

It is Accomplished

According to John's Passion account, the last words of Jesus were "It is finished." But what exactly does this mean? The Greek word that is translated as "It is finished" can also mean "it is accomplished;" "it is completed;" and "the work is done." Perhaps translating this as "It is finished" may not be the best choice of translations.

In the first century, that society used the Greek word in various ways. It was a typical statement of victory when a servant finished a task given to them by their master. When the Jewish people would bring their sacrifice to be offered, the high priest would use this word to let them know that the sacrifice was perfect, it was accepted. When a merchant received full payment for a debt, this word was used to indicate that the debt was paid in full.

But when we hear "It is finished" by Jesus from the cross, most times we hear it as a cry of defeat, of despair, of Jesus saying, "My life is now over!" Hearing Jesus say "It is finished" should not be heard as a cry of despair - I do not think that the people who witnessed the crucifixion would have necessarily thought of that when Jesus said it. Depending on what you believed about Jesus determined how you heard those words.

Believers would have heard not despair, but victory. A statement that Jesus had accomplished that what He was sent to do by His Father. They may not have come to that conclusion right away, but as the events unfolded over the next three days and more, this is how they came to understand these words of Jesus.

Nonbelievers would have heard despair, an admission of failure by Jesus. They would have seen a defeated self-proclaimed Messiah who was not who He said He was.

However, whether you are a believer or not, hearing these words from Jesus as despair would not be consistent with the theology found in the rest of John's Gospel account. John presents Jesus as someone who is in complete agreement with God over what must and how it must happen and when it must happen. Jesus is fully aware of His destiny and obediently, willingly and almost seems to be in control, guiding events so that 'this hour would come.' Therefore, when Jesus declared "It is finished," or "It's done....complete" as found in Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, He was not saying "It is over, I am defeated." Rather, Jesus was stating that He has completed the tasks that the Father laid before Him when Jesus took human form and dwelt among us.

It can be debated, and has been since that time, about what exactly happened on that cross when the Son of God died. But, what we must agree upon is that on that day on a hill far away, God fulfilled His promise to send us a Messiah who would deliver us from the forces that enslave us. While the expectations for this Messiah did not come close to meeting what to what the people had in mind, this salvation that gives us so much more is given to all who believe that God did this through Jesus.

Regardless of the details of the how Jesus accomplished this, to whom was the debt paid, who actually paid the debt and all the other questions that have been debated since that day of the meaning of the crucifixion, one thing is clear: God came through on His promise to redeem the world. The relationship which God created when He created us and which was severed by us has now been restored through Jesus. Why would God go through all this? Because, as John brings to mind the creation story the way he opens his Gospel account and how God declared that what He created was good. It is because of this and because of the love that God has for us.

Knowing this prompts us to ask, "What should my response be to this ultimate act of love that was shown to us, for us?" However we interpret the death of Jesus on the cross, the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity has been restored. We have the opportunity to change our ways and follow God's will. We can do this knowing that our God is near us and will be with us regardless of the trials we face. Knowing this, we can live in the hope that we are truly children of God and that God keeps all His promises. So, we do not need to think of this day is the day that Jesus was killed, rather it is the day in which we were given life.