

“It Is Finished”
John 19:1-42
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Today’s lesson covers the 19th chapter of John’s Gospel. The setting is Jesus has been brought to Pilate by the Jewish leaders with one thing in mind – to kill their Messiah. I would imagine this section of the Gospel story is making most of you, at a minimum, feeling somewhat disturbed by the wrongness and evil that is being laid out before us. You may be thinking of something like, “How could they do this to such a good man?” This is a natural and reasonable response. Please allow me to suggest you come up with an alternative and deeper question, “Why would Jesus go through all of this?” I’ll provide an answer to this question in my conclusion.

I’ve broken this lecture into 3 sections:

- Lessons we can learn from Pilate
- Fulfilled prophecies
- What did Jesus mean when He said, “It is finished?”

Even though Pontius Pilate would ultimately condemn Jesus to crucifixion, I believe he’s an important study for every person who is confronted with Jesus. While Pilate had no doubt heard rumblings of Jesus during His three-year ministry, he did not know Him. Such as is the case with most non-believing people in today’s times – they’ve likely heard of Jesus, but they’ve never met Him, personally. I believe we can learn from Pilate’s brief encounter with the Lord and see some of the challenges not only the *non-believer* faces when being personally confronted by Jesus, but also the *believer* in his/her willingness to fully put their trust in Him.

I took the four Gospel presentations of Christ’s encounters with Pilate and lined the four accounts up chronologically. I see a progression of Pilate’s head/heart in these encounters, and I believe we can learn from some key moments in this process that led him to the disastrous decision to reject Jesus and have Him crucified. I also believe this is a helpful exercise as we’re going to see the evil agenda of Satan through the Jewish leaders via their tactics to steer Pilate’s mindset regarding Jesus. The encounters begin with him asking the leaders, “*What accusation do you bring against this Man?*” in John 18:29. The response came from Luke 23:1-2 and John 18:30, “*And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King. If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.”*”

Let’s pause here – how was Jesus perverting the nation? He was healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and dispensing incredible wisdom, compassion, and love to anyone who would come to Him. They also claimed that He forbid the people to pay taxes to Caesar. Is that true? What did Jesus tell the people regarding paying taxes? “*Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s.*” in Mark 12:17. If people are determined to not like someone but, in their heart of hearts, can’t really come up with a reason why, what do they do? They make up lies. This is when you know the enemy is at work.

Pilate told the people to go judge Jesus by *their* law. The lies continue in John 18:31, “*It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.*” Here’s another insight regarding the cowardly character of these people – and Satan as well. Ultimately, their accusation against Jesus was that He was blaspheming God because He claimed to be their Messiah. According to Leviticus 24:16, the penalty for blaspheming God was that individual was to be stoned to death by his/her accusers. So, they’ve lied when they say it is not lawful for them to put anyone to death. More revealing to me is their lie was really a thinly veiled disguise that they wanted Pilate and the Romans to do their dirty work. Their own law says if you are going to accuse someone of something that is punishable by death; then they need to own it and follow through with the entirety of the Law’s command.

We then get to the beginning of the interactions between Pilate and Jesus. Pilate starts by asking Him if He is the King of the Jews. All but John’s Gospel has Jesus affirming that He was, but in John 18:34, Jesus responds with an interesting question, “*Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?*” I believe the Lord is challenging Pilate at this moment to decide if he is thinking for himself, or is he merely accepting what others say about Him? This is an important question for non-believers. Are they inquiring about Jesus out of their own curiosity, or have they already made up their mind because of what they’ve heard from other people? In other words, are they serious about getting to know Him, or they simply asking questions to fulfill their already-decided opinion?

Pilate responded in John 18:35, “*Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?*” At this point, Pilate appears to be truly curious as to why the Jews have such a problem with Him. In the next verse, the Lord clearly declares who He is, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*” I suspect Pilate has just recognized this is no ordinary man that has been brought before him. He asks Jesus if He is a king, and the Lord replies, “*You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*”

I’m curious as to the tone of Pilate’s response, “*What is truth?*” Does he say this arrogantly as if there is no such thing, or does he say with a sense of exasperation as if he’s never found truth in his life? Doesn’t that sound like how a nonbeliever might think? The chief priests and elders, likely sensing Pilate isn’t buying their claims against Him, amp up their accusations. Yet, Jesus doesn’t respond. As often can be the case, silence can speak louder and more powerfully than spoken words. Pilate concludes for the first time that he finds no fault in Jesus. He learns Jesus is a Galilean, so he tries to push this mess off on Herod’s jurisdiction. Pilate’s actions, to this point, are not unlike the non-believer. At first glance, Jesus seems like a good dude, but He’s not yet made enough of an impression, so they just dismiss Him as little more than an inconvenient curiosity.

