

To Do Your Will, O God!

Reconciliation
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Given 11-Mar-17; Sermon #1367

We see by what is going on in the world today that humanity is incapable of solving its own problems. Will mankind ever be able to produce peace and love with one another? Can humanity ever reconcile to God? We know the answer to that. They cannot as long as people continue to sin as a way of life.

What is required of people to reconcile to God and to one another? In a word, change, but change how? They need to repent of their sins and be converted to God's way of life. We must allow our minds to be turned towards God, just as the world will eventually have to do.

What is necessary for that to happen? What had to be finished in order for atonement and reconciliation to take place?

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

As we know there has never been, nor will there ever be again, a death like Jesus Christ's death. The importance of words, "It is finished," the sixth in a series of seven spoken by Jesus on the cross, is that they point to Christ's death as an achievement.

Elsewhere in the gospels we are told that Jesus uttered a loud cry, just before His death.

Matthew 27:50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

Mark 15:37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

Christ's words were not the final gasping sobs of a defeated man, or even the firm deliberate declaration of one who was resigned to His fate. They were a triumphant declaration that the turning point in history had been reached and that the work that Jesus had been sent to do had been done.

It is this that makes Christ's death unique. As an example of a patient endurance of abuse and suffering, it may perhaps be similar to others' deaths, as a fitting end as for one who, like the prophets, bore a faithful witness to God's truth even when that truth was rejected. It may perhaps be parallel in some respects, but Christ's death cannot be matched in its fullest sense, because Jesus, and no other, achieved our salvation by and through His suffering. Paul writes in Romans 3:

Romans 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood,

through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

That is a powerful statement in recognition for what Jesus Christ has done for each and every one of us.

Our omniscient God knew before creating mankind that humanity would sin and if there was going to be reconciliation and character building there would have to be a means provided that would not only satisfy the legal requirements, but also contain within it the moral and spiritual influences that would motivate a person to cooperate on his own.

We play a major part in this because God has given us free moral agency. The Protestant world, for the most part, has convinced Westerns that Christ did it all for us and we act as though that it all depended on God, and in one sense it does, but God gave us free moral agency so that we can respond to Him, put His Word into practice, and exemplify before others what God is like.

We have an awesome responsibility to uphold our part and work with God the Father and Jesus Christ in making sure that His death for us was not in vain.

We would like to be able to say that we live our lives like Christ's perfect life, and that we could say about ourselves as Christ said about Himself, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father." However, the only person who was and is totally at one with God is Jesus Christ.

Now what God is working at doing with all these things that He has provided, specifically the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of His Holy Spirit, is to motivate human beings to repent, change, turn to God, resist the desire to continue in sin, work at building character, and learn to live by faith. So we see here that we have a lot of things that we are responsible for doing. Ultimately God is the one who grants us the power to be able to do these things, but we have the responsibility to carry things out.

This is what God, in His wisdom, determined would satisfy the legal requirements and would also provide inspiration and motivation to get people to follow in the right way. Christ chose to be a sacrifice, so that we can relate to a man being unjustly put to death by and for others.

Now let us look at some basic principles related to the significance of what was accomplished in Christ's death. When we consider the nature of the reconciliation, we immediately find ourselves in the midst of a world of biblical ideas and imagery. Central to this is the notion of sacrifice and an accompanying thought of substitution.

The first word for the understanding the meaning of Christ's death is *sacrifice*. Sacrifice has to do with the death of an innocent victim, usually an animal. Substitution means that this death was in place of the death of someone else.

The background of this concept lies in the truth that all who have ever lived are sinners who have broken God's law and that the penalty for sin is death. The Old Testament declares that the penalty for sin death.

Ezekiel 18:4 “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.”

The New Testament also confirms this in Romans 6 and in I Corinthians 15.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I Corinthians 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

So this death is not merely physical death, more importantly it is a spiritual death as well. Death in itself is separation.

