

# 'It Is Finished' But It Is Not Over

God's work of redemption continues in the redeemed. An excerpt from *Cross-Shattered Christ*.

STANLEY HAUERWAS | MARCH 24, 2005

*"It is finished."* – John 19:30

"It is finished" is not a death gurgle. "It is finished" is not "I am done for." "It is finished" will not be, as we know from the tradition of the ordering of these words from the cross, the last words of Jesus. "It is finished" is a cry of victory. "It is finished" is the triumphant cry that what I came to do has been done. All is accomplished, completed, fulfilled work.

The work that is finished, moreover, is the cross. He will be and is resurrected, but the resurrected One remains the One crucified. Rowan Williams reminds us of Pascal's stark remark that "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world." This is a remark that makes unavoidable the recognition that we live in the time between the times—the kingdom is begun in Christ but will not be consummated or perfected until the end of the world. Williams observes that Pascal's comment on Jesus' ongoing agony is not an observation about the deplorable state of unbelievers; it is instead an exhortation to us, those who believe in Christ. It is an exhortation not to become nostalgic for a supposedly less compromised past or take refuge in some imagined purified future, but to dwell in the tension-filled time between times, to remain awake to our inability "to stay in the almost unbearable present moment where Jesus is."

The Gospel of John makes explicit what all the Gospels assume—that is, the cross is not a defeat but the victory of our God. Earlier in the Gospel of John a voice from heaven responded to Jesus' request that the Father's name might be glorified through his obedience, saying, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." Jesus tells us this voice came for our sake so that we might know that "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:28-32). That "lifting up" is the cross, the exaltation of the Son by the Father, making possible our salvation.

This is, moreover, as Pilate insisted, the King of the Jews. That kingship is not delayed by crucifixion; rather, crucifixion is the way this king rules. Crucifixion is kingdom come. This is the great long-awaited apocalyptic moment. Here the powers of this world are forever subverted. Time is now redeemed through the raising up of Jesus on this cross. A new age has begun. The kingdom is here aborn, a new regime is inaugurated, creating a new way of life for those who worship and follow Jesus.

Creation rightly describes the work done here. In his book *Believing Three Ways in the One God*, Nicholas Lash calls attention to a remark in a fifth-century calendar on March 25, a day identified as the martyrology of Jerome, which says, "Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, and conceived, and the world was made." Lash observes on this day, the day of crucifixion, God brings all things alive, creating *ex nihilo* making a home in our sin-scarred world. "Out of the virgin's womb, Christ is conceived. Out of that world-threatening death on Calvary, life is new-born from an empty tomb. Christ's terror is God's Word's human vulnerability. But, it is just this

vulnerability, this surrender, absolute relationship, which draws out of darkness finished life, forgiveness of sins."

On the sixth day of creation "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" ([Genesis 1:31](#)). So on the seventh day "God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done" ([Genesis 2:2](#)). Accordingly the seventh day was hallowed. But God's work, the work of the Trinity, is consummated in Jesus' great declaration from the cross, "It is finished." His life, his death, his resurrection, as Irenaeus insisted, recapitulates creation, recapitulates God's covenant with Israel, uniting creation and redemption in Incarnation.

At the beginning of the Gospel of John we are told:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:15)*

Creation has an end, creation is to be consummated, and the name of that end and consummation is Jesus.

Sin does not and cannot determine the character of Jesus' task. To be sure, he has come that we might be redeemed, but our redemption is but one movement in this drama of the beginning and end of time. In his book *After the Spirit*, Gene Rogers suggests that we let "redemption" name a plot defined by a starting point. We begin in slavery from which we are redeemed. The plot of consummation, however, is not determined by a starting point but by an endpoint: "it ends in joy, in that to whom one is united." Consummation is joy made possible by God's love, by God's friendship with us. In Jesus, redemption and consummation become movements in the one story of God's unrelenting love for his creation. That we—that is, we Gentiles—are included in the redemption of Israel is but a sign of the abundance of God's love and the completion of the new creation.

