

The Words of Lent 6

(Yeshua, God's Salvation)

Zechariah 9:9-10

John 19:30

Scripture Lesson from the OT: "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and will bring salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt the foal of a donkey."

Scripture Lesson from the NT: "When Jesus therefore received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished", and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

This is the word of the Lord for the people of God.

There is a story from the days of the old mountain men about the frozen dead body of a man that was found leaning against the trunk of an old pine tree. In the top of his coat was a note hastily scribbled on a piece of cloth that said, "My name is Hatchet Jack. In my hands is the gun that killed the bear that killed me. It's a .50 caliber Hawken, and is a good gun. I pray that the man who finds me is a white man and a Christian and will take this gun and put it to good use. My life is finished now, and I am dead."

"It is finished." This next to last word spoken by our Lord from the cross might have been the saddest word ever spoken. It might have been a difficult and painful last word said during a short life that was to end soon in failure.

In speaking the word "finished," Jesus might have been saying that He had gone as far as He could go and hadn't achieved anything but His own defeat and death by crucifixion on a Roman cross. Some have said this was true, you and I could have perhaps said this was true, but that's not what Jesus was saying was true. In fact, I would be so bold to say this word of finality spoken by Jesus from the cross, is not a mumbled word of failure but is instead a shout of victory. "It is finished," He said!

Well then, if this word is a word of victory, what was the occasion for such a triumphant outburst of emotion? Some have said He was shouting because the bodily suffering of crucifixion was over. Others believe that since He had been born to fulfill His Father's will to save His people, and He had accomplished this goal, there was nothing more for him to do, "It is finished," He said.

Personally, I don't think either of these theories are quite correct. As far as we know, Jesus was a normal healthy man. As such, He would have enjoyed the pleasures of life as most of us do. As we all cling to our lives, Jesus clung also to His life. He had no hatred of His body such that He could find no joy in living.

Those who sing "This World is not my Home" as their theme song, and who look forward to heaven as their reward for having suffered through life to the bitter end certainly are not in agreement with Jesus. From the beginning, God called this world "good" (Genesis 1:31), and I believe that Jesus likewise called it "good" every day of His life right up to the very last day when He said, "It is finished."

And why not? His life from beginning to end was a life fully consecrated to the will of God! What better way to live one's life is there than that? A life consecrated to God is a holy life lived in God's presence full all the abundance that heaven has to give. It would only follow then that He should be among the most joyous humans that ever lived.

And His joy was not only during the early days of His ministry, when success looked like an open road to the sky, but also at the end when the going got rough. Even in the last hours sharing a meal with His best friends in the upper room, He prayed "That they might have their joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13).

A man who celebrated the joys of life as Jesus had done would not wish for His life to be over. In this way, I believe that Jesus feared the ordeal of death even as you and I fear death. Thus, His prayer to the Father in Gethsemane to "Take this cup away from Me if it is possible" (Matthew 26:38).

Having noted this, it is my belief that Jesus was not rejoicing from the cross that He would soon be dead, but instead that He had overcome even the greatest desire of life, which is to live for the pleasure of living, if the pleasure of life was not the will of His heavenly Father.

The joy of Jesus was therefore the joy of a perfect son completing the task of His perfect Father. The joy of Jesus was the joy of living in holy love.

And He had not merely brought the work to its conclusion through His death, He had finished it unto eternal life. His success had not been a partial success with loose strings flying in the wind and important details left undone, as is often the case with our life's work. His success was complete in every way down to the last jot and tittle. The picture of life He painted was a picture that needed neither addition nor subtraction of a single stroke.

As He had prayed to His Father a few short hours before, "I have finished the work which you gave Me to do," and now He was shouting out the victory of that same prayer triumphantly from the cross, "It is finished," He said.

So then, what exactly had Jesus finished? What work of His Father had He completed? What joy was there for Jesus in living a life of holy love? Let's have a look at what the Gospels have to say in response to these questions.

In Matthew 18:11 we read that, "The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." Jesus said that people who were not sick did not need a physician, but those who were did. Thus, as the good physician, He came to heal the world from the sickness of sin.