Spiritual death is the separation of the heart and mind from God and this is what we deserve as the consequence for our sin. But Jesus took that death to Himself by His sacrifice and became our substitute by experiencing death in our place.

Genesis 2:16 is a very vivid illustration of this principle in the early chapters of Genesis. In these chapters Adam and Eve had sinned and were now in terror of the consequences God had warned them about.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

God told Adam and Eve clearly and He left no doubt about what would happen when they disobeyed. Now at this point they probably did not have a very clear idea of what death was, but they knew that was serious. Consequently, when they had sinned through disobedience and then later had heard God walking toward them in the Garden, they tried to hide, so obviously they knew what their sin meant, they felt guilty.

But they could not hide from God, no one can, so we are told that God called them out of hiding and began to deal with their transgression. Now here is God, who has told our first parents that in the day that they sinned they would die. And also here you have Adam and Eve, who had sinned, in this situation they had probably expected the immediate execution of the penalty, which was death.

They had sinned, so if God had put them to death, in that moment banishing them from His presence forever, it would have been just. But that is not what we find. Instead we find God first rebuking the sin and then performing a sacrifice as a result of which Adam and Eve were clothed with the skins of those animals. This was the first death that anyone had ever witnessed enacted by God.

As Adam and Eve looked on, they must have been horrified. Yet even as they cringed from the sacrifice they must have marveled as well. What God was showing was that although they themselves deserved to die it was possible another, in this case two animals, to die in their place. The animals symbolically paid the price of their sin and in addition they were clothed in the skins of the animals as a reminder of that fact for as long as those skins lasted.

This is the meaning of sacrifice, or substitution. It is the death of one on behalf of another. The Bible teaches us that the death of an animal can never take away the penalty of sin.

Hebrews 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

These were a symbol of how sin was to be taken away, but they were only a symbol. A real and effective sacrifice was performed by Jesus Christ at a later time.

Now the second word for understanding the meaning of Christ's death is propitiation. Romans 3:25 referring to Jesus Christ he says:

Romans 3:25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

Propitiation also relates to the world of sacrifices, but unlike substitution, which refers primarily to what Jesus did for us, dying in our place, propitiation describes that death in terms of its bearing upon God.

The background for this the term is the wrath of God, which is directed against all sin. Propitiation refers to the work of Jesus Christ in which the justified wrath of God against the sinner was turned aside and the love of God was enabled to go out and save him.

An Old Testament illustration of the ark of the covenant is helpful here and the sacrifice that was involved. The ark of the covenant was one of the pieces of furniture, we might say, for Israel's wilderness tabernacle. It was a chest about a yard long covered in gold and closed by a solid gold covering known as the Mercy Seat.

The Mercy Seat had two figures of cherubim—angels on either end looking inward. The cherubim had wings that stretched over the ends of the ark and then came together over the top. The stone tablets of the law of Moses were kept within the ark. The ark itself was kept within the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the tabernacle.

The most significant thing about the ark of the covenant is that it was thought of, symbolically, as begin the earthly dwelling place of God. God was speculated to dwell between the outstretched arms of the cherubim above the Mercy Seat. This is why no one but the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and even he was to enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

God is holy, and sinful men and women that came into His presence would be consumed. So here we see God sitting between the cherubim and we see the law which we have broken in the past and continue to break. As God looks down upon affairs of men this is what He sees, His broken law. So this picture tells us that God, in His holiness, must judge sin and that sinners are subject to His judicial wrath.

But that is not all. Now the Day of Atonement comes and on that day the high priest takes the blood of a sacrifice and, bearing it carefully according to all the regulations for this ceremony because violation of these regulations is death, enters the Holy of Holies where it is sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat between the presence of God and the law, symbolically.

What is symbolized now? The picture is no longer wrath against the violators of God's law, but rather a picture of God's mercy, in which the wrath of God against sin is satisfied and the sinner is

spared. The blood of animals could not actually take away sin, but they pointed forward, in instruction, to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ yet to come. The blood of the sacrifice sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat by the high priest did not remove sin, but it pointed toward the one whose death would remove it, Jesus Christ.

