

It Is Finished!

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you can imagine for a moment that you've been lifted out of your seat, lifted out of the building and dropped somewhere else in the world.

You're totally lost. You don't know the language. You don't know the culture. You don't have your passport. You don't have any kind of ID on you. Now, how would you tell people who you were? Well, it doesn't matter where in the world your imagination has taken you, because wherever you are in the world, in your mind, whatever language, whatever culture, there is one simple picture that you could draw that people would instantly recognize and know just who you were.

You wouldn't have to speak the language. You wouldn't have to know anyone. But when you showed people a picture of a cross, well, pretty much every person on earth would know that it is the universally recognized symbol of Christianity.

It is the cross of Christ. There are some places you probably wouldn't want to show people the cross, but they would know what it was.

[1 : 19] And have you ever wondered how strange that is? What is a cross? It's a torture device. The universally recognized symbol of our faith is something that was used to nail people to until they slowly suffocated and bled, until they died.

It would be like today, taking as the symbol of our faith, a gun or an electric chair, something that is designed and built to inflict pain and to take life.

That is what a cross was. So then why is it the symbol of our faith? You know, this passage that we're coming to this morning is why?

Because of who it was on the cross, who was crucified that day, and what he did on the cross that changed life in this world forever, and life in the next world forever.

What did Jesus do that turned the cross from being a gory piece of wood into a glorious symbol of our salvation?

[2 : 38] Well, as we follow Jesus to the cross this morning, John wants us to see three things on the cross. The king, the lamb, and the plan.

Firstly then, let's see the king. It isn't obvious, is it, that the cross is where we would find a king? I don't know if you've perhaps read Tom Holland's book, *Dominion*, or heard him on the podcast, *The Rest is History*.

He's a well-known historian. And in his book, he writes that no death was more excruciating, more contemptible than crucifixion.

Such a fate, Roman intellectuals agreed, was the worst imaginable. This, in turn, was what rendered it so suitable a punishment for slaves. The Romans didn't even crucify each other.

No matter how bad the crime, they considered the cross too horrific to inflict on one of their own. It was deliberately dehumanizing. It was reserved for the lowest of the low.

[3 : 50] Now read with me from verse 17. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

There they crucified him. And with him two others, one on each side and Jesus in the middle. This is the death. Jesus died.

A shameful, a painful, and subhuman death. Now because our culture is a very visual culture, we would want John at this point to go into great detail, wouldn't we, about the physical torment of Jesus.

What did he look like? What did he feel like on the cross? But notice that John doesn't do that. He doesn't get into the physical pain of Jesus, which suggests that those things are a distraction for now.

Instead, what does John want us to zone our eyes in on? Well, it's not the nails through his joints, and it is not the bleeding cuts on his body, but notice the words that are above his head.

[5 : 05] We read them there in verse 19. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And remember that Pilate had said, as he had Jesus on trial three times, that he was not guilty of any charge.

And so he has this sign put over his head, not here hangs a criminal, but here hangs a king. So that as we gaze on the broken body of Jesus on the cross, John comes alongside us and points up and said, look higher.

Look higher. We are gazing at a crucified king. Back then, as now, I think those words just don't go together, do they?

Be like talking about a homeless executive or a beaten champion. A crucified king? And yet that sign is there, isn't it, for everyone to read?

In Aramaic, in Latin, in Greek, that would be like today, writing it in English and in Arabic and in Mandarin. These are global languages. It is a proclamation to the world.

[6 : 26] And so that we can see that the king on the cross is the climax of the gospel, well, this sign sparks off, doesn't it, the conflict that is at the heart of this gospel all the way through.

See that? The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, do not write the king of the Jews, but this man claims to be the king of the Jews. You don't call him that, they say.

You turn it into an accusation that he said wrongly that he was our king. That's been their firm and stubborn and unchanging belief, hasn't it, throughout this gospel as Jesus stood before them and did miraculous signs and spoke from God in a way that people had never heard before.

And as he raised people from the dead, in their unbelief, they sent him to the cross. So don't say now, they cry, that he is our king, but Pilate, the judge, well, he insists that, no, this is not an accusation it is a proclamation.

Here is Jesus of Nazareth. He is the king of the Jews, God's chosen, promised king. And here we are again left, aren't we, with the conflict and the question at the heart of this book that who is Jesus really?