But the plot thickens. On his own, Pilate seems okay with Jesus. However, once he found his counterpart, Herod, being far more indifferent and unkind to Jesus than he was, Pilate was empowered by Herod’s arrogance and mistreatment of the Lord. Luke’s version of this story tells us once enemies, this opportunity to demonstrate their alleged Roman authority over Jesus

brought them together as friends. This is what Satan does to the nonbeliever as he/she starts to seriously examine Jesus. He will assemble every negative force he can to discourage belief in the Lord. Herod returns Jesus to Pilate, but even with Pilate's Herodian influence, according to Luke's accounting, tells His accusers that neither Herod nor he found fault in Him.

The scene shifts to the feast the night before Passover, and we learn of the custom of releasing a prisoner that the crowd wished. They had a choice of releasing Jesus or Barabbas, whom we learned in Mark's accounting of the story was a murderer and Luke's that he was a robber. Matthew's and Mark's accountings tell us Pilate knew exactly what he was doing in offering a murderer as the only other choice. He had picked up their issues with Jesus were unfounded – they were just envious of Him. I believe an important moment in this story is noted in Matthew when Pilate's wife warns him to have nothing to do with Jesus because she has suffered many things in a dream because of Him. The reason I believe this is an important point is fear was introduced into Pilate. Nothing good comes from a place of fear.

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to join in on their accusations and requests to release Barabbas and crucify Jesus. The pressure on Pilate is building, but he hasn't completely caved – yet. Despite his personal belief Jesus is innocent, he began to weaken – likely due to the bad influence of his newfound friend, Herod, and the pressure of the people. The spiritual warfare here is at its highest in human history. Pilate tells the people he will have Jesus chastised, or scourged, and then release Him. Jesus is scourged, but the accusations and shouts for Pilate to crucify Him are intensifying. Clearly unsettled by their pressure, he again asked them, *"What evil has He done?"* Mark's account noted Pilate wished to release Him. Our reading has Pilate telling the people for them to crucify Him for he found no fault in Him.

The people then told him the crux of their issue in verse 7, *"We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."* Finally! We are getting to the truth of who Jesus is – He is the Son of God. For Pilate and every other nonbeliever, this is where the rubber hits the road when evaluating Jesus. If He is just a prophet, a wise teacher, or a good man, then the implications of dismissing Him aren't that big of a deal. However, if He is the Son of God, then how we respond to Him introduces the possibility of having to consider potential consequences of rejecting Him. By rejecting Him, our fear factor of the implications of rejecting Jesus goes up, and that is *exactly* what happened to Pilate after hearing the people tell him Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Verse 8 tells us he was the more afraid.

The interaction between Jesus and Pilate concludes in verses 9-12 of our reading. Pilate's pride kicks in when the Lord refuses to respond to his question about where He was from. His delusion is that he is in control and has the power to crucify or release Jesus. Here, again, is a crossroads the nonbeliever is confronted with – do they think they're in control of their own lives and, therefore, don't need Jesus? The Lord's response in verse 11 resonates in me virtually every day when I think about my alleged control over my life, *"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."* Every gift, ability, talent, strength, and everything that is good in me is *only there* because Christ gave it to me. This is why God gets the glory in everything I do. Pilate was clearly shaken by Jesus' final words to him, and our reading tells us he sought to release Him.

We all know the conclusion of this story; Pilate would eventually succumb to his fear of the crowd's threats. They even warn him should he not crucify Jesus; he would not be a friend of Caesar's. From that place of fear, his pride is fueled and symbolically washes his hands as if that absolves him in his role in the Lord's crucifixion. Fear and pride harden hearts. Hardened hearts are vulnerable to believing lies. For the nonbeliever who eventually dismisses Jesus, this is what happens to his/her heart. Because God's mindset for His creation is that of redemption – not judgment, He will bring countless opportunities to the life of a nonbeliever to make the right choice. There is a limit, though, when the Lord, no doubt with tears in His eyes, will honor these repeated rejections, and their eternal fate is sealed. God has never sent anyone to hell – every person who will end up in hell will be there solely because they sent themselves there by their choice to reject Jesus.