When Jesus dies, God's wrath against sin was literally propitiated, which God Himself demonstrated by tearing the veil of the Temple, separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies, from top to bottom. In this way, God shows that the way into His presence was now open for all who would believe in Jesus Christ. Sacrifices ceased because the death of Christ alone met the need they were supposed to satisfy.

Now that brings us to the third word used to describe the affects of Christ's death which is reconciliation. II Corinthians 5 provides us with a key passage.

II Corinthians 5:18-19 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Reconciliation means to make one. So the background for this term is the broken relationship between ourselves and God because of sin.

We have already seen one example of this in Genesis, because when Adam and Eve sinned and God came to them in the Garden, our first parents hid from God. This had not been the case before their disobedience. Before there had been openness between God and man, but now the relationship they had enjoyed was broken and they showed their physiological awareness of this by hiding.

In a sense, men and women have been hiding ever since. We hide through a self-imposed ignorance of spiritual things, to our supposed sophistication or culture, or even through religion. Many religious experiences are attempts to get away from God, rather than attempts to find Him. Many people have their own form of religion that counterfeits God's church and in many cases it similar to God's church and can deceive many.

But God comes to us through the glory of His Word and when He comes He does what is necessary to heal the broken relationship to bridge the gap.

In Eden it was the inauguration of sacrifices; on Calvary, in Hebrew Golgotha, meaning the skull, it was ultimate bridge to which the earlier sacrifices pointed.

I Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

We see here who enables that reconciliation and has become our Mediator. He means that it is on the basis of Christ's death that the reconciliation takes place.

We normally think of Passover in terms of being reconciled to God. Passover and Atonement are inextricably bound. Passover involves reconciliation and so does Atonement. Passover is personal in nature and it provided reconciliation of the individual to God and the beginning of unity of with people in the church with Christ.

It is through Passover that we learn the price of redemption and reconciliation and that the price is no less than that of the Creator, Jesus Christ. However, Atonement supplies answers and solutions to problems not resolved by Passover. Atonement is universal in nature and provides reconciliation of the world to God, all of mankind at one with God and each other through Christ.

Passover shows Satan defeated but still free to work out his nefarious schemes, and he is still free to produce confusion and division as well as rebellion. Atonement, on the other hand, shows Satan defeated and punished by banishment, no longer free to do anything but to bewail his lot. So the difference is that one is personal for the people in God's Kingdom, and the other one is general for the world at large.

The fourth and final word for describing the death of Christ is redemption. Redemption is derived from two Latin words. *Re* meaning again, and *meere* meaning to buy. So redemption means buying again or buying back, as in redeeming something that has been pawned or mortgaged.

We use this word in terms of material things, the Bible uses this word to signify that we are God's but have nevertheless fallen into bondage as a result of our sin and now must be purchased out of that bondage by Christ's sacrifice.

Just as sacrifice is directed to the need created by our guilt; propitiation to the need that arises from the wrath of God; and reconciliation to the need arising from our alienation from God, so redemption is directed to the bondage to which our sin has consigned us and this bondage is multi form. Consequently redemption, as purchase or ransom, receives a wide variety of reference and application in Scripture.

Redemption applies to every respect in which we are bound and it releases us into a liberty that is nothing less than the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Paul speaks of that redemption in Romans.

Romans 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Peter speaks of it in even more explicit terms in I Peter 1, emphasizing the terms of reconciliation. He is speaking to Christians here.

I Peter 1:17-21 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Now what makes this so important to God's purpose is that a major portion of our desire to obey God comes from a sense of obligation to God and Christ, with regard to our appreciation for how much was paid for us to be free. We should never let that leave our minds! That the cost was so great, and we should have an appreciation for what God has done for us in that sacrifice and we should feel a deep obligation that never leaves our mind.

You will never feel this until you begin to understand that this was done for you as an individual. If you had been the only person who had ever sinned in all of God's creation, it still would have taken the life of the Creator to free you from the wages of sin.

