is Finished!

A sermon preached at Second Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Good Friday, March 28, 1997. Scripture Lessons: John 19:30

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Crucifixion as a form of execution began with the Persians. The Romans adopted crucifixion from the Persians and reserved it for slaves and the most despicable criminals. They introduced crucifixion to Israel. Jews had previously put people guilty of blasphemy, witchcraft, and adultery to death by stoning. But the Romans crucified their victims. During Palestine's 400 year occupation by Rome, thousands were crucified.

Crucifixion was governed by specific rules. the idea was to make this horrible procedure as painful as possible and an example to others. Roman crucifixion took place in a public location outside the city. The Romans normally crucified people naked. Romans preferred a cross in the shape of an upper-case T rather than a lower-case t. Crosses were quite low, only 5 to 6 feet off the ground. The Romans first flogged the condemned person, often with a cat of nine tails that had pieces of metal attached so that the skin was ripped open. The crossbar was tied to the prisoner's shoulders. He was paraded through the streets for humiliation and as an example. A soldier carried a sign indicating the crime the person had committed. At the place of execution, the prisoner's wrists were nailed to the crossbar. The bar was lifted and placed on the stake which was already in the ground. The condemned person's ankles were then nailed to the stake. Finally, the sign identifying the person's crime was attached to the stake. The prisoner suffered excruciating pain.

The victim eventually died of asphyxiation, dehydration and loss of blood. Some prisoners remained conscious for days. Sometimes the Roman soldiers shortened the prisoner's suffering by breaking their legs. Because his legs no longer supported the weight of his body, he suffocated faster. Jesus, however, died without any broken bones. The victims could talk only in short bursts of breath because of the stress on their diaphragms. As Jesus hung on the cross, his statements were all short:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

"Woman, behold your son."

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

"I thirst."

"It is finished."

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Jesus died during the Jewish celebration of Passover. During Passover pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. Each Jewish family selected a lamb to die on Passover. Traditionally, the daily sacrifice was slaughtered at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, including on the day of Passover. At that time, the priest stood at the pinnacle of the temple and blew the shofar, the ram's horn.

As Jesus hung on the cross, he surely heard the piercing blast of the shofar carry across the city. Jesus recognized that the hour of his sacrifice had come. When the knife slit the throat of the Passover lamb, I can imagine that Jesus looked up

to heaven and said, "It is finished." At that moment, the
Passover lamb and Jesus died - at about 3 in the afternoon.

"It is finished!" Jesus cried.

Lifted up was He to die,
"It is finished," was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high,
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

"It is finished! Jesus cried.

There's an old spiritual in the Presbyterian hymnal that
goes this way.

Everytime I think about Jesus,
Everytime I think about Jesus,
Everytime I think about Jesus,
Surely He died on Calvary.

Don't you hear the hammer ringing?
Don't you hear the hammer ringing?
Don't you hear the hammer ringing?
Surely He died on Calvary.

Don't you hear Him calling His Father?
Don't you hear Him calling His Father?
Don't you hear Him calling His Father?
Surely He died on Calvary.

Don't you hear Him say, "It is finished?"
Don't you hear Him say, "It is finished?"
Don't you hear Him say, "It is finished?"
Surely He died on Calvary.

"It is finished!" "It is finished!" What's finished. I
was thinking, "Maybe Jesus meant his suffering was finished."
But I'm not so sure about that. I believe that Jesus still
suffers. Sick people suffer and Jesus says, "I was sick, and you
visited me." And hungry people suffer. And Jesus says, "I was
hungry and you fed me." He's talking about sick people and
hungry people in the world today. Jesus still suffers. Jesus
suffers in and with his suffering children. I don't believe that

Jesus paid it all.
All to him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain.
He washed it white as snow.

The blood of sheep and goats could never remove our sins.
What Jesus did for us on the cross has paid for all our sins.
For countless years, thousands of sheep and goats had been
sacrificed. Not once had anyone said, It is enough. Finished.
Not until the Lamb of God said, "It is finished!"

"It is finished!" It's a cry of victory, not a sigh of
resignation. It's a cry of triumph. God's judgment has fallen.
God has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Jesus was the Lamb
of God, taking away the sin of the world. He has now finished
that great work of redemption and sits at the right hand of God
the father almighty.

We rest our souls on the finished work of Christ. Don't
fear that either sin or Satan or the law of God will condemn us.
We have a Savior who has paid it all. When we look at our lives,
we well may be ashamed of them. But when we look at the finished
work of Christ, we are complete in him.

"It is finished!"

The strife is o'er, the battle done,
The victory of life is won,
The song of triumph has begun.
Alleluia!