

# It Is Finished

**Preached At Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on Lord's day  
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by J. K. POPHAM -

***"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." (John 19:30)***

Nobody can preach properly about Christ until he has seen Him by faith and is thus commissioned to preach Him. Behold, the sight of all sights; the sight that delighted God the Father; that fills the church with praise in the fruit of it for ever and ever; that moves the angels, *"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"* of them to ascribe unto Him all honour and praise and glory and might and dominion for ever and ever; and that for which the Son of God came and was manifested. It is in this word, *"It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."*

We are sinners. We deserve hell; without exception we deserve hell. We have incurred the wrath of God. We owe Him a debt we cannot pay and obedience we cannot render; we owe Him love and we give Him hatred. The law under which we were born and have lived by nature and which we have broken, says, *"Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."* (Gal. 3:10) This is our woeful, hopeless, helpless case with respect to ourselves, and yet our helplessness is a part of our sin. How then can we hope to get to heaven? How can we expect to stand in the presence of God without blame? To hear Him say as He will say to some in the judgment day, *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Matt. 25:34) Sinner, how can you expect it? If you do expect it, what is the ground of your expectation? How dare you pray, if you do pray? In what name and for whose sake do you ask to be blessed? The answer that will please God is implicit in the text, *"It is finished"*

*"It is finished"* means that there is a work done, a great work accomplished. Nothing more is to be done and therefore He who had finished it, had no more reason for remaining here. It was meet that having done the work He came to do He should go to heaven, ascend and be glorified. What is the work? The work is to save the worst of men, to justify the guilty, purify the polluted, quicken the dead, teach the foolish and sustain the weak; to help them through all difficulties and bring them through all troubles, and to slay the last enemy and take the blessed people who are interested in this work at last into glory to be with Himself. It does not take a minute to say this, but eternity will not be too long to celebrate it and to bless Him who did the work. The work involved the incarnation of God's Eternal Son, for man is to be the subject of salvation. Man is condemned and man must die. Man sinned and man must suffer. Man broke the law and man must obey and satisfy it. If we see by faith the dear God-man, it will attract our eyes and fix our hearts and make Him the chiefest among ten thousand and the Altogether Lovely. (Songs 5:10,16)

We sinned. Did the Lord Jesus undertake the great work of saving us? This is an enquiry which occupies the hearts and the faith, the thoughts and the prayers of God's people as long as they live. They want to know, and knowing, want to know again, and knowing again, want to be assured over and over again by the eternal Spirit of God who pities their weakness and gives them renewed assurance. It becomes us to look a little at this mighty thing; this hidden thing. "*I will show thee great and mighty things.*" (Jer. 33:3) The marginal reading of "*mighty*" in that verse is "*hidden*" things. He who descended is the only begotten Son of God, and He took our nature into union with His divine Person. O! what a subject, one's own poor thoughts of it are soon expressed and exhausted. The subject itself is an eternal wonder of heaven an eternal wonder in the church. The Lord Jesus Christ is the object of faith, and of all the praises of saved sinners. If only God gives you a sight of this wondrous God-man you will see One who is sufficient, who alone in heaven and earth is sufficient for this mighty work that God gave Him to do. "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,*" (John 5:17) is His own word. The work may be spoken of for convenience in this twofold way. First, a work of absolute obedience; and second, a work of sacrifice in offering Himself to God. When we have looked at these two points, then I would show how this becomes known in the heart and conscience.

First, there is the work of obedience. Obedience implies a law to which obedience is rendered; but how can Almighty God be subject to law? He took human nature and so can be and was subject to law. He became obedient, "*He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*" (Heb. 5:8) He was made under the law that He might bear man's sin and that He might do man's duty. He was made under the law that He might do the duty that we ought to have done and did not; that we ought to do and cannot and to pay the mighty debt we had contracted and were not able to discharge. Obedience, I say, involves law, and Christ came and was made under the law. "*God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.*" (Gal. 4:4) "*Made of a woman,*" teaches the virgin birth. "*Made under the law,*" teaches His willing subjection to the law to obey it. Therefore He said, "*I am come, not to destroy, but to fulfil*" the law. (Matt. 5:17) It is not in God's nature to abrogate His own law, to nullify or make it void; it must be honoured. Nothing that He says is to be dishonoured. He gives a law and He will have it honoured. We have dishonoured it and we have broken it. Down comes the Saviour and He says to His Father, "*Thy law is within My heart.*" (Ps. 40:8) God's law was in Adam's heart, and the works of it are in our hearts. Now if this law which was in Adam's heart and which is in our hearts is to be satisfied and willingly give us up from its custody and to remit the punishment which we deserve, and smile upon us, it must be satisfied in every particular. This is not dry speculation, it is real gospel truth; that Christ came and put Himself in precisely the condition of sinners, though He was not a sinner, and He willingly took on Him all the obligations and debt of the Church, and undertook to obey on her behalf. The gospel is here, my friends. Every child of God who is sent forth from the pit by the covenant that God has made with His Son, is brought out of that pit honourably. The law shall never be able to cast into his teeth and say: you owe obedience which you never rendered; for faith will say, the Surety rendered it for me; Jesus obeyed for me; Incarnate Deity became the end of the law for me for righteousness, and I by faith receive that righteousness, and that honourable acquittal. This is everything to living faith, that Christ became the end of the law, and the law received all its honour in Him. Everything it could claim, for us He rendered; every act of obedience due from us He rendered absolutely; and from His youth upward He obeyed perfectly this blessed, just and good law in the place of His children, and thus could say, "*I do always those things that please Him,*" (John 8:29) that is His Father.