Before I move to the next section, I'm guessing some of you might be wondering what, as believers, we can learn from Pilate. We chose to believe in and follow Jesus, so how does Pilate's experience with Jesus help us? I'm in the camp of once saved, always saved, but salvation isn't just a singular event that forever changes our eternal destination. Salvation is the inauguration and commencement of a new relationship with God whose foundation is rooted in a type of love that can't be found anywhere else but through His only begotten Son. Satan lost the war for your soul upon your confession in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but he is going to use whatever evil trick he has in his bag to slow down the progression of your relationship with God. Just as he did with Pilate, he'll introduce adversarial outsiders to pull you away from the Lord. He'll introduce fear and bring forth a powerful force in numbers who make public acts and confession of Jesus more challenging. There's an important difference between Pilate and the New Testament believer – the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Never forget that He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. Amen?

One of the most compelling proofs of the validity and God's omniscient power of the Scriptures is the fulfillment of prophecies. Scholars estimate there are no less than 300 and as many as 570 prophecies Jesus fulfilled. I found at least 11 of these fulfilled prophecies in Chapter 19 alone. They are summarized in the below table.

Prophecy		Fulfilled
Verse	Paraphrased Summary	Verse
Isaiah 56:6a	"I gave My back to those who struck me."	19:3
Isaiah 53:9	"nor was any deceit in His mouth"	19:4
Isaiah 53:7	"He opened not His mouth."	19:9
Isaiah 53:12	"He was numbered with the transgressors."	19:18
Psalms 22:18	"They divide My garments among them."	19:24
Psalms 22:15b	"My tongue clings to My jaws."	19:28
Psalms 69:21	"for My thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink"	19:29
Deuteronomy 21:23	"his body shall not remain overnight on a tree"	19:31
Psalms 34:20	"He guards all His bones; not one is broken."	19:36
Psalms 22:16	"They pierced My hands and feet"	19:37
Isaiah 53:9a	"They made His grave with the wicked/rich"	19:42

For the naysayers of Jesus being the Son of God, they attempt to dismiss His fulfilled prophecies because He orchestrated them. Ok, I'll play that game, but if you're going to play that

game, then you must play it out to a truthful conclusion. When I look at the above list of prophecies, I can only see 2-3 Jesus could have “manufactured” to further give evidence that He was God’s only begotten Son and the Messiah. So, let’s say, conservatively, Jesus had no control over seven of these prophecies. Now, for those of you who have math caps, put them on. Now, try to imagine the odds that with *just these seven* fulfilled prophecies, how the Jews can’t conclude that Jesus, in all of human history, post the dates the prophecies were made, is their Messiah? The key word I just used is “can’t.” Can’t implies a choice isn’t available. The truth is, they won’t, which implies a choice *is* available. Just as Pilate had a choice, the Jewish people had (and still have), and every other human being has a choice as to believe that Jesus is who He says He is. Getting back to the math and the virtual certainty that Jesus is the Messiah, their conclusion to dismiss Him just doesn’t add up.

Verse 30 contains not only the title of this lesson, but also our memory verse, “*It is finished.*” Please forgive me for belaboring this life-changing statement beyond what you’ve heard from the excellent devotion. What exactly was finished? John the Baptist laid out Jesus’ primary mission for His first extended human visit to Earth back in John 1:29, “*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” There is a specific word that is used four times in the Scriptures, and that word is propitiation. It is defined in the Oxford dictionary as, “*The action of propitiating or appeasing a god, spirit, or person; atonement – especially that of Jesus Christ.*”

Psalms 99, 1 Peter 1, and Revelation 15 – along with several other verses tell us God is holy. Sin is an offense to a holy God. Because God is the one who is offended, He set the terms of forgiveness – the shedding of blood. The offended, God, has two choices to make. First, He must choose whether or not He is willing to forgive the offense. Forgiveness will only be extended if the one doing the forgiving loves, or cares for, the one who has done the offending. The objective of offering forgiveness is to continue the relationship in fully reconciled peace via letting go of the past offenses. Should the person who has been offended choose to forgive, the second choice that person must make is to establish the terms in which such forgiveness is to be made available. In the case of God offering forgiveness, His terms were the shedding of blood.

Let’s pause here on this point. This is a stumbling block for many non-believers and, perhaps, for some believers. Couldn’t God have come up with something less severe and awful than the shedding of blood? He’s God – of course He could! But, let me offer a situation. A man intentionally kills a child and goes before the judge. The judge finds him guilty, but he only sentences him to community service. How would you react to this judgment? You would likely view the murder of a child as a serious crime; therefore, there should be a serious judgment. Right? All-powerful and all-wise God could only come up with the shedding of blood to pay the price for sin. That should tell you how serious sin is to a holy God.

