

It Is Finished - Notes

<https://voxchurch.org/page/688?Item=486#:~:text=Let's%20dive%20deeper%20into%20what,in%20the%20Gospel%20of%20John.>

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:28-30

The Greek word “τετέλεσται” (tetelestai) is used in the Gospel of John as Jesus’ last words (“it is finished”) before He gave up His spirit on the cross. “Tetelestai” comes from the Greek root word of “telew” meaning to bring to an end, finish, or complete.

I studied this word in college and realized that although it is just one word, this seemingly simple statement of Jesus on the cross holds divine meaning. Let’s dive deeper into what it means.

In the entire Bible, the word “tetelestai” is used only twice. In both instances, it appears in the Gospel of John. The verb is used once in John 19:28 and again in 19:30. In 19:28, the author references Jesus’ knowledge that everything had been finished; the final fulfillments of scripture would soon be addressed. It seems that the verb is used in 19:28 to imply everything is accomplished through the will of God; yet, in 19:30 the tone of absoluteness declares, His death, burial, and ascension were as certain as if already accomplished.

According to Craig S. Keener, these last words of Christ in John 19:30 are to be viewed as a cry of triumph: “It is finished!” He suggests that earlier in the Gospel, Jesus had come to “finish” the work of the Father (4:34) which is accomplished through His ministry (17:4) with His death on the cross crowning it as a complete act. At first glance, it seems that Jesus would be saying that His life and ministry are now over, but as carefully study the statement, we can find that He had fully accomplished the work He came to do, triumphantly. The fact that Jesus was dying was quite obvious, but as He was dying, He was bringing to completion the redemption of God to His people. “It is finished,” is surely a victory cry. The death of Christ in John’s Gospel is not a scene of suffering, or ignominy, or universal desolation—but it is the beginning of a great triumph that will last all of eternity.

One of my favorite findings from studying this word was that “tetelestai” would often be the abbreviated word for the phrase “paid in full,” which would be stamped on a receipt for one previously in debt, indicating that the sum of payment has now been paid. One can equate this usage to Christ, whose sacrifice has paid in full the price of sin for all peoples in order to save the world. The Hillsong United song, “Man of Sorrows,” puts this idea very clearly into words: “Now my debt is paid; it is paid in full by the precious blood that my Jesus spilled. Now the curse of sin has no hold on me; whom the Son sets free is free indeed.” And since the purpose of Christ’s mission also included the assurance of eternal life for all believers, salvation and eternal life from here on out were now freely available to all. Paul summarizes this idea saying, “‘He himself bore our sins’ in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; ‘by His wounds you have been healed’” (1 Peter 2:24). Christ announces it has been finished to show that a way has been provided for sinners to now be saved.

The declaration of tetelestai in John's Gospel is followed by the prophesied death of Christ. His faithful followers must have felt complete hopelessness and defeat after watching their Savior be beaten and finally give up His spirit. Fortunately, this death-scene did not end there because Christ was raised from the dead as the savior of the world.

So what does tetelestai overall imply? It is finished. Done is the work of the Father, the pouring out of His soul as an offering for sin is accomplished, and redemptive atonement is finalized forevermore. It is here He lays down His life for His friends (15:13). Here He shows the full extent of His love toward His own (13:1). At last the work of revelation (17:26), His obedience to, His oneness with, and His love toward the Father have been realized in full (10:30, 38; 14:31). All scripture and prophecy that needed to be accomplished in Christ's passion was consummate. From John 3:16, which says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," one can assume that the death of Christ was needed for the sin of the world to be overcome by His sacrifice. We find that out of the open side of Jesus, who had been willingly killed, flowed the stream of life and salvation to everyone willing to receive it.

Through the boldness of the word tetelestai, Jesus' mission on earth was complete of its fulfillment of the scriptures, and in turn, opening up the door for all sinners to enter into eternal salvation. The declaration of "It has been finished!" as Jesus' last words showed His utter desire to do the will of the One who sent Him. He was triumphant in completing this extremely selfless task of dying on a cross for His friends. Christ, therefore, gave up His spirit willingly and rested after his finished work just as God rested on the last day of creation. Consider today the last words of Christ in John's Gospel, and be reminded of His presence in this Easter season and the sacrifice He made that allowed Him to truly say "Tetelestai," "It is finished!"