

It's ironic that what was once considered the cruelest form of capital punishment, has come to be Christianity's most important and beloved symbol—the cross. The Apostle Paul, wrote the following to a church in the city of Corinth, “*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” Paul continues, “*When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ—that is, Jesus Christ crucified.*”<sup>1</sup>

The Christian vision is cruciform in nature—the cross is the lens through which we see God, ourselves, and the world. Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified as a messianic pretender. Jesus claimed to be God the Son, sent as a man, to reconcile humanity to God, and to break the power of sin and death. Those who opposed Jesus sent Him to His death, thinking that would be the end of Him but they were wrong. Jesus was crucified on a Friday and Sunday He was raised from the dead.

We all love a good come-back story—from worst to first, rags to riches, weakness to strength—but who comes back from the dead? Crucified on a Friday, raised to life on Sunday; this is the ultimate story of reversal.

The title for my sermon this morning is, *It Is Finished*; Jesus spoke these words from the cross before He died. But before we consider His words, I want you to reflect with me about our own experience of finishing something. Let me share a few examples.

**illus:** I'm 5 feet, 9 and 3/4 inches tall; I may continue to grow outwards but I finished growing upwards at the age of 20. My son on the other hand has shot past me this year; he's just shy of 6 feet tall and he's not finished yet.

By a show of hands, how many of you have ever run a 5 or 10 km race? How many here have completed a marathon? Training for a marathon requires a lot of focus, discipline, and time on your feet. If you are training hard, stretching is key, so is a lot of sleep, and then there's the three hour long runs to prepare your body for the race. I used to run about 1600 km in preparation for a 42 km race. Nothing feels as good in marathon as seeing the finish line—it's all over, no more training, no more steps, you're done.

Have you ever gone over to someone's house and seen an unfinished puzzle sitting on the dining room table? By a show of hands, how many of you enjoy putting a puzzle together? What is the matter with you?! A puzzle is an exercise in torture! Every piece looks the same, the pieces don't fit where you think they should, and inevitably, the piece you need is either lost, or hiding in someone else's hands.

I would rather stick a fork in my eye than work on a puzzle—ok, maybe that's a slight exaggeration. For me, the only positive is when the last puzzle piece is fit into place—it's finished, the picture is complete, there's nothing left to be done.

But here's the thing: eventually the finished puzzle is taken apart and put back in the box, and the fitness gained through marathon training fades. Even a building as majestic as the Notre Dame doesn't last

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:1-2.

forever. Construction originally began in 1163, finished in 1345, but last week's fire means that Notre Dame is unfinished once more.

When we talk about finishing something, our words convey the notion of permanence but our lives are impermanent in nearly every way; what is finished or done frequently needs to be refinished and redone.

This morning, we're going to look at John's Gospel and consider the final words of Jesus. Please follow along with me as I read; the words will be on the screen before you.

John 19, "*the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle...25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."* From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

*28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.'* With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit...

*38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared*

*the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away...40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

*20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'*

*3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed...*

*11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.'*

*14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' 16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means "Teacher").*

*17 Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!'"*

At the heart of Christianity is a good-news-story, based on events that happened in history, that have brought about life-altering, world-changing, consequences.<sup>2</sup> Jesus was crucified on a Friday and on Sunday He was raised from the dead.

Jesus' final words from the cross were, "*It is finished!*" He didn't say, "*I am finished,*" or "*This is the end of Me.*"

The work the Father had given Jesus to do was finished. So here's the question: *in the light of death and resurrection of Jesus, what has been so dealt with so completely that it never needs to be redone or refinished?*

### **1. First, the gap between God and humanity has been bridged—(reconciliation).**

The Bible affirms something that we already know from personal experience: **sin builds barriers.** In our non-religious culture, we don't use the language of "sin" anymore, insisting that there is no universal right or wrong. And yet, with or without this language of sin, the wrongs we have done, and the wrong done to us, cause hurt, anger, and separation.

When we fail to love and honour God, it's only a matter of time before we fail to love and honour people who have been made in His image. I want you to think for a moment about a broken relationship in your life—a friend, a colleague, a spouse, a child, a sibling, a neighbour, a grandparent. We all need to be reconciled to someone, don't we?

To "**reconcile**" literally means "**to exchange, or, to bring into a changed relationship.**" When we look to the Cross we see two intersecting beams—the vertical and the horizontal; think of these beams in terms of our relationship with God and one another. It's here at the Cross that broken relationships can be mended. God has acted in Christ to reconcile humanity to Himself, and, to reconcile us to one another.

**illus:** When I was young, misbehaving, and I had pushed my mom over the edge, she would say something like, "*Go to your room and wait until your father comes home.*" You know what I did? I would sit alone in my room, hoping that my father would never come home.

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<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 206.

Sin has a way of twisting everything; it breaks relationships, it causes separation. I loved my father and he loved me, and yet I was wishing him out of my life to avoid the consequences of my behaviour.

Romans 5:6 and following says, “*at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*”

Vs. 6 states the premise—*Christ died for the ungodly*; vs. 7 comments on it—*it’s incredibly rare to find someone who’s willing to die for a worthy person*; and vs. 8 draws the conclusion—*the cross of Christ reveals the magnitude of God’s love*. The work of reconciliation is God’s initiative, fuelled by His steadfast love.<sup>3</sup>

It’s very important that we understand the order of Paul’s thought. God acted in Christ before humanity wanted to be reconciled; He loved us while we were still enemies. Put another way, while humanity was still running from God, He took the initiative to draw near.

