

It is Finished.

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished...said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John 19:28-30

Many of us know of these final words of Jesus on the cross, but what exactly did Jesus mean by them? What was finished? Some might suggest that Jesus was acknowledging that His life was finished - that it all was tragically coming to an end. He had expected to make an impact on the world - only to realize that everything had fallen apart.

In August 1997, Princess Diana and her boyfriend were involved in a terrible car crash after being chased by *paparazzi* in Paris, France. Her last words were, "My God, what's happened?"

That is what many would say that Jesus' last words amounted to.

Some may assume similarly, that after three years of preaching "Good News" and healing others - only to end up being rejected by His people and crucified - Jesus had lost the will to live.

But both of those interpretations of Jesus' words, "It is finished" would be wrong. For Jesus's death on the cross was NOT a tragic cutting short of His life, ***but was the event for which he had lived all of His life.***

Jesus Christ, God the Father's eternal son, had become man to walk this earth for one two-fold purpose: ***To glorify His Father and save His people from their sins.***

This purpose had been stated by the angel who spoke with Joseph about his virgin fiancé's pregnancy. Mary, Joseph was told, was bearing "Emmanuel" - the child who was literally God come to earth in human form. And the reason He had come, the angel said, was to "save His people from their sins."

And that could ONLY be done by taking the judgement of God for His people's sins - so that they would never be judged. God could not defy His own holy justice - allowing rebellion to go unpunished. But His Son - as holy himself - could die *in the place of His people.*

This substitutionary justice had been taught the people yearly for at least 13 centuries generally in the set up of the Temple, and specifically through what was done at the Temple on what is called the *Day of Atonement.*

The Temple was divided into two rooms by a floor to ceiling 6 inch thick curtain - the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The most holy place was where the Ark of the Covenant was housed. It was the place of the presence of God. That curtain represented the separation between God and man because of man's sin. And that meant that no one, including the priests, were able to go beyond the curtain and enter that holiest of places.

But on the Day of Atonement each year, the people were taught what was necessary to no longer be separated from God. A lamb without disease or blemish was brought to the temple. The sins of the people were symbolically put on the lamb by the laying on of the priest's hands - and the lamb was sacrificed. The blood of the lamb was then taken by the High Priest into the Holy of Holies, where the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat, which covered the ark of the Covenant. With that, Atonement for sin was complete for

another year.

And yet it was not actually complete - for the death of an animal killed as a substitute cannot actually remove guilt and the separation from God that comes from it. That could only be accomplished by the substitutionary death of a sinless **person**. Jesus was and is that Holy person. And that is why John when first seeing Jesus said, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

This is why Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, and Luke 23:45 tell us that when Jesus died, the "curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." He had atoned for His people's sins by paying the penalty for sin which they owed - **and so the curtain was torn - there was no permanent separation from God!**

So when Jesus died, it was not a tragic failure, but a successful completing of the very mission for which Jesus came. He paid for the sins of everyone in the world, Jew or Greek, who would trust Him as the substitute for themselves as sinners.

Thus, when Jesus finally said on the cross, "It is finished," He was saying "Mission accomplished!" It was not a cry of despondency but a declaration of victory.