It is Finished
John 19:17-30

I'm sure you've noticed it, but if you watch first-time parents handling their newborn baby for the first time, how do they do it? With incredible care. With this strange combination of tenderness and fear, because 'this is almost too precious to handle'.

Now, by the time they're on their second or third or fourth, they're a bit more blasé, aren't they: 'Oh it's your turn to have her, here, have a baby' - and start throwing it around! But not the first.

And when we come to a passage like today's - and the crucifixion and death of Christ - we should come with that same combination of love and fear, shouldn't we? A love that draws us in and yet we handle it with reverence, not because it's fragile, but because it's holy. And something we should never be blasé about it.

And yet, at the same time, something we should think deeply about. So this morning, I want us to start at the end, where Jesus cries out his last words, v30, "It is finished". And I want you to consider, what's finished?

You see, those three words in English are just one word in Greek - *tetelestai.* And it means more than just 'it's finished,' as if Jesus is just saying 'my suffering's over.' The word has this sense of completion, even perfection, of a task or an aim or a goal being *fully* accomplished, and brought to fulfilment. And the job is done, and cannot be improved upon. It's *finished*.

So as Jesus hangs there, and breathes his last, what goal is he saying he's accomplished? What task is he saying he's brought to perfect fulfilment? What was he aiming to do that he has totally completed?

Well, I want you to see five things.

He Has Set You Free
Verses 18-19, they lead Jesus out to the Place of the Skull and, 'There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."'

And there is a huge irony there, isn't there? Because as that cross is lifted up, with King of the Jews nailed above his head, this is a mocking attempt at his enthronement. When the soldiers earlier pushed that crown of thorns on his head and robed him with a purple robe, that was a mock coronation. But now this is his enthronement.

But what's his throne? It's a cross. And crucifixion was considered so awful, so shameful, it was reserved for the scum of the earth, for rebels, and for slaves. So here is a king, *the* king, dying the death of a slave.

And yet, that wasn't just an accident of history, was it, as if Jesus was crucified because, well, that's how the Romans did it. Because, did you notice the two references to Scripture being fulfilled? Verse 24, as the soldiers divide up his clothes, '*this was to fulfil the Scripture* which says, "They divided my garments among them…"' And v28, Jesus, 'knowing that all was now finished, said (*to fulfil the Scripture*), "I thirst."'

And the first is a direct quote from Psalm 22, and the second an allusion to the Psalm. And we know that Jesus is reciting this psalm to himself as he hangs there, because he quotes it's opening line: "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" In fact,"It is finished," his last words, echo the last words of the psalm, "he has done it." (Psalm 22:31).

So Jesus is consciously, deliberately fulfilling Psalm 22. But look at Psalm 22:16: "They have pierced my hands and feet." And that was written a thousand years before Jesus was crucified. Which means, all along, even the means of his death, crucifixion, has been sovereignly orchestrated by God.

So why choose this way - a shameful - slave-like way to die? Why not go out in a blaze of heroic, kingly glory, in a sword fight to the death, like Peter wanted in the garden? Why, as Isaiah the prophet foresaw, was he 'numbered with the transgressors.' (Is 53:12).

Well, the answer is, he's taking our place. You see, the apostle Peter says, 'Whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved' (2 Peter 2:19). While Paul says you are 'slaves of the one whom you obey' (Rom 6:16).

Now, being well-educated, well-to-do kinds of folk we object to being described as a slaves, don't we. But what Peter and Paul are saying is - whatever controls you, whatever drives you, whatever that thing is that you *must* have - that's your master. And it could be your work, or the respect and affirmation you get from your work. It could be the need for romance, or sex, or the latest thrill or experience in life. Or if you say, 'I don't let anything control me', then that's what's controlling you. You're enslaved to freedom.

But whatever controls us, whatever drives us, is also what's taken the place of God in our lives - because it's become the ultimate.

And the problem with that is that the very first commandment is "You shall have no other gods before me." (Ex 20:3). Which means we're not just slaves, driven by something; we're rebels and law breakers. And deep down you know that's true. You know there's such a thing as right and wrong because even if *you* do the wrong and say 'that's ok', when someone does it to you you say 'that is definitely not ok!'

But you also know that sometimes you're not good enough even for yourself, don't you. That you don't even meet your own standards. It's one of the reasons why you can be so driven - because you're trying to prove you *are* good enough. And there's a restlessness about it.

