

Last Words

John 19:30

Good Friday

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Generally speaking, last words are considered to be among the most important words that people speak, especially when the speaker knows they are the last words. The last command that Jesus gave to his disciples before he was arrested was, "Love one another as I have loved you. No greater love is there than this, that one lay down one's life for one's friends."¹ By making that his last commandment, he was in essence saying, "If you remember nothing else, remember this: Love one another as I have loved you."

According to John, just before Jesus died on the cross, he uttered these words: "It is finished."

²There is some debate as to whether or not these are the actual last words of Jesus, since Luke records Jesus saying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."³ In any case, the three words John reports Jesus saying before his death are among the last words Jesus uttered from the cross. And as last words, we ought not discount their importance.

"It is finished." The words themselves have a ring of finality. On the one hand, the words could be interpreted as Jesus finally giving up against the unjust and evil forces that have amassed against him.

Perhaps it is Jesus' way of saying, "It is finished. Game over. I give up. You win."

But the sense of the Greek word translated as "It is finished" won't let us ascribe that meaning to the phrase. The sense of the word that Jesus uttered from the cross is the sense of fulfillment, the sense of accomplishment of what he had come to do. The Greek verb, *telew*, connotes "completion," "arriving at the intended goal." And so when Jesus says from the cross, "It is finished," he is not capitulating to the forces that have put him there, nor is he resigning himself to defeat at the hands of his enemies. On the contrary,

¹John 15:12

²John 19:30

³Luke 23:46

when Jesus says from the cross, “It is finished,” he is saying that he has finally accomplished everything he had been sent to accomplish.

You see, from the very beginning of his ministry, everything that Jesus ever does or says is fraught with purpose. Nothing happens as a coincidence. Nothing is left to chance. If you were to read the Gospel of John from beginning to end, you would find time and again Jesus saying that his purpose is to fulfill his Father's will, that he does nothing apart from the will of the Father. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of [my Father] who sent me.”⁴ Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”⁵ Truly, nothing that Jesus does is without purpose; his purpose is to do the will of the Father in all things.

Throughout the gospel Jesus has put the brakes on whenever anybody tried to rush into acclaiming him as the Messiah; his response was always, “The time has not yet come...,” implying that there was still more work to do. Finally, on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus knew it was time to set in motion the culmination of everything for which he came. He told his disciples, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds.”⁶ He is speaking of his death. Jesus knows that in order to accomplish the will of his Father, in order to bring to fulfillment those long-cherished words from the third chapter of John—For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life—in order to bring those words to fulfillment, Jesus knew he must willingly give up his life. In order for Jesus to fulfill the promise that he had come that we might have life, and have it abundantly, Jesus knew that he must willingly give up his own life for us.

Until he died for us, Jesus could not possibly say, “It is finished.”

As cruel and unjust the crucifixion was, we cannot say that Jesus was simply a helpless victim and therefore subject to the whims of those who had arrested him. Indeed, Jesus was aware that what was taking place was the fulfillment of every messianic promise in the Old Testament; Jesus was aware that, despite the evil intent of his executioners, what was taking place was nevertheless the will of his Father, to accomplish the salvation of the world. And so finally, just before he breathed his last, Jesus was able to proclaim that his work is finished, that he had accomplished everything his Father had sent him to do.

⁴John 4:34

⁵John 5:38

⁶John 12:23-24

That is why we can come here today, in the face of the evil and the darkness and the brokenness of the world, in the face of the cruelty and injustice that put Jesus on the cross, and we see not lifelessness and defeat, but accomplishment and victory.

Because Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished," we can receive the promise of everlasting life. Because Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished," we can say with utmost faith, "It is just beginning." Because Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished," we can call this Friday "Good." Amen.