



SERMON TITLE: "The Death of Death"

DATE: March 28, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 19:28-42

PASTOR: Jim Thompson

SERIES SUMMARY

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

We don't like to talk about death. Yet, death looms with inevitability. It casts a long shadow. The psalmist says we live "in the shadow of death." For all of us, death is not a multiple-choice option. It is not an if-question, but a when-question. We can try to neglect it, or not think about it, or busy ourselves so we don't deal with its lurking nearness, but still, even as followers of Jesus, death can feel like a curveball of seeming finality that we don't know how to swing at.

Beyond this, death is the last in a long line of fears that we all face. Denise Inge writes, "It's the final fear, as quiet as a cat's feet, that sits in every human heart." And because it's the final fear, it fuels everything else that we're scared of. It's why we say things like "I'm dead serious." And when we fear anything – public speaking, paying bills, belonging, addiction, people-pleasing, failure, fear of losing control – when the brunt of those things is upon us, the fear of death is behind them all. So, what should we do?

It's probably not wise to look to someone's last words to decipher some sort of meaning for their life and ours. But this is not true when we look at Jesus' final words before his death. In John 19, when Jesus said, "It is finished," and bowed his head to die, he knew exactly what he was saying and doing. And at the cross, we have an invitation out of death and into life. Something happened when Jesus uttered these final words and died. Something happened that should change the way we view fear and death. So, what is the "it" of Jesus' "It is finished"? What was finished at the cross? Below are ten things that "it" includes. And these will help us see how Jesus has taken the sting out of death.

What was finished at the cross?

1. Jesus' death. We often think of death as instantaneous. We sometimes reduce it to a medical failure. But for Jesus, death was a process. We know that crucifixion itself was a long-drawn-out process to shame you, and shame those who love you. And when Jesus says, "It is finished," he is saying that the process of death is done. The soldier of John 19:34 proves it by piercing his side with a spear.
2. Jesus' life. Part of John's main point is that Jesus is *fully God* who became *fully man* and *fully lived* all the way to the end. His full humanity was felt all the way to his dying words. When Jesus said, "I thirst," (19:28), he was speaking out of the fragility of his humanness. And if he isn't the God-man who lived his entire life as one of us, then he can't serve as our substitute and representative on the cross. So, "It is finished" is not just about the process of his death, but also the entirety of his human life.

3. Jesus' ministry. Jesus' life as the God-man wasn't to prove an ambiguous theological point. He came bringing **Fellowship Greenville** 3161 S Highway 14, Greenville, SC 29615-5906

God's kingdom from heaven to earth. His ministry was the divine game plan, to inaugurate God's future in the now, bringing salvation to bear on the brokenness of the world. And his ministry was his way of saying, "When I go put death to death on the cross, you should continue my ministry in the power of my death-conquering love." This is what John himself is doing in writing his gospel account.