So how is a slave to be freed from slavery? Or how is our law breaking to be dealt with in a way that leaves us knowing we are good enough?

Well look at v17: 'So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross.' Now, you know that VIPs have bag carriers, don't they. They're too important to carry their own, so they have a flunky, a servant, to carry them for them. But Jesus doesn't. He carries his own burden. Except… it's not his own, is it? This was the cross that was supposed to be for Barabbas - the bandit. The rebel, the lawbreaker. But Jesus has taken his place.

And not just his, but ours. You see that expression, *tetelestai,* 'it is finished', was what was written across a bill when a debt was paid, or an account was settled. So as he dies the death of a slave, he's saying, the price of redemption, that buys your freedom, has been paid. And your debt has been paid, and your law breaking is dealt with. Because he's drunk the cup of God's wrath to it's dregs. Because he gave up his freedom so that you can enjoy the ultimate freedom.

Free from the guilt that comes with not being good enough or *knowing* you're not good enough. Free to rest - from your drivenness to prove yourself. And free to live in freedom - from those things that promise you freedom but end up enslaving you. As Jesus himself said, "If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Because, secondly,

He Covers Your Shame
Verse 23-24: 'When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfil the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."'

Now have you ever watched someone, head down and glued to their device, when all around them is this spectacular mountain scenery? In a way, it's the same with these soldiers, isn't it? The greatest event in history is taking place just above their heads, and they're eyes-down, playing dice.

But why are they doing it? Because they've stripped him naked and are gambling for his clothing. But why have they stripped him naked? To maximise his humiliation. It's what they did to all victims of crucifixion - to expose them to public shame and ridicule.

You see, when you're naked, you really are naked aren't you? You're exposed and vulnerable. It's what makes the account of the Fall in Genesis so telling: the man and the woman were naked and unashamed - comfortable in themselves - until the moment they took the place of rebels and lawbreakers. And they felt it. And how did they deal with it? By hiding, and by covering themselves with figleaves. They no longer want the other to see them as they really are.

But it's what we all do, isn't it? We hide our true selves - behind bravado, or humour, or hard work, or just good old fashioned secrecy. And we fear what would happen if we were truly known.

Ok, but think, what are the soldiers going to do with Jesus' clothes? They're going to wear them. He's stripped naked, so they can be clothed. He's stripped naked so they can be covered.

And what's true of them is true of you and me. Because when Jesus says, "It is finished!" he's saying, 'you feel this deep discomfort within yourself, this shame, and you fear exposure. But I see you as you really are. And I've been exposed and put to open shame, that you might be covered.' As Paul puts it, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21). So that just as his clothing covers those soldiers, so his righteousness, like a robe, covers us.

And that doesn't just make you *legally* right with God, and change the way he sees you - which is miracle enough. It can also change the way you see yourself: because it's finished - he's seen me to the bottom, and he loves me, and he covers me. So I can come out of hiding.

Thirdly,

He Gives You a Family
Verse 26-27, 'When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.'

It's an incredibly tender moment, isn't it? Jesus is experiencing unimaginable suffering… yet he cares for his mum. She's a widow, and he's the eldest son, and to the last he fulfils his duty to care for her.

And when Paul was writing to Timothy about widows in the church, he tells him to make sure families are caring for their elderly, because 'If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.' (1 Tim 5:8). And it's not hard to imagine that Paul's got Jesus in mind here, is it. That even as suffers, he loves and honours his suffering mother. And as we watch him do it, we're motivated to do it.

And yet, there's something more in it than that. Because look what he calls her: 'Woman' not mother. And beginning at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, back in chapter 2, Jesus has been gently putting distance between himself and her. Because not even Mary can pull the strings of family privilege. She's got to come by faith, just like everyone else.

And notice how he doesn't entrust her to his younger brothers - her blood family. But to John, the beloved disciple.

And this is in a culture where blood family was everything. Where your identity was tied to the identity of your family. But Jesus is saying, there's something that matters more.

But it's not individualism, is it. Because while he doesn't entrust her to her blood family, neither does he say, 'its a brave new world Mary, a world of expressive individualism, so go out there and be yourself, be a woman!'