There was one more thing to do. Sin in its bitterness the Son of God must experience; sin in its guilt and desert He must know, for "*God made Him to be sin.*" (2 Cor. 5:21) What a solemn consideration this is! Could we by faith see Jesus Christ with the burden of imputed sin on His soul, having as it were really incurred the curse of a broken law; see Him a willing victim; giving up the life that no man could take from Him, and doing this in obedience to His Father's commandment, then we should see something of eternal love, eternal wisdom and omnipotence. The curse of the law is no name, it is an awful reality. The curse of the law is God's anger, God's holy displeasure; it is God's sword; it is God's hell, hell being a state as well as a place afterwards. The curse of the law is all this, and every child of God has some very little conception of it as convinced of it; but the dear Saviour, the Redeemer; He has the whole of it. Everything that the word penal wrath, that the word curse of the law means, that, the Lord Jesus experienced.

Could we rightly, by faith, survey this scene of matchless woe, it would touch our hard hearts; it would make us sorry that ever we sinned. The curse of the law involved God's desertion of Him on whom it came. Think of it; whenever the curse of the law takes hold of a sinner in eternity, that sinner is eternally deserted of God. Never a smile, never a look of love, never a visit can that sinner have: and that curse, as to its endurance, its reality and its terribleness fell upon the Lord Jesus and He drank it up. We deserve hell, and He that hell endured. Rutherford has a word like this, that "Christ suffered an innocent hell." Punishment is innocent, the sinner punished is not. Punishment is holy, the person punished is unholy. Punishment as inflicted by God is just and all this means the sufferings of the dear Redeemer. The law is not to be dishonoured; the curse is not to be waived aside, it must be known and felt. Sinner, do you realize that you deserve this? Can you say in any measure that you believe and feel you deserve this? Can you and did you ever justify God in the sentence that He pronounces against you in a broken law? O! then, see a scene of matchless love and woe, grief and sorrow, shame and ignominy and death itself coming on Jesus Christ. What a wonder of eternal mercy if it came on Him for any of us, and if we live to prove that God the Father took our sins from us and laid them on His dear incarnate Son!

The Lord Christ began immediately to feel this curse when He was in the garden of Gethsemane. It was ever before Him because sin was always on Him by imputation, but as the day and hour approached that He was to suffer, He went into the garden of Gethsemane. It seems quite clear from the account of that scene of woe that the Lord Jesus had on His soul and in His heart, some very weighty and keen apprehensions of what He was about to suffer. He saw a cup; He received that cup from His Father's hand. He yielded His human will to His Father's divine will. He said "*The cup which My Father hath given me, shall I not drink of it?*" (John 18:11) So great was His agony, so exquisite was His pain, that it is said He sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground, and so exhausted was His human nature that an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen Him. And was this for wretched, sinful me? Was this for you, sinner? Sinful, only sinful? Did the Son of God bleed and suffer and die for such as we are? "*It is finished.*" We sing of types and shadows and ceremonies. All finished. They were finished. Every type, the Lord Jesus Christ realized in Himself as the anti-type; every shadow of good things to come that the Lord projected, He now has in all perfection. The whole body is of Christ, but what is above all is that He finished the work of saving the church; He finished the work of atoning for sinners; He finished the work of satisfying justice, of pleasing His Father, of taking sin from His people, of

bringing them in before God without "*spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.*" This was Christ's work.