Thus, He had been born to fulfill the Holy Christmas prophecy of the angels that, "Unto you is born this day a Savior which is Christ the Lord." The sacrifice of holy love for Jesus was in the fulfillment of the prophecy of the angels that "He will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

And then in John 10:10 we read, "I am come that they might have life, and have it abundantly." As we look through the pages of the Bible, we see time and again the spell that Jesus cast over the people. I believe He was able to do this because of the healthy vitality they experienced through being in His presence. Jesus was beautifully alive to every person He met, and He made sure they knew why!

One day a young rich man came to Him and asked Him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is the good life, he asked Jesus, and how can I have it?" As always, Jesus gave him heaven's best answer, "I have come to give you the best life possible right now!"

Which is to say in brief, “If what you want is eternal life, begin to live like you have it now, for the life you are seeking is in Me! You want the good life? I AM the good life!”

When Pilate asked Jesus if He was “King of the Jews,” you will notice that Jesus didn’t say that He wasn’t, only that “His kingdom was not of this world.” Which would imply that under the right circumstances, He would be willing to be king of the Jews, or king of anyone else for that matter.

When He took the conversation a bit further and extended His offer to include Pilate himself, Pilate was forced by the convincing power of His argument to deflect the conversation to a more trivial subject rather than face the truth claims of Jesus’ kingship framed in the question before him.

Friends, there is no doubt that Jesus came to earth to establish a kingdom. All of His enemies understood this to be true, which is why they wanted him dead. Those who would claim that the gospel message is not a message about political power and activism have either not heard His words, or they have misunderstood their meaning. The political activism of Jesus was the *War of the Lamb* against the roaring lions of evil and darkness in which “everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37).

Jesus came to earth to establish His church so that “the gates of hell would not prevail” on earth. He came to build up humanity into a sister and brotherhood of one body and one soul, opposing the powers of darkness in the world.

He declared that this fellowship of believers was the true sign of the living power of God in the world. I sincerely believe that were it not for the church militant of Jesus Christ on earth today, even in its present weakness and cultural complicity, the devil would have already won the day for the legions of hell.

In John 13:35 we read that, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” In these words, we see that Jesus came to build a kingdom on earth made of relationships based on “Holy Love” that seek to do the will of God on earth even as it is done in heaven.

And then Jesus came to reveal God’s presence on earth. In John 1:18 we read, “No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten of God who is in the bosom of the Father.” It has been said that Jesus Christ is the best picture God ever took

of Himself. Thus, it was for the eternal purpose of revealing God's presence to the world that Jesus came. If you want to know what God is like in a way that can be understood by every human, you have your answer in Jesus Christ.

When the apostle Paul was once asked what he could say about the nature of God his answer was that "God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is to say that if you want to know God, then know Him through His Son.

Here on the cross of Calvary in the person of Jesus Christ we see God's supreme revelation of Himself. Jesus revealed God every day of His life on earth, and never better than the day He shouted triumphantly from the cross that His Father's great work of salvation was done, "It is finished" He said.

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the fulfillment in human history of the divine mind and will of God. In this grand achievement we have no right to view Jesus as merely an innocent martyr who died an untimely death, as many are wanting to believe about Him.

His death did not just happen to him as a result of a strange mix of circumstances over which He had no control, but was instead the prescriptive plan of God for the salvation of the world. The atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary was the very reason He came into the world.

We must never build our case for salvation simply on the idea that because God is our Father and He loves us, He will forgive our sins. This thinking is a direct contradiction of the revealed truth of God in Jesus Christ. Thinking thus makes the cross unnecessary, and the redemption from sin to be much ado about nothing.

There is no doubt that God loves us and will forgive our sins (John 3:16). But God forgives sin only because of the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus could have been the savior of the world in no other way. Any doctrine of the crucifixion that diminishes the holiness of God through a definition of His love that reduces the cross to be unnecessary, contradicts the truth of God revealed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

We must never allow ourselves to be held captive by thinking that the advocacy of God's Son stands with us against His Father's hatred of human sin simply because He loves us. The scripture way of salvation teaches that this way of

thinking about God's love will surely send us to hell because it blasphemes the Holy Spirit by denying its power over human sin.