Sacrificial animal blood for the covering of past and existing sins in the Old Testament was merely the foreshadowing of the greater sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament. His shed blood cleansed us from all sin – past, present, and future. Now, let’s get back to the word, propitiation. Not only are we cleansed of our sins by Jesus’ blood, but also we receive the full atonement, or forgiveness, for all our sins. 1 John 4:10 tells us, “*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*”

When Jesus said it was finished, what was finished was the totality of God the Father's requirement for atonement for all of humanity. After making this glorious statement, "*It is finished*," He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Please allow me to offer a couple of illustrations to, hopefully, demonstrate the significance of Jesus' statement, "*It is finished*." First, picture a woman who has to take the bar exam to become a lawyer. The bar exam is a long and grueling test. The woman finishes the exam – she answers every question. She eventually learns she passed the test. Let me ask you this, does it make any sense that she would ask to have more questions to answer to pass the test even though she's already completed the test and passed it? Now imagine a man who is running a marathon. He crosses the finish line, but he keeps running. Does that make any sense? No, because he finished the race.

How many of us, after we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, still believe there's more to be done to secure our salvation? How many of us feel like we're any less loved or saved if we don't go to church? Why? What did Jesus say about what was required from God the Father to be forgiven of all our sin? *It is finished*. Well, what about I need to be baptized? Why? Didn't He say the atoning work was finished? Well, what about I need to tithe or do good works? Why? What did Jesus say? "*It is finished*."

'Dan, what are you telling us?' Let's go back to the Scriptures starting with

Genesis 15:6, "And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

In response to being asked what one must do to be saved in the 16th chapter of Acts, the response was, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*,"

Romans 10:9 proclaims, "*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*."

What's the key word in these three salvation verses? Believe. Do you read any other requirements? Now, I'm guessing some of you are probably getting uncomfortable with the simplicity of what I'm saying. First, it's not me saying these things – it's God's own Word. Some of you are struggling and grasping for Scriptures that speak to the importance of baptism or hearing James' words in chapter 2, verse 6 of his book, "*Faith without works is dead*." True belief should produce righteous and obedient fruit. Fruit, though, can't exist if there isn't first a tree or soil for it to grow from first. Belief is that tree – the old wooden rugged cross of Christ. Belief in the *finished* work of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified as the payment for all your sin, gets you saved. Period. There is *nothing more* that you need or have to do to secure your salvation. Why? Let's together repeat what our beloved Lord said in our memory verse one more time...because "*It is finished*."

We covered today:

- Lessons we can learn about Pilate
- Fulfilled prophecies
- What did Jesus mean when He said, "It is finished?"

I began this lecture with posing a question, “Why would Jesus go through all of this?” As I prepared for this teaching, I must confess my blood boiled over the behavior of the Jewish leaders. I find it very hard not to become judgmental of them. But then I hear the Holy Spirit remind me of Jesus’ *very first* of seven things Jesus would say on the cross. He requested, “*Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.*” This forgiveness-first mindset of Christ’s is, for me, the most important development in a Christian’s faith. It unveils the depth of agape love, for only from *that* foundation can spring forth a forgiveness-first heart towards people. That, loved ones, is the answer to my question, “Why would Jesus go through all of this?” His death was the price God was willing to pay to forgive you of every sin you have committed, you are committing today, and the rest of the ones you will commit until you breathe your last breath.

I believe there is a direct correlation to the depth of one’s relationship with God to the extent someone extends forgiveness to the offenders in one’s life. The deeper the pain from the offense, the more we need to draw on the power and grace God poured out on us to extend forgiveness to the offenders in our lives. This is a tough place to go but remember the place Jesus went to, to forgive you.

Imagine climbing as high as Mount Everest or diving as deep as the lowest place in the ocean. Now add those two distances together, and they are a minor fraction of the length God goes to, just to prove His faithful and passionate love for you. Jesus said, “*It is finished,*” but He’s not finished with you or me. I’ll conclude with Hebrews 12:2, “*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” What was that joy that was set before Him that allowed Him to endure the cross? Each and every one of you. Do you believe that? I hope so, because the Author of your faith is alive and seeks to reveal Himself to each of you in a deeper and more powerful way. If He loved you enough to go to the cross, imagine what His love will produce in you if you let Him. Let’s stand and sing.