How did Christ know that the work He was sent to do and that He volunteered to do and did with all His heart and with all His eternal love and grace and mercy: how did He know that He had finished it? I believe myself that He knew it by the return of His Father who had deserted Him; by the flowing into His soul of all the happiness and peace that the smile of God gave Him and that He did not die in the dark. That He was not broken to pieces by the curse of the law so as to be utterly overcome, I believe. He was the conqueror; He destroyed death by dying; He took away the curse by bearing it; He removed sin by atoning for it. And when all was done, before He left this world, before He said this important word, He knew in His own soul's experience that everything was done. God had no further claim on Him in law, the curse was exhausted, the sword of justice was sheathed and satisfied and made fat in His sacred blood, so that nothing remained to be done, and therefore He sang the glad song, "*It is finished.*" He finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. (Dan. 9:24)

Heaven is involved in this, because for all to whom the dear Redeemer uttered this word, "*It is finished:*" "*He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.*" And "*gave up the ghost*" is translated by scholars in this way, "dismissed His Spirit." As I judge it, the voluntary nature of the death of Christ is in this world, "dismissed His Spirit." He died voluntarily. We shall not so die. He did die voluntarily, and this means that the atonement was made by Him. The efficacy of the death of Christ is involved in the voluntariness of it. May the Lord help us to hold this fast. If He had died of a physical necessity, it seems there would have been no merit attaching to His death, but He died because He had undertaken to die. He died because His Father commanded Him to die. He took a life that He might yield it to His Father as a sacrifice, He being the Priest. So this little word, "*It is finished,*" teaches an eternal and blessed truth with which may the Lord make us savingly acquainted.

Now let us look at the way in which sinners become experimentally acquainted with this truth. Every doctrine of the gospel has its termination in a sinner. As the atonement first terminated in God, so it must terminate in the conscience, must be lodged there. Why? Because conscience quickened and bearing a load of sin and feeling the condemning sentence of a broken law can never be satisfied until what is in it of death and hell be taken away by the heaven of the atonement. The atonement is as it were heaven. Therefore sinner, look at this; religious professor, consider this point; how can you know you are going to heaven if the atonement never comes into your conscience? How can you be satisfied if you feel God's anger, unless you have the atonement? Is this word, "*It is finished,*" manifested in you? How does this come to a sinner? It comes by the Holy Spirit. As Christ loved His Father and loved to do His Father's will, so the Holy Spirit loves Jesus Christ and loves to honour Him, and His great work in the covenant of grace is to take of His things and show them to sinners. (John 16:14,15) Are we sinners? I do not ask that question foolishly; we are sinners; I ask it really with a good intention. Are we sinners in our own judgment and feeling? Do we know that we have transgressed God's law? Do we believe and feel that we deserve hell? Are we concerned about living, concerned about dying, concerned about appearing before God in eternity? If so, what will satisfy us? The atonement of Christ, that rich atoning blood gives a plea, an access and eventually satisfaction to a wounded conscience.

"I will bring it health and cure," says the Lord in the thirty third chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah. "Call unto Me," says the Lord, "and I will show thee great and mighty things." (Jer. 33:3) "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9) And among the hidden things is the forgiveness of sins. You may think and say out of grief of heart that God must honour Himself by condemning you. It is many years since I began to feel that; as a young man I was certain of it. Nothing was more fixed in my heart than that God could only honour Himself by condemning me and punishing me. It will soon be sixty years since I became concerned about my soul, and many many years since that scripture astonished me: "*It shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth which shall hear all the good that I do unto them.*" (Jer. 33:9) Sinner, it will astonish you if you feel sure that God's anger is a just anger; that His anger is against you and you deserve it; then to have your eyes turned to Jesus and His blood. For you then to perceive that that very anger that is so just, expended itself upon His broken heart; that that love which was in Him, and sent Him, and filled Him, is to be in your heart in spite of anger; that the frown which you deserve, He received, that you might be smiled upon here and through eternity without interruption: this will astonish you.