The greatest note of triumph ever sounded in the ears of a shocked and startled world was and still is the note sounded from Jesus on the cross of Calvary, "It is finished" He said.

If indeed we understand then that the work of salvation is complete in the death of Jesus Christ, what are we to do? Well, as it turns out, we are not the first to ask this question. In Acts 2:37 we read, "Now when they heard this they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

My great uncle was a farmer, and a pretty good one too, so I'm told. But the fact that he was also a Christian did not mean when spring came all he had to do was pray and the soil got magically tilled, and the seed got magically planted, and the harvest got magically harvested. He was wise enough in the ways of heaven and earth to know that God would provide the harvest if he did his part in tilling and tending the ground.

In a similar fashion, it is certainly God's will for us to live in a peaceful world filled with love and brotherhood. This is the world God intended and made provision for back in the days of the Garden of Eden. If we are honest and fair in our relationships and our business dealings with others, God will certainly give us the peace we seek and so desperately need.

In John 17:15 Jesus did not pray that God would take His disciples out of the world, but would instead keep them from the evil one while they were still in the world. In this way, Jesus prayed that God would make provision for the disciples in the world as His adopted children without them becoming of the world.

And God through His Son Jesus Christ guaranteed His protection and provision on the cross for such a world. But for some reason, He chose to realize His holy purpose in the world in cooperation with His holy church. What this means is that God's plan for the protection and provision of the world will not happen if His church fails to do their part as His representatives on earth.

Evangelist Billy Graham once spoke of a time as a teenager when he was left home alone on a dreary Saturday afternoon. As a student of theology, he picked up his Bible and turned to a random page and began to read. The page he opened to in the book included the text of John 19:30. There he began to read the story of the last hour of the life of Jesus which concluded with the cry from the cross, "It is finished."

These words of Jesus took hold of his heart, pierced his heart if you will, and he knew exactly what he needed to do. He later wrote in his journal of the occasion that "there dawned on me the conviction that nothing was more important for me to do but accept Jesus Christ as my savior and continue serving Him forever." This was exactly what he did for the rest of his long life of service to God.

By so doing, he was answering the question to Peter in Acts as to what should be done in response to God's offer of salvation.

By so doing, he was agreeing with God that his salvation was "finished" by Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

By so doing, he was affirming that he could be saved from his sins only through the cross of Christ.

Methodist founder John Wesley once prayed to God that he die rather than become useless to His Lord. Henry Thoreau once said that "all men live lives of quiet desperation." All of us at one time or another have wondered if our life will count for anything.

I think everyone wants to believe their life counts for something, and their voice will be heard above the din of the mob in some way. To quote a famous movie line: everyone wants to sound their barbaric "Yawp!" I think at heart that is the root cause for the popularity of the various social media.

The human sense of uselessness that results when our lives don't count for anything is perhaps the greatest cause of despair in human life. A useless life of mere existence is no life at all. In fact, I would go as far as to say that uselessness is the root cause of nearly every malaise known to humans, from bodily illness to personality disorders to addictive alcoholism and drug abuse, you name it, and you will find a sense of human uselessness at the root of it.

To quote the famous poem of John Greenleaf Whittier, "*Maud Miller*": "The saddest words of the tongue and pen, the saddest are these: "It might have been." Thus, while it is true that the words "It is finished" spoken by Jesus from the cross might have been the saddest words of the tongue or pen, they were in truth, not sad at all, but were rather cause for the grandest celebration the world has ever known.

If you truly believe that Jesus has finished your salvation on the cross of Calvary, then *today* your life will begin to count for God. Today, if you have heard His voice, and you do not harden your hearts to what He tells you to do, today, Jesus Christ will give you a new life that will both honor God and be a heavenly blessing to everyone you know. All because Jesus said, "It is Finished"!

And all God's people said, "Amen" and amen!

(Pass out palm branches)