[7 : 59] As we look at him on the cross, who do we see there? I guess those words hung only a few inches above Jesus' head. But to those watching, it would have seemed an infinite distance.

You to humanize the contrast between the broken body of Jesus and the title king of the Jews is like a gaping wound. Surely we think either he's crucified and he's not a king, or he is a king and he doesn't belong on the cross.

By human calculation, the cross is no place for God's king. And if we've lost count, perhaps of the times that we've read or heard about Jesus' death, I think it's hard for us to feel that tension, to feel that conflict.

Because lots of us here today do know that Jesus is the king sent from God for us. We know that over the page, he rises from the dead. But brothers and sisters, when we take shortcuts to the end of the story and bypass the gospel, bypass the cross, the burial, well, even that well-known and that well-worn path can become overgrown, can't it?

What we think we know, we start to take for granted. But we cannot let that happen with the gospel. This ground at the foot of the cross, these are the paths of life.

[9 : 36] And we must tread them and see again. Okay, so let's not move on too quickly. Don't look away. If you are distracted right now, well, John would say, lean in.

Look closer. Because by God's calculation, cross is exactly where his king needed to be.

Because behind what Pilate had written is what God had written a thousand years earlier from the pen of another king, King David, the first in the long line of kings that led to the forever king, Jesus Christ.

Okay, John doesn't want us to miss this. when they crucified Jesus, they stripped him of his clothes, they shared them out between them, but not his undergarment or his tunic.

They say, well, let's decide by lots, you will get it. And it seems like such a small detail, doesn't it? And yet we sang about those details in the words of Psalm 22.

[10 : 43] It's as if, to John, time is kind of collapsing in on this one moment in history. It's as if God's promises of rescue are flooding into the present at the cross.

For this happened, he writes, that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, they divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. So this is what the soldiers did.

Those words were written more than a thousand years before this happened, written by God's king on a throne for this king on the cross.

It is the psalm of a suffering king. See, John is saying to us that this is where God has always said we would find his king.

Not in a palace and not on a throne, but suffering and bleeding and dying. Perhaps you are here this morning searching for God.

[11:49] Maybe you are here to find him and the cross is the very last place that you would expect to meet him. Humanly, it is unthinkable, but it is where God says we will meet him in his king.

Remember, Jesus said, my kingdom isn't of this world. Friends, we won't find King Jesus in the halls of power. We won't find him in the ivory towers of philosophy.

We won't find him in the lecture theaters. We find him crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross because that is where God has always said we would find him suffering for his people.

And so, friends, this morning, do you see what the priests could not see? Do you see what they refused to see? Do you see on the cross the king sent from God for ye?

Well, why is he there for us? Well, as we look at our king on the cross, John also wants us to know that we are looking at a lamb. This is our second point, the lamb. And now, we're going to go on to verse 31.

[13:07] And don't worry, we'll come back to those words that Jesus spoke from the cross in a moment because we need to see first who it is who spoke those words.

John says the king and the lamb. And I guess we maybe can have that scene from Revelation, chapter 5, playing in our heads.

Remember, John has a vision from heaven and one of the elders says to him, do not weep, see the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed.

And Revelation is a picture book, isn't it? So you would expect the next thing we see to be a lion who's standing majestic and strong and reigning. It's a kingly image.

But when we turn to look at the throne, what is it we see there? Then I saw a lamb, says John, standing as though it had been slain at the center of the throne.

[14:09] see, he says, the lion and the lamb, the king and the sacrifice. See, John chooses this moment in his gospel to remind us, verse 31, that it was the day of preparation and the next day was to be a special Sabbath.

It's Passover. Remember, the priests didn't want to go into Pilate's palace. They didn't want to be defiled. They didn't want to miss the Passover, but they have missed the Passover.

How? Well, because the Passover lamb is not lying on an altar in the temple, says John. He is hanging on the cross. Again, don't miss this, he says, in the ordinary happenings of that day.

We can call it that. John sees God's great promises of rescue coming true. The priests are worried, aren't they, that the bodies shouldn't be left on the cross for the Passover.

Again, they don't want to be ceremonially unclean. And so, they get the soldiers to break the legs of those crucified so that they would die quicker. And so, they break the legs of the two criminals.

[15:23] But when they come to Jesus, they found he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. Details, we think. But wait, John says, do you see what's really going on?

