

The Finished Work of Christ

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon explores the profound significance of Jesus' declaration 'It is finished' as the culmination of His redemptive work and its implications for believers.

Duration: 1:03:36

Scripture: Genesis 1:31 - 2:1, Psalm 22:5-31, Luke 23:44-46, John 19:28-30

Topics: "Cross of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the sixth saying of Jesus on the cross, 'It is finished.' He explains that this statement signifies the completion of the work of Christ and the fulfillment of Scripture. The speaker also highlights the significance of Jesus' previous saying, 'I thirst,' which marked the passing of eternal death and the separation from God that comes with human sin. The sermon emphasizes the importance of the will of God throughout Jesus' ministry, from his first words of being about his Father's business to his final words committing his spirit into God's hands.

Transcript

Tonight is the last of the series of studies in the Suffering Servant, the Old Testament, and the Doctrine of the Atonement, in which we consider specific texts of the Bible. And so with tonight, we are concluding that particular aspect of our series, and we will begin next Wednesday night with the study of the question, For whom did Christ die? And then on that Wednesday night, we will be dealing with the historical background of the controversy between the Arminians and the Calvinists over the question, how these questions arose historically. And then in the following Wednesday nights, at least two, perhaps three, we will deal with the scriptural side of the question, For whom did Christ die? And then that may conclude our series.

We do have one or two more that are listed on the schedule, but the light of what we have done, I'm not sure that we will continue them. But at least the next few Wednesday nights, we will be dealing with the question of the design of the Atonement, or For whom did Christ die? I think the tape room is all set, so let's begin our class with a word of prayer. Our Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the night before us.

We thank Thee for the Word of God. We particularly thank Thee for the ministry that our Lord Jesus had in the last days of his life upon the earth in the flesh. And we pray that as we study these final sayings of his that he uttered from the cross, that the significance of them may become plain to us, not only in the

doctrinal sense and not only in the theoretical sense, but may they also come home to us in a practical way, and may the result be that our devotion to him who has loved us and loosed us from our sins in his own blood may be deepened.

And we pray too, Lord, that if there should be someone here who does not know Jesus Christ, that this may be the night in which they come to know him. We commit the hour to Thee in his name and for his sake. Amen.

Our subject for tonight is the finished work of Christ, and so we're turning to John chapter nineteen again, and we're going to read three verses there, and then three verses in Luke chapter twenty-three. Both of these passages together give us the last words of our Lord upon the earth in the days of his flesh. John chapter nineteen and verse twenty-eight through verse thirty.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar, and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.

And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, or the spirit. Now will you turn over to Luke chapter twenty-three, but we will be dealing with that John passage first, while I read verses forty through, forty-four through forty-six of chapter twenty-three. Luke chapter twenty-three, verse forty-four through verse forty-six.

And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

And having said this, he gave up the spirit. Our Lord must have experienced supreme spiritual joy when he finished his work. It is certainly true to human experience that the greater the labor that we expend, the greater the joy there is in the accomplishment of that labor.

What a joy it must have been to a Dante, for example, when after all of the preparation involved and all of the labor involved in producing something like the Divine Comedy, having finished it, he was able to put down his pen and write underneath it, Finis. The same thing must have been the experience of Milton when he finished one of his great works, such as Paradise Lost. It must have been a tremendous sense of accomplishment to have done something that one knows is a work that is worthwhile.

What a tremendous sense of joy it must have been to Columbus when after all of the labor he had spent in gathering the patronage necessary to make the trip, when after he had endured the storms of the Atlantic, the uncertainties of what lay before him, the mutiny of his own sailors on the boat, finally when he sighted the peak of Darien, there must have been a tremendous sense of accomplishment and a tremendous sense of joy. It is finished. The thing that I have dreamed of all of these months and years is now a reality.

Well I think when the Lord Jesus reached the stage in his ministry, when he cried out upon the cross, it is finished. There must have been a tremendous sense of accomplishment and resultant spiritual joy as a result of arriving at the place of the completion of all of the plans and purposes of the Godhead which have stretched back into eternity and on into this very moment. And now it is done.

Now this sixth word that our Lord uttered, it is finished, is a triumphant cry and it is a cry which expresses a supreme sense of spiritual accomplishment. But more than this, it is a cry with great dogmatic significance.

Now I'm using dogmatic in the sense of theological of course, because that is the proper sense of the word dogma.