He did it personally for you and me and we must think of it in those terms every day. It is very easy for us to escape responsibility for His death when we conclude that He did it for all mankind, which He did. However He also did it for you as an individual, and we must never forget that. This is essential in order to come to a right sense of obligation. We should at least respond out of thanks for what He did because we owe our life to Him.

There have been people who have been willing to give virtually everything to somebody who saved their life, for example saved them from drowning or a car accident, etc. At Passover we rehearse that with the understanding that it was done for you and me as an individual.

Christ's declaration from the cross, "It is finished!" is particularly appropriate for understanding His death as redemption, because one of the meanings of the Greek word that comes from the root word *telos* is *tetelestai*, which means paid in full. The word was used in this way in secular business transactions at that time.

The death of Christ is so unique and certainly highlighted as the focal point of history, because it accomplished precisely what needed to be accomplished in regard to our salvation. We deserve to die for sin so Christ died for us and we are under the just wrath of God because of our transgression. So Christ bore the wrath in our place. We were alienated from God so Christ reconciled us to Him, and we were sold under sin, so Christ bought our freedom by paying sin's price.

These are all things that we are very familiar with, but we need to remind ourselves every year so that we do not forget the individual meanings to us personally.

From one perspective all of this is spiritual and it has to do with both moral matters and spiritual relationships, but from another point of view this is as concrete and historical as any famous figure in the history of mankind. The facts of Christ's life are even more sure because the witnesses of the events of Christ's life were divinely inspired for them to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Those that know anything at all about Christianity know that Jesus died to save us from sin and death and they know that the source of the decision to save us from sin was God's love (John 3:16). But why was it necessary for the love of God to achieve its end in this way?

The death of Christ was an absolute necessity. But having elected to save them, He was under the necessity of accomplishing this by the death of His Son, a necessity arising from the perfection of His own nature.

At first glance it might be thought presumptuous for us to speak this way of something being absolutely necessary for God. Obviously we cannot tell God to be or do anything, yet He has revealed something of His nature in Scripture and it is not impudent or improper to inquire on the basis of that revelation whether God can or cannot do a thing.

For example, is it possible for God to lie or speak falsehood? If we answer no, as we should, we are not limiting God by telling what He can or cannot do, we are simply acknowledging that deceit is

impossible for One who is characterized by absolute truth as God declares Himself to be, and in this we actually honor Him.

Furthermore we are led to a valuable conclusion, because on the basis of God's inability to lie, we perceive that He can always be trusted—forever and always.

When we turn to the Bible we find a number of necessities pertaining to God which bear upon this subject. They are like the necessity for God to speaking truth, being truth, but they relate primarily to the matter of salvation.

The first of these necessities is the hatred of God for sin which we may express by saying that God must hate sin if He is to be as He declares Himself to be in Scripture. The background for this necessity is the holiness of God. In Scripture God is more often called holy than anything else. This is the label most often affixed to His name.

We do not often read of His loving name, His mighty name, or His eternal name, but we do often see His holy name. This is the attribute of God that is invariably mentioned in any vision men have of Him.

Isaiah, in His great vision of the Lord, high and lifted up, stressed the holiness of God more than any other attribute. We see that his immediate reaction was to bemoan his own sinful condition.

Isaiah 6:5 So I [Isaiah] said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

So the holiness of God lies at the core of His being, and then the dismay of Isaiah was the recognition that in His holiness, God cannot be indifferent to anything which opposes it. Holiness involves the element of majesty and will.

When we ask, "What is that will primarily set on?", the answer is God's majesty. Thus God's will is inevitably directed against anything which would attempt to diminish that majesty or flaunt it. That is what sin tries to do. So God is against sin, He is wrath toward it.

Many people today do not like the idea of wrath, especially in mainstream Christianity. All they want to hear about is God's love, not His wrath. But like it or not, Scripture teaches that it is a necessary aspect of God's nature in relation to sin.