4. Jesus' fulfilling Scripture. In 19:36-37, we see that the specific details of Jesus' death harken back to pictures and promises that God gave his people in the Old Testament. Additionally, the New Testament writers understand the cross of Jesus as a unique event that the entire Hebrew Bible was rushing towards in hope. The cross is not a sad interruption of Jesus' life; rather, it is a holy and solemn fulfillment of all of life that came before Jesus.
5. Jesus' work as the Passover Lamb. When 19:36 says, "not one of his bones will be broken," that's from Exodus 12. Israel was set free from slavery in Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb. And it's the Passover week in John 19. Meaning, Jesus is the Passover Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. In his death, he offers definitive freedom. If we look elsewhere for ultimate freedom, thinking that we can hide and death won't find us, not only are we woefully mistaken, but we belittle Jesus' gracious work for us on the cross. Our freedom comes at the cost of Jesus' life. And Jesus' death as the Passover Lamb is the beginning of Death's great unraveling. Now, all the anxiety and questions and phobias and other death-fueled fears start to get nervous. Now, Death's seeming certainty and finality are beginning to doubt themselves.
6. Jesus' work as our high priest. A priest is someone who stands in the gap between God and people, and Jesus' death is him carrying out his priesthood perfectly. The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus' death was "to free those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Hebrews 2.14-18). Meaning, Jesus understands our fears. He knows what it's like to live in the shadow of death. And beyond this, Jesus understands our fears and temptations *more* than we do. He never caved to temptation and never yielded to worry, so he felt the most pressure that those things had to offer. Because of this, Jesus can handle anything and everything that we face, even death. "It is finished" means that his work as high priest is done, and that we are never alone in our fears. The cross is Jesus' undoing of the mechanics of death and how it haunts us.
7. Jesus' rescuing Jews into God's family. (see below)
8. Jesus' rescuing Gentiles into God's family. All along Israel was meant to be God's people for the world, but they often became too focused on themselves, and neglected their vocation to welcome other nations (Gentiles) into God's family. But somehow Jesus' death is a watershed moment that proves his Messiahship for faithful Jews, and simultaneously flings wide the door for all nations to be a part of his family. In 19.38-42, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are Jews who are leaving fear and darkness to step out into faith and light, and the cross did that. And for us Gentiles who believe (see 19:35), the cross invites us out of death and into life. Meaning, all that was required for Jew and Gentile to be rescued into God's family together was finished at the cross.
9. Jesus' opening the door to rest. When 19:30 says, "It is finished," it means the work is done. We can take a deep breath now. We don't have to prove ourselves or defend ourselves. We don't have to achieve or accomplish. We don't have to do spiritual jumping jacks and calisthenics trying to get God's attention. Fear doesn't win. Death doesn't win. And now we can rest in the completed work of Jesus on the cross to make us right and keep us right with God. "You don't have to take yourself too seriously, because at the cross Jesus takes you seriously" (Sammy Rhodes). The cross declares that you are perfectly loved, totally forgiven, irreversibly free, and indelibly in the family. Because Jesus' body rested in death on the Sabbath (19:38-42), we get to rest free from death in the eternal Sabbath of New Creation.
10. Jesus' opening up the Garden again. John is not trying to hide anything. He's writing about a central tree, a tragic death, and a garden (19:41). John wants our minds to rush back to the first few pages of the Bible. He's saying that the cross undoes the power of sin and death, and makes a way back home for wayward rebels like us. This is the big-picture view of what "It is finished" means. The first Adam and his wife fell because they wanted to be God. The second Adam is God and rescues his fallen bride. The first Adam's sin caused thorns to infest

creation. The second Adam wore a crown of thorns, and died for sin to reclaim creation. The first man caused the curse when he gave in to Satan. The second Man bore the curse and triumphed over Satan. The first man came naked to a tree and led all his offspring astray. And the second Man died naked on a tree, and is leading all his offspring home. This is the wide lens, that there is eternal life to be had in the cross of Christ. The central tree, tragic death, and the garden of John 19 open up the way to the Garden of Genesis 1. We don't have to be afraid. Death has lost its sting, and is now working backwards and against itself. Now its inevitability is merely a hurdle.

So, how should we appropriate Jesus' "It is finished"? How should we respond as the cross daily and eternally invites us out of death and into life? John 19:35 calls us to "believe." We can **acknowledge** our worries, but we must **trust** Jesus. He is our Passover Lamb and our high priest who understands. We can admit that we don't add up, and that's okay, because Jesus does. And we get to rest in that. The believing John calls for is the relational, lifelong art of relying on Jesus, and swearing allegiance to him because of his work on the cross for us. And as we trust and believe, fear's strength wanes, and death's grip loosens. Death has met its match in Jesus, and there is endless grace for us in these words: "It is finished."

Discussion Starters—Begin by reading the passage...

1. In what way has death most affected your life personally?
2. How does death relate to some of your biggest fears?
3. What stood out to you most about this passage/message?
4. Who is someone you know who trusts the cross so passionately that they aren't governed by fear?
5. How do Jesus' words "It is finished" undermine our fear of death?
6. How should Jesus' words "It is finished" cause us to rest?
7. How does Jesus want his death to calm your most current and present fear?
8. How does Jesus' death point to the eternal life God wants to share with us?