That is why "it is finished" is such good news. For Irenaeus, Jesus is the one who recapitulates all that God has done on our behalf until the final consummation. But this means that in Christ that recapitulation continues in the world. We, the body of Christ, through the Spirit, turn out to be "the finished." This, I believe, is what Athanasius meant by his dictum that God became human so that humans might become divine. Which means, as Richard Neuhaus puts it in his reflections on the seven words in his *Death on a Friday Afternoon*: "It is finished.' But it is not over." God remains at work making us, his creatures, divine.

What is over is our vain attempts to be our own creators. What has happened is our overwhelming, says David Ford. We are overwhelmed by God's love through which we are able to see the beauty of God's care for all that is. Now it is possible for us to live at peace, to be God's agent of reconciliation, in a violent world. We are able so to live not because we have answers to all the world's troubles, but because God has given us a way to live without answers. To so live does not mean we will be free of suffering, but it means that we can now live knowing it is through suffering that God's kingdom is manifest. Paul writes to the Colossians,

*I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of the body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:24-27)*

God has finished what only God could finish. Christ's sacrifice is a gift that exceeds every debt. Our sins have been consumed, making possible lives that glow with the beauty of God's Spirit. What wonderful news: "It is finished." But it is not over." It is not over because God made us, the church, the "not over." We are made witnesses so the world—a world with no time for a crucified God—may know we have all the time of God's kingdom to live in peace with one another.

*Used by permission of Brazos, a division of Baker Publishing Group, copyright 2005. All rights to this material are reserved. Materials are not to be distributed to other web locations for retrieval, published in other media, or mirrored at other sites without written permission from [Baker Publishing group](#).*

Copyright © 2005 Christianity Today. [Click](#) for reprint information.

#### **Related Elsewhere:**

[Cross-Shattered Christ](#) is available from Christianbook.com and other book retailers.

[God's New Family](#) | Rethinking Jesus' words, "Woman, behold thy son ... behold thy Mother," an excerpt from *The Seven Last Words from the Cross*.

[And Jesus Stood](#) | An excerpt from *Holy Week Sonnets*, by Philip Rosenbaum.

[When the Giver of Eternal Life Thirsts](#) | Meditations on Franz Joseph Haydn's The Seven Last Words of Christ.

[The Last Words of Jesus](#) | A new book renews a classic musical meditation.

#### **Other [Holy Week](#) articles include:**

[Maundy Thursday](#) | Part one of "The Great Reversal," a CT Classic article, by Walter Wangerin, Jr. (April 20, 2000)

[Good Friday](#) | Part two of "The Great Reversal," a CT Classic article, by Virginia Stem Owens (April 20, 2000)

[Holy Saturday](#) | Part three of "The Great Reversal," a CT Classic article, by Eugene H. Peterson (April 20, 2000)

[Easter Sunday](#) | Part four of "The Great Reversal." by Philip Yancey (April 20, 2000)

[The Goodness of Good Friday](#) | An unhappy celebration—isn't that an oxymoron? (April 17, 2003)

[The Other Holy Day](#) | In the rush toward Good Friday and Easter, don't forget Maundy Thursday. (March 22, 2002)

**More [Easter](#) articles include:**

[Who Killed Jesus?](#) | After centuries of censure, Jews have been relieved of general responsibility for the death of Jesus. Now who gets the blame? (Aug. 24, 2000)

[The Scars of Easter](#) | He knows the wounds of humanity. His hands prove it. By Paul Brand with Philip Yancey (April 18, 2000)

[Grave Matters](#) | Take away the Resurrection and the center of Christianity collapses. By N. T. Wright (April 6, 1998)

[Jesus v. Sanhedrin](#) | Why Jesus "lost" his trial. by Darrell L. Bock (April 6, 1998)