The Old Testament alone has nearly six hundred important passages concerning God's wrath. His wrath is directed against injustice, corruption, and offenses against His own glory and majesty. The New Testament has equally important passages. Romans 1:18 speaks of God's wrath being revealed.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Other passages speak boldly of the wrath to come.

Romans 2:5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

The teaching of these passages is that God will not and cannot look with indifference upon the unrighteous.

A second necessity of the divine nature relating to the matter of salvation is the obligation of God to do right. This obligation is based upon God's role as ruler and judge of creation.

Genesis 18:25 "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Now the answer was obvious, the Sovereign must do right. In fact Abraham used this necessity to plead for the salvation of Sodom. God had told Abraham that He would destroy Sodom and Abraham objected as we just read in verse 25.

Here are two divine necessities pertaining to salvation. First, that God must hate sin, and second, that the judge of the earth must do right. What is right where sin is concerned? The answer is judgment, as the destruction of Sodom indicates.

We do not see the fullness of that judgment now, because God has largely withheld His judgment, yet it must come and when it comes it must result in the final destruction of the sinner, that is those who have not repented.

We know from the biblical record that God elected not to destroy every sinner. Out of His great love He decided to elect a great multitude of called-out ones to salvation. But the question arises, how can He do this without violating these two necessities of His very nature? How can He save those who actually deserve His just judgment?

There is only one way, another must suffer the judgment in place of those who stand condemned. God's own Son, the only One both able and willing to become man and to die for sinners. Salvation had to be achieved by God, because no one else could achieve it, certainly not man, because we have gotten ourselves into this trouble in the first place.

Prior to our conversion we have done so by our rebellion against God's just law and decrees and also we have suffered from the affects of sin to such a degree that even our will is bound and therefore we cannot even choose to obey God, let alone actually please Him. Our only hope is God who alone has both the will and the power to save.

The achievement of our salvation at such a high cost flows from the love of God, yet God did not hesitate to provide the sacrifice of His Son. So great was His love for us!

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ loved us so much that He did not hold back from doing what needed to be done. Because of this, we in our part should serve Him without reservation. Now I want to pick up something here in John 19.

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

One of the goals of Greek oratory, to which the Greek generally lends itself, is to say much in few words. That goal is reached in the sixth of Christ’s sayings from the cross: “It is finished!”

In English this is only three words, in Greek it is just one, yet this one word sums up the greatest work that has ever been done.

Now let us look at the perfection of what He finished in the reconciliation, the aspect of Christ’s death that is perhaps more directly suggested by this word *finished* than any other, is *perfection*.

Certainly as Jesus spoke this word He was not yet dead, but His death was only moments away and so He speaks in anticipation of the work being done.

There are a number of things we can point to as having been perfectly finished at the moment of Christ’s death. The first and most obvious one is Christ’s sufferings. These had not taken Him by surprise. Long before this Jesus had said in Luke 12,

Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Centuries before Isaiah had written of Him in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Suffering marked Christ’s life. He had thirsted and hungered and had ministered for three years without a place to lay His head. He was scorned, accused, beaten, and subjected to the horrors and indignities of the crucifixion. No one ever suffered as Jesus did, yet now “it is finished.” He sits on heaven’s throne at the right hand of His Father waiting until all His enemies are made His footstool.

The second thing that that is “finished” in the moment of Christ’s death was His work on earth, that which He had been sent into the world to do. This work centered on the reconciliation, but it was more than this. It was His entire life undergirded by His absolute obedience to the Father and filled with teachings and good works. This work was before Him constantly and we are told by the author of Hebrews that on the occasion of His coming into the world, He said,

Hebrews 10:5-7 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’”

This is what He finished at that time, what His will was for Him here on earth.

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”

In John 5:36 He spoke of the works that God had given Him to do. In John 8:26 and John 14:24, He spoke of the words that God had given Him to speak.

John 14:10 “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”

Then in His great High Priestly prayer recorded in John 17, He said,

John 17:4 “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.”