Blessed be God that Jesus Christ took sin on Himself that He might give us His righteousness. When the Holy Spirit brings that righteousness; we are in self despair, when we think the end must come, there is no hope, and all feeling of being able to get near to God has gone; for the light of the gospel then to beam upon your heart and the Holy Spirit to bring in some gracious application of the atonement so as to make it your own in experience; this is how sinners become acquainted with this word; "*It is finished.*" "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*" (Ps. 32:1,2) There are people who do not impute iniquity to themselves; they wipe their mouth as Solomon says, and they say, what is it? what have I done? It is nought, there is not so much wrong in me; there is not so much amiss with me. But they are not cleared by God. He who justifies himself is condemned, but when a sinner condemns himself he is chastened of the Lord and forgiven, and then when he looks for his sins they are not found, he cannot see them. He used to look at them as being done by him and feel them in the guilt of his conscience, now he looks for them and he cannot find them. When the sin of Israel is searched for it shall not be found, because says the Lord, I have pardoned whom I have reserved. (Jer. 50:20) "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.*" God imputed iniquity to Christ, and that double imputation that we have in the second epistle to the Corinthians, "*He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,*" (2 Cor. 5:21) takes place in the sinner's experience. A man who gets this by the Holy Spirit into his conscience is fit for heaven because he is righteous, and heaven is a place for righteous people. He is fit for heaven because he is holy, and heaven is a holy place fit for holy people. "*Thy people also shall be all righteous.*" (Isa. 60:21) Jesus Christ is made righteousness and holiness to them. "*Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*" (1 Cor. 1:30) Then the sinner is fit to live. Nobody is fit to live but a sinner who is blessed with grace and a seeking God. Nobody is fit to die but a sinner who is in Jesus Christ and interested in that word, "*It is finished.*"

This experience is known not once nor twice, but again and again by the Lord's people during their pilgrimage. They often get a feeling of jealousy about it in their souls. They are like Josephs

guilty brothers; Joseph had kissed them all and told them that he would nourish them because God had sent him into Egypt before them to do it, but when Jacob was dead they became somewhat jealous lest Joseph's feelings should turn against them and he should regret the reconciliation he had effected. So they sent a message to Joseph and said that their father had commanded them to entreat Joseph to be kind to them, and Joseph wept that they said it because it was a reflection on him. We read, "*And Joseph wept when he heard this.*" There is such a thing as a jealousy coming into a living child of God who has had sweet mercy and pardon, and is led to come again to his heavenly Joseph and ask Him to make it over again and again. He does so; and yet, does not it appear to you who have asked this and had mercy, as if it was wrong to entertain that jealousy of Him after He had passed His word to you? On the other hand you can say honestly, it is not only past sins that I am jealous about and fearful of, but it is something now on my heart, something done, or deadness and carelessness coming, worldliness intervening and carrying my heart away from God; sins repeated since I have known the Lord, and I need these to be put away; and they are put away again and again.

That beautiful word in Isaiah, how it shines at times, "*I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions...*" "*....as a thick cloud...thy sins; return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee.*" (Isa. 44:22) The thing is finished, finished in the conscience for the time; you are satisfied, nothing more is required for the time being; you are happy in redeeming love, happy in pardoning blood, happy in justification, happy in the favour and presence and smile of God, all is well, "*it is finished.*"

The work is finished though a great deal remains to be endured by pilgrims. We have to endure the wilderness, but the wilderness is not hell, and the wilderness is the scene of many mercies and many miracles such as the smitten rock sending its living waters after pilgrims to accompany them. I say, the wilderness is not hell. Its hardships are not the curse of God; its difficulties are not put in the way to block your progress and make you turn back. No, the wilderness is full of discipline but it is equally full of mercy. Much remains to be endured, but no wrath remains to be endured. Much remains to be learned but no curse remains to be felt, and to break the pilgrims to pieces. Happy men who are pilgrims and strangers in the earth seeking "a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

The Lord Jesus will have this great transaction of His on the cross remembered. One may say, if I had it in my conscience I should never forget it. That may be. God knows whether you would or not, but He, the great Redeemer, will have this great matter repeatedly commemorated. "*As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.*" (1 Cor. 11:26) So the church of God on earth is privileged, walking in His ordinances to commemorate His death. Remember our dying Friend. Remember what He did for you. He said, "*This do in remembrance of Me.*" "*As often as ye eat this bread....ye do show the Lord's death till He come.*" He said, "*Take, eat; this is My body,*" this is the bread of life, by this you are to be nourished, by this your faith is to be strengthened and your hope brightened and your love inflamed. By this you are to be strengthened to bear the cross and to walk in the path of tribulation. "*Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*" It will tell thee, as a people who are brought, rightly brought to the table, that their dying Lord loved them with an everlasting love and will have them walk in humble obedience to His ordinances and remember Him therein.

So man we have the cross before us. May we have a suffering Saviour manifested to us. May faith open her arms to embrace Him and love break the backs of all affections, and thankfulness and adoration and wonder and praise and honour be given to Him. It is a great mercy and a high privilege to be allowed to keep in memory our dying Friend by obeying Him and coming to His table. Amen.