When a relationship has been broken, rarely can the offending party bring about the repair. The one who has been injured must take the

first step, forgiveness must first be offered in order for it to be received. This is what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

*It is finished!* The gap between God and humanity has been bridged through Christ.

## **2. Second, the enslaving power of sin has been broken—we’ve been redeemed and set free.**

It’s a cruel irony that Western culture prizes freedom yet very few people actually feel free. Students are free to go to school and yet many think of school as a prison. Adults are free to work, free to pursue relationships, and yet many feel trapped by their work, families, and responsibilities.

Let me take a moment to unmask two cultural assumptions that fuel captivity. At present, freedom is primarily defined as the absence of restraint; “*we are truly free if, and when, we are free to do whatever we want*”. The belief is that by maximizing individual freedom, people will be fulfilled and satisfied.

A second cultural assumption is that our desires provide the path to fulfillment. The idea is that we do damage to our self by denying our desires. The sad truth is that blindly obeying our desires rarely leads to freedom, instead, we become a slave to our passions and satisfaction remains out of reach.

Let’s pause for a moment to administer an internal self-assessment. Do you feel bound, captive, or enslaved in any part of your life? Do

<sup>3</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Day Revolution Began*, 137.

you have a secret, or public, addiction? Is there something you can't break free from?

Do you feel bound to past events, or past woundedness? Is there any bitterness or unforgiveness that seems to have a hold on you? Do you ever feel yourself tossed back and forth by your worries, fears, or insecurities?

In the ancient world, “**redemption**” was primarily an economic term. To redeem was to buy back something that had been sold (think pawn shop), to exchange something that was yours for something that belonged to another, or to pay a price to set a slave free.

In turning away from God, all of us are held captive to sin's enslaving power, but the good news is that at the cross, God, in Christ, has broken the power of sin.

*It is finished!* We've been bought back; we've been redeemed and set free. We have a new freedom in Christ to love and serve God, freedom to love and serve others, freedom from the compulsions that drive us. When come to Jesus—with our addictions, our fear, our anger, or insecurity—He can set us free.

**3. Death Has Been Defeated.** Death is humanity's final enemy. It can be a terrifying thing to face the great unknown, but there is hope for the Christian when we look to the cross. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “*Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil,*

*who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.*” In dying, Christ swallowed death; in rising, He secured our own resurrection.

Jesus once said, “*You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live.*”<sup>4</sup> When a loved one dies, we might be tempted to think that death has the final word. But even death is subject to God—Jesus proved that when He rose again.

There's a lot of different opinions about what happens the moment after we die. There's some who believe that this life is all there is—after this life, nothingness. Others believe that they will come back again and again in a continuous reincarnated cycle. Still others believe that after death their spirit becomes one with the universe.

The Christian hope is very different. The Christian hope is that beyond this life, there is a life to come, a life with God that is eternal and beyond compare—a life that can only be described as “heaven”. Imagine the most glorious day that you can and then multiply it by a billion. Imagine a place and a time without fear, stress, or anxiety, a time when all of your relationships are perfect: no barriers, no no bitterness, no misunderstanding,

Imagine a time where your body is perfectly strong, healthy, and free from pain. Imagine a place where everything is beautiful and purposeful. In this place, the ugliness of our broken world will be distant memory, because everyone and everything has been healed.

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<sup>4</sup> John 11:25-26, The Message.

The beauty I've just described is the future that's available to us through Jesus.

C.S. Lewis once wrote that death is “only the beginning of the real story. Life in this world has only been the Cover and the Title Page...but now at last we begin Chapter One of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter is better than the one before.”<sup>5</sup>

My dear people, this is the Christian hope, this is my hope. It is finished! One day, death will be no more.

#### **4. And finally, at the Cross, the Matter of Our Worth Has Been Settled.**

All of us walk through life wearing invisible labels; some we've been given, some we've earned, others we've chosen. It would be revealing—wouldn't it?—if for an entire day, the **invisible** labels we carry were made **visible**.

There's all of the basic labels—son, brother, father, friend. There's the vocational labels—pastor, preacher, leader. But then there's the more sinister ones—*Big Disappointment*, *Ugly*, or *Loser*. There's also labels like *Insecure*, *Fearful*, or *I'd Be Better Off Dead*. These labels have a way of burrowing into our soul; we can't wear these labels and be whole.

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<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1:3.

My truth, your truth, whose truth wins the day? We're told that *it shouldn't matter what anyone else thinks, be your own person! Only you can tell yourself who you are!* It's a myth of course; no one is an island to themselves.

*So, who am I and what am I worth?* At the Cross, the question of our value was decided once and for all—we are loved by God.

John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”

1 John 3:1, “*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*”

1 John 3:16, “*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.*”

Before the creation of the world, God knew you and chose you.<sup>6</sup> The greatest thing in the world is to be loved, and you are loved by God. The God who sees all that you are and have done—the good and the not so good—has determined that your life is priceless. How else can you account for the fact that God the Son became human in order to die in your place?

The truest thing about you is what God has said—you are valuable, you are precious, you are loved.

At the Cross, the gap between God and humanity was bridged. At the Cross, the power of sin was broken. At the Cross, death was defeated. At the cross, the matter of your worth was settled—you are loved.

*It is finished!* These things have been decided, completed, and nothing ever needs to be added to them. May the reconciliation, redemption, victory, and love of God be yours in Christ.

**Pray**

**Worship**

**Benediction**