No, he entrusts her to John and the family of faith. So when Jesus cries out, "It is finished" - having cared for his mum, he has perfectly fulfilled the commandments, including the one we might sometimes find hardest, to honour our parents. But in doing so, he's created a new family, not based on blood, or race, or colour. Because as Paul writes to the Galatians, at the cross he has broken down the wall of division between us, and brought us into his one new family.

Which means, if you're a Christian, wherever you go in the world, you have family. And that person you disagree with in the church, they're not your enemy, they're your brother or sister. And the way to grow in the faith is not to go it alone, but to find your place in the family.

Fourthly,

He Quenches Your Thirst
Verse 28-29, 'After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.'

Several years back, I said in a sermon that I've got a rule that I don't buy a bottle of wine for more than 5 francs. It's gone up a bit now, I think we're up to 6. But the next day, a friend who was here, appeared at my office with a *very* expensive bottle - it was at least 10 francs, and said, 'I think you need to try this. This is what wine should taste like!'

And let's just say, he was not wrong! And yet at the coronation and enthronement of this king, it's not exactly the best wine that get's served, is it? Because the soldiers are also drinking the cheap stuff. And Jesus says he's thirsty, so they soak a sponge with it and give it to him.

And yet, John tells us that Jesus said, "I thirst", 'to fulfil the Scripture.' Because in Psalm 69 - another psalm about an innocent sufferer, the psalmist says, 'For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink' (Ps 69:21). And so in doing this, and in provoking this response, Jesus is placing himself alongside all those who suffer. All those in need of help who instead of help get further abuse. So if that's you - Christ understands what it is to long for water and be given sour wine instead.

And yet, it's Psalm 22 that Jesus has been praying as he hangs there. And v14-15 says, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws" (Ps 22:15-15). In other words, he is so dry, so dehydrated, with as much moisture in his mouth as a broken piece of pottery in the dirt, that his tongue is stuck to his jaw.

But why draw attention to that when he's not drawn attention to any of his other pains? Because, the psalmist says, he's poured himself out like water.

Now, does that ring any bells for you? Because back in John 7, Jesus stood up at the feast and said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." (7:37) And here at the cross, he has poured himself, and he is dying of thirst - so that our thirst can be quenched.

But what are we thirsty for? Well, do you remember back in chapter 4, when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well. And he asks her for a drink and then says to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water… Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." (John 4:10, 13-14)

To which the woman, standing there in the midday sun, goes, 'please, give me some of that water!' But what does Jesus reply? "Go, call your husband." Now why bring up the subject of her husband in the middle of a discussion about thirst? Because she hasn't got one. Because she has had a succession of men in her life. And she has been running from one man to the next trying to quench her inner thirst. Because if only I could have his love, if only he would share my bed, if only he told me I was beautiful, then I'd know I'm someone, then I know I'm ok, then I know I've made it. Then I'd know I'm secure.

You see, we're all thirsty for love, or meaning, or forgiveness, or worth. And you might try and quench it through academic or career success, or like her through romance, love, or sex. It might be family or a succession of great holidays. Whatever it is, we're thirsty for meaning and significance. And Jesus says, your inner thirst will only ever be quenched if you come to me and drink.

And here, the thirst quencher goes thirsty, and the drink giver goes dry, as he pours himself out. Poured out, so you can drink of his love and know your worth. And "It's finished" Jesus says: you can stop running from broken cistern to broken well. Instead, come to me and drink.

But fifthly and finally

He Gives You Life

Look again at v17: 'So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of the Skull.' And if you've ever been to Israel you'll know there's debate as to where this place was. But wherever it was, it's aptly named, isn't it? It's the place of death. Verse 30, 'When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.'

And yet, throughout this gospel, John's been telling us that Jesus is the eternal, immortal, never dying, I Am. And yet, in the words of them hymn, ''Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!'

But that's why he cries out "It is finished," isn't it? Because death is finished. In John Owens' words, this is 'the death of death in the death of Christ.' So it's not just that he becomes a slave that we might go free, or that he is stripped naked that we might be clothed, or that he goes thirsty that our thirst might be quenched. It's that he's bruised that we might be healed. He dies, that we might live.

So today, whether you know there's something controlling you and you need freedom, or you feel ashamed and you need covering, or you're trying to make it on your own and you need family, or you're thirsty and you need a drink - Jesus has done it all. So come to him and live.