Throughout His lifetime, Jesus had this work in mind and devoted Himself to doing it. Now it is done, and He points, with satisfaction, that it is finished. None of us can say that fully with our work. Jesus’ works was done perfectly!

The third area that we can point to as finished in the moment of Christ’s death, are the prophecies of His first coming. We cannot say that *all* the prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming because other prophecies pertain to work He is yet to do at His second coming. But those that refer to His gospel ministry are finished. In fact, it is in direct connection with one such prophecy that these words were spoken. Psalm 69:21 says:

Psalm 69:21 They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Jesus noticed that this had not been fulfilled and said, “I thirst,” thereby triggering its fulfillment as the soldiers rushed to offer Him a vinegar/wine solution. Immediately after we read, He said, “It is finished!” and bowing His head and gave up His spirit.

In Isaiah 7:14 and Galatians 4:4 it had been prophesied that the Messiah was to be born of a woman without benefit of human father, this was completed.

In Genesis 22:18 and II Samuel 7:12-13, it was foretold that He was to be the seed of Abraham and of the line of David, and this was finished.

Hosea and Isaiah had spoken of His flight into Egypt and His subsequent return to His own land and it was fulfilled.

Malachi 3:1 predicted that Jesus’ appearance was to be preceded by one like Elijah, John the Baptist fulfilled this role. In Isaiah 35, Christ’s miracles were foretold:

Isaiah 35:5-6 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

Jesus performed all of these miracles! The list goes on and on, His triumphant entry into Jerusalem had been foretold. He was to be hated and rejected by his own people, a friend would betray him. He was to be numbered with the transgressors and be pierced through hands and feet. Soldiers were to divide His garments and cast lots for His outer cloak. It is impossible to deny that there were no connections between the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus Christ!

All of this had been completed and there is nothing of all that had been written of Him that was left undone. Furthermore, this is not just a conclusion based on our own knowledge of the Old Testament texts. This is the teaching of the New Testament itself. Three times in the New Testament the very word that it used in John 19:30 translated as “it is finished,” is used of this fulfillment. It is first used in Luke 18.

Luke 18:31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished.”

Luke 22:37 “For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end.”

Acts 13:29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.

Nothing that was to be fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ was left lacking. The finishing that He did was perfect in every way.

Now we have an obligation to follow Christ and His example of finishing God’s will for us. Paul knows that because God called Him and did so for a purpose, he himself must determine to follow after Christ. God’s calling always puts an obligation on His children.

Doing the will of God is always personal and remember how it was with Peter. Peter unknowingly avoided deep personal contact with Jesus by speaking impetuously and often on behalf of the twelve, but when Jesus came to recommission him after Peter’s denial, there was no escaping a personal response. Jesus asked a very simple but profound question here in John 21.

John 21:15-17 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.

John 21:18-22 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished [Is that not what we do quite often?]; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.

And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.” [This is personal to Peter and it is personal to us as well.] Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”

A follower of Christ can never be dependent of God’s plans for some other Christian. Christ’s call is always a personal one.

It is also true that following is costly. It costs a person his all and there are always professing Christians that believe they can be Christ’s disciples piecemeal. They think they can follow Him an inch at a time after first assuring themselves that there is no danger and that following Him also conforms to their own plans for their own future. But this is not following at all.

Following Christ means abandoning and overcoming your sin, your past, your own conception of yourself, your plans for your own future, and even at times your friends and family, if that is God’s will for you and the result of following Christ.

Our own human nature tends to draw back because it is hard to follow the narrow path that He has set for us. It was never supposed to be easy, but it is also true that there is a far greater sense in which we have not given up anywhere near as much as the Father and the Son did. Even the things that we surrender are so arranged by God that they work for our own spiritual well-being.

Peter learned this in a conversation that he had with Jesus. Mark tells us that just before Christ’s final journey to Jerusalem, there was a point where Peter was boasting, in this case reminding Jesus of his sacrifices in order to serve Him.