See, verse 36, these things happen so the scripture would be fulfilled. Not one of his bones will be broken. See, what do those words refer to you originally?

Well, they come from Exodus 12 and verse 46. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, these are the regulations for the Passover meal.

It must be eaten inside the house, take none of the meat outside the house, do not break any of its bones. The bones of the lamb must not be broken, say the Lord.

And that scripture was fulfilled, says John, when the bones of Jesus were not broken on the cross. How do we get from a lamb to the cross?

[16:25] Well, friends, remember the whole Bible. The whole Bible, all of God's promises are yes in Jesus. Jesus is the bottleneck through which all of scripture flows.

All of the Old Testament flows into him, doesn't it? All of the New Testament flows out of him. He is the bottleneck through which it all flows. He is the climax, the center point of history.

And the cross is at the center of his life. And so, on the cross, even that command to do with the Passover lamb becomes a prophecy and a promise of him and of his death.

And so, as John the Baptist said at the very beginning of this gospel, so now John the apostle says to us, behold the lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

See, the twist is that if these priests and these religious rulers had been interested in keeping the Passover that day, they would have put their trust in the one who hung on the cross.

[17 : 38] Because he is the lamb sent to take away the sin of the world. That's what his death did. It's what John's teaching us. That night at the Passover, when God's people were to take a lamb without spot or defect, without guilt and innocent lamb, and paint its blood on the doorposts of their houses and eat it, the whole thing, without breaking its bones, well, why did they have to do that?

It was so that as God punished sin, those who shared in the lamb would be saved. He came, didn't he, to Egypt to strike down the first born of animals and of people.

But he said, the blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood I will pass over ye. Why? Well, because in those houses there was a lamb that had died instead.

It was the blood of the lamb that turned away God's wrath from them. God passed over those houses that had put their trust in the lamb that God had given for their rescue, because in those houses the lamb had died instead of them.

And John is saying now that that Passover meal was just the trailer. It was just the teaser for the real thing, which is here and now as the Son of God is nailed to the cross.

[19 : 15] Friends, God has given us a way to be saved from his judgment and from his anger against our sins, and it is the death not of a lamb, but of his own Son.

Through his death, Christ turns away God's wrath from us. His blood is what shields us from the punishment that we deserve.

For on the cross he took that punishment for every person who ever had or ever would trust in him. he died instead of us for our sins.

Did you notice as the soldiers pierced Jesus' side, what flows out? Blood and water. Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Water that we might drink and have eternal life.

And John saw it there on the cross and he wrote it down. Why? Well, he says he testifies so that you also may believe. Friends, the cross is not an interesting piece of history.

[20 : 24] It's not an accident. Perhaps you have looked at the cross many times and seen there only a fraud or at best maybe a martyr.

But what does John say? We see there. We see the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He bled and died that day so that we might live.

And so, friends, do we take John at his word? Do we look at Christ crucified and see the Lamb slain to ransom people for God from every tribe and people and language and nation of the earth?

And seeing him there, do you believe in him? Do you trust him in his death to have taken away your sins? Because that is why he was there.

That is what he is doing. The king suffering in your place, the Lamb dying to take away your sins. Finally, to bring these things together, John says we need to see the plan.

[21 : 33] Finally, do we see on the cross the plan? John has often paused, doesn't he, in the second half of the gospel to ask, who is in control?

He's often reminded us that it is Jesus. Jesus, knowing this or that thing, knowing above all what God had planned, then said or did whatever he said and did.

And verse 28 is the last time that John asks us once again, who is in control? Just have a look. Verse 28, later, knowing that everything had now been finished and so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

Who is in control? It is the man hanging on the cross. He was put there by lies and hatred and sin. But don't forget, says John, that he went there by choice.

choice. Because on the cross, he is seeing through the plan to the very end, the plan made by himself and the Father and the Spirit before the creation of the world.

[22 : 43] On the cross, he is in control. You see that in the really touching way he speaks, doesn't he, to his mother. He looks down, sees Mary looking back up at him.

And we're not told, are we, what Jesus thought or felt? But I can't help thinking that perhaps through his mind flashed that day, remember, at the wedding. The day when his mother had come to him and says, Jesus, do something about the wine.

And do you remember his answer? He replied, woman, my hour has not yet come. Well, now his hour has come. It's the climax of the story.

His hour of glory. And now at the height of his suffering and the point of his death, he looks down and sees who? His mother. And she looks and sees her son in his glory. And he loves her, doesn't he, one last time. He gives her a son. Those are not the words, are they, of somebody who has lost control?

[23 : 53] They're not the words of somebody who has not chosen to be there. They are the words of someone who has been waiting for this hour to come his whole life. And now it's here.

He is finishing what he started. He's tying up the loose threads. There's not one detail that he leaves undone as he fulfills all righteousness. And then without hesitation, he asks for a drink. And what is he given to drink? Well, it's wine. Wine, vinegar. Remember? Remember the wine? Remember the cup? In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours it out and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs. The cup of God's wrath filled with the wine of his anger. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? He asked. And so that we could see scripture being fulfilled, the plan being completed, he drinks the bitter wine given to him on the cross.

[25 : 06] A picture for us of what he was truly there doing, drinking God's wrath for our sins down to the very dregs. The righteous son, who do you know sin, became sin for us.

And with that, the king, the lamb says, it is finished. And with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Friends, John wants us to know, doesn't he, that with that last breath, the whole plan of salvation, concocted, hatched by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before the world began, promised throughout history, prayed for by his people throughout long ages, was completed.

Mission accomplished, says Jesus, finished. What do those words mean for me and ye, brothers and sisters, today? Well, it means, doesn't it, that there is nothing even our best efforts could add to the finished work of Jesus.

us. And it means that there is nothing that our sins, our gracious sins, or our littlest sins could ever take away from what he did on the cross.

[26 : 26] It means our rescue from sin and death and hell was signed and sealed for us 2,000 years ago as Jesus died on the cross.

And it is delivered to us by his spirit at the very point that we believe in him, that we put our trust in him, we are saved from our sins, and that is it.

His words tell us that your rescue and mine was finished at the cross. And don't we need to know that there is nothing that you or I did or didn't do yesterday, or today, or tomorrow, or for the rest of our lives that can change that?

Do you believe that? Do we believe that? Jesus said a lot of difficult things, didn't he? And this is a really easy one.

I think we find as Christians, verse 30, very hard to take in. We tell ourselves, don't we, that he's done it, that it's finished, but we sort of half imagine that God's kind of keeping a secret tally of our sins.

[27 : 35] That one day he might turn around and say, actually, you've blown her. Or on the other side of the coin, is it not the days when we have read our Bible and said our prayers, that we feel it's those weeks that we are good enough to come to church, or to go to the Bible study, or to tell God what's really on our hearts?

How often, friends, do we tell ourselves that Jesus has done it, and then live as if he only got us halfway there? And we need to get the rest of the way.

But that's not what he said, is it? Read it again. Jesus said, it is finished. We know it, don't we? But we need to walk the path of the cross again, and again, to see him again, and again, to hear him again, and again, to get it into our bloodstream.

Let it sink into our hearts, to live in the shadow of the cross. In a moment, we're going to sing these precious words together. My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought.

[28 : 53] My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross. And I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, oh my soul. And if your trust is in Jesus today, friend, dare to sing those words.

Belt them out. Believe them that 2,000 years ago, our sins were paid for in full on the cross. And your forgiveness was settled and secured by the death of Jesus.

And friend, if your trust is not in him, and you hear us sing these words together, just know that in these words that Jesus says, it is finished, he holds out to you the promise of forgiveness and life

and rest and refuge for your soul.

It is finished. Would you not take hold of him as we sing these words together? Let's come to him in prayer.

Let's pray. Worthy is the lamb who was slain of all glory and blessing and honor and power and majesty and might.

[30 : 12] Lord Jesus, we praise you. Lord, we see you, the king, the lamb, slain for our sins. And we fall before you.

Lord Jesus, what can we say? What can we do? Only to trust you. Only to take hold of you by faith. To receive what you have done.

Father, pray that we would each do that. Lord, that there would not be one of us who would seek to go away and do something this week to earn your love. That there would not be one of us this week who goes away and does not come back to live under the shadow of the cross.

Father, how we pray that you'd help us by your spirit as we trust in Jesus to believe that it is finished. To believe that our sins are paid for, our guilt is no more.

Lord, we thank you that he came, that he died, that he was buried. In his death, we have life. Lord, help us to live in awe of him and to believe in him, for we ask in his name.

[31 : 23] Amen.