It is something that the church teaches. Dogma. It's come to have a bad connotation because the world doesn't like the things that the true church teaches.

And so their teachings are called dogmas and now dogma has a bad connotation because the world doesn't like our dogmas. And even some of our Christian friends don't like our dogmas either because they like to think of the book that we study as a book that is really a kind of recounting of Christian devotional experience. And they do not like the idea of these dogmas.

You get this often when you hear a man say, now I'm not so much interested in the doctrine of this as I am in the practical outworking of it in your life. Or I'm not interested in theology, I'm interested in practice, as if theology is bad. Professor Warfield, who was probably our greatest theologian of the twentieth century in arguing the significance of dogma and the importance of it, in an outstanding little work on the idea of systematic theology, has said in that work that when you come right down to it, the Bible itself is not a description primarily of Christian life.

It's really a book of dogmas. From beginning to end, a book of dogmas. Now this word, it is finished, is a triumphant cry.

It expresses the epitome of Christian experience of our Lord's in the sense that it was the highlight of his carrying out the will of God, no doubt. But it is also a cry with tremendous dogmatic significance. Now Jesus Christ did not say, I am finished.

He said, it is finished. This is not the last gasp of a worn out life, but this is a triumphant utterance and we are to look at it in order to gain its doctrinal significance. It is the sixth of the words that Jesus uttered.

It has its Old Testament roots. It goes right back to Genesis chapter 1, verse 31, and Genesis chapter 2, verse 1, Psalm 22, and about verse 30, just as well as the seventh saying will have its roots in the Old Testament too. But now let's look at this sixth saying.

We looked at the fifth last week. That was Roman 1 in the outline. This is the sixth saying.

I gave you a special outline for what we did last week, but it is part of the overall outline. And we now want to look at the sixth saying, and I want to remind you first of the circumstances of the saying. Now those of you who were here Monday a week ago when we studied, I thirst, will remember that I tried to make the point that when the Lord Jesus uttered, I thirst, that the eternal death which our Lord died was passed.

He had cried out, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me in the fourth and central utterance of the seven utterances of the cross. It was at that moment that he experienced to the uttermost the separation from God that is the penalty for human sin. So at the time that our Lord cries, it is finished, the eternal death is passed.

The one thing that remains is that he experienced the results of spiritual death. And the results of spiritual death are, of course, physical death. I guess I should say the result is physical death.

So that remains. This statement is uttered somewhat proleptically, it is finished. And then he is to give up his life because physical death is the issue of spiritual death.

And he takes the vinegar, as we pointed out last time, in order to strengthen himself for all that he is experiencing. In order that to the end he may have his senses fully in his control. Just as he did not take the wine mingled with myrrh which would have deadened his senses and deadened the pain in order that he might bear the pain to the full, now he takes the refreshing vinegar, the refreshing workman's wine in order to keep his senses clear for the full experience of the suffering of the cross.

Well, having said that, let's look now at the content of the saying. You remember that last, in our last study I said that the statement I thirst was one word in the Greek text. It is simply the word *dipso*.

This too is simply one word in the Greek text. You probably have seen it transliterated on tracts because there are several tracts written with the title *tetelestai*. That means it is finished.

It is one word. Now we have something of an exegetical problem in the statement it is finished because he does not tell us precisely what he means when he says it is finished. What is the it? To what does the it refer? Some students have suggested that when Jesus says it is finished, he has reference to the scriptures.

Now you notice in, you'll notice in the context immediately preceding in verse 28, we read after this Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished that the scripture might be fulfilled saith I thirst. In verse 30 when Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said it is finished. And so some students have thought that in the light of the context, perhaps he means it is finished, it, that is the prophecies that have pertained to my dying or my ministry as a whole have been fulfilled.

Of course, not all of them really are fulfilled at this point. We read, for example, in the immediately following context, verse 36, for these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken, and again another scripture saith they shall look on him whom they pierced. So the prophecies as a whole were not completely fulfilled at this time.

Still others have suggested in the light of the difficulty with that interpretation that what he means by it is finished is simply the whole of the passion described, say, from verse 16 through verse 30. Perhaps that is the meaning, it is finished, the suffering on the cross. Perhaps most of the Bible students have taken a third interpretation and have suggested that what our Lord means when he says it is finished is what he means in John chapter 17 in verse 4 when he says I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do.

And there the reference of the statement is to the total program in which our Lord was engaged. All that he was to do as he came from the Father ultimately went to the cross and finally was to go back to the Father. So commentators have said the absence of a definite subject forces the reader to call up each work which was now brought to an end.

Perhaps that is the meaning. You cannot be certain about it but he does say in John chapter 17 verse 4 in a statement that is certainly related to this one in his great priestly prayer I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. There remains now the resurrection but this was not the work of the Son, this was the work of the Father who raised the Son.

And so consequently it may be that our Lord means this. At least we know that he includes within the reference the statement or the experience of the death under the judgment of God. There is one other thing that I want you to notice.

I feel that in the study of Scripture we should pay attention to every word. Now when the Lord Jesus was speaking to the Father he spoke to the Father in John 17 and he said I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do. That is perfectly proper for the Son to speak to the Father and use the term I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do.

But as he hangs upon the cross he does not say I have finished the work. He says it is finished. And perhaps the reason that he says it is finished here is that he is still acting out his relationship as the servant of Jehovah.

And so he doesn't draw attention to himself, he simply says it, that is the work is finished. It is finished, not I have finished the work. He keeps himself in the background, so to speak.

He makes the utterance general in order to stress the Father rather than his own part in it. Perhaps also he makes it general in order that everyone may claim a part of it. Now we come to the significance of the word finished.

What does it mean to say it is finished? You know in reading the Bible, you have noticed this I am sure, that the divine self-satisfaction appears only twice in the Bible. It appears in connection with the creation. When the creation is finished, remember in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 31 the text of Scripture said that God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good.

The next chapter begins with something about having finished the work of the creation. And so there is the divine self-satisfaction in the accomplishment of the creation. Now here, there is that statement of completion from a member of the Godhead, the second person, the Lord Jesus.

This time however, it is the divine self-satisfaction that appears in connection with the foundation of the new creation. For it is on the basis of this finished work of our Lord Jesus that we have another creation, this one a spiritual creation. So in a sense what takes place on the cross in the gospel of John corresponds to what takes place in the original creation in the book of Genesis chapter 1. I feel that this is really John's purpose.

I feel that that is really why he is the only one of these writers to include this particular text in his gospel account. Because right in the beginning of this book and throughout the book there is an implied comparison and contrast between the book of Genesis and the things that have to do with the ministry of the Lord Jesus. You can see it in the opening phrases of the gospel of John.

In the beginning was the Word. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were accomplished by the Word.

And without him was not anything made that was made. It is almost as if John says now against the background of the first creation I want to tell you the story of how we may have a new creation through the Lord Jesus. Both of these creations are through the Son.

In fact I think we could rephrase John chapter 1 and verse 3 and make perfectly good dogmatic sense. It says all things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. We could substitute the word regenerated and have good doctrinal significance.

All things have been regenerated through him and without him was not has not anything been regenerated that has been regenerated. So just as the Word is the agency of the first creation he is the agency through the spirit of the new creation. I want to say a word about the word finished though.

In the Greek this is the word teleo. It is translated in three different ways in the New Testament among others. I think it would be good for us to look them up.

The first way in which it is translated is as to pay like paying your bills. Matthew chapter 17 and verse 24. Matthew chapter 17 and verse 24.

And when they were come to Capernaum they that received tribute money came to Peter and said doth not your master pay tribute? We would be in harmony with the text of John chapter 19 and verse 30 if we translated this. It has been paid. It has been finished.

Paid. Now turn to Luke chapter 12 and verse 50. Luke chapter 12 and verse 50.

Here is another text in which we find this verb teleo and our Lord says but I have a baptism to be baptized with. He is speaking of course of his death. And how am I constrained till it be accomplished? Accomplished.

We could translate John chapter 19 and verse 30 it is accomplished. And then we have another rendering of the word in Matthew chapter 11 and verse 1. And here it is rendered to make an end. And it came to pass Matthew 11 1 when Jesus had ceased commanding his twelve disciples.

Now I said Matthew 11 1 but I do not see it in our text. And it came to pass when Jesus had ceased. This is I am reading the Schofield edition and they may have changed this.

Or I may have made a mistake in my notes. But I do not think I made a mistake in my notes. I did not.

The word that has been changed in the Schofield edition of the authorized version and translated now ceased was rendered something like and it came to pass when Jesus isn't it? Someone have the authorized version? Had made an end. Right. Had made an end commanding his twelve disciples he departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

And it is translated cease in this edition here. Now this is