Mark 10:23-28 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

In other words, Peter was reminding Jesus that he was an ideal disciple and that his following Him had proved costly. Peter was being ridiculous! He had left hardly anything; his claim was presumptuous and here is how Jesus replied to him in verses 29-31.

Mark 10:29-31 So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

So Jesus was teaching that any loss that His disciples suffered, God would abundantly compensate far more than they had lost.

Most people are familiar with Mark Twain's story "the prince and the pauper." The two main characters were boys who came from entirely different backgrounds and circumstances, but they looked alike. One day when chance had thrown them together, they decided to put on each other's clothes, then the boys became separated. The pauper had been mistaken for the prince and taken to live in the palace, while the prince was turned back to the poor streets of London where he suffered great indignities before he eventually regained his rightful place and his throne.

In a similar way, Christ took on our poverty while we have been clothed in His finery.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

He became poor as we were so that we might be clothed in His righteousness. He endured sufferings and death that we might become like Him and sons of God and co-heirs with Christ of God's glory.

It is true that the "paupers" must give up their rags but there is no comparison between our rags and God's glory. Jesus has told us that there is nothing given up in this life that is not replaced one hundred-fold by spiritual treasures, not only in this world, but in eternity also.

It may be that God has been asking you to lay aside something in order that you might be a more effective witness for Him. Something that may be a hindrance for one disciple is often entirely different for another. If you do not know what it is in your life, God will reveal it to us when it is necessary.

At this point in your life, for you, it is the touchstone of your discipleship. If you cast it aside to follow Jesus Christ, you will grow in your Christian discipleship and God will bring great blessings into your life and through you also into the lives of others.

A primary reference of these words, "It is finished!" is to the atonement and reconciliation. This was the culmination of His sufferings, the principle of His works, and primary focus of the prophecies. Having demonstrated the unique Christ's person, office, and mission, the author of Hebrews states in Hebrews 10:

Hebrews 10:12-14 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

That is talking about you and me and all the believers there have been since Adam. Those who are perfected forever refer to the saints, but that does not mean that they are morally perfected now at this time. What it means is that Christ's one unique sacrifice is perfectly adequate to assure our status before God.

We must never allow ourselves to fall into the deception that having believed in Christ there is then nothing else for us to do, or that our conduct after we have become members of God's church does not matter anymore. We know, from John Ritenbaugh's emphasis, that everything matters!

Nothing we have done or ever will do can enter into the satisfaction that Christ made on the cross. His work is perfect, so if Jesus has finished such a great work for us, we must be asking what work we can do for Him.

We find an example in Saul of Tarsus, when he was struck down on the road to Damascus. His first question concerning the identity of the One who was revealing Himself to him was, "Who are you Lord?" But as soon as he had learned the answer, "I am Jesus whom you persecute." Paul's next question was, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Christ had a work for him to do, he was to be an apostle to bear the name of Christ before Gentiles and kings and to the children of Israel.

We each have a work to do fulfilling the responsibility God has determined for each and every one of us. These responsibilities vary widely depending on many different factors, such as age, health, education, God-given gifts, interests, personality, training, and so on.

We must follow Jesus Christ's example. He always finishes the good He begins. In like manner, each of us must finish our God-given work. Of course, there are discouragements, suffering, weakness, and disappointment, but we must not give in to these. We must keep on until we have no more to give or are incapable of anymore. The apostle Paul says in II Timothy 4,

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

The world did not like Jesus Christ's first appearing and all that it finished. The world does not look forward to the righteous judge's second appearing and what it will accomplish.

Paul is talking personally about all who desire and long for Christ's second coming. To believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge the world and to desire His return became a criteria to which Christians were known throughout history.

No others but true Christians truly believe in that and desire it. What do the mainstream Christians look forward to? They look forward to the rapture, being taken up to Jesus Christ. Do they look forward to Him coming down to earth? This is one of the characteristics of a true Christian that we sincerely desire the return of our Savior and welcome His coming to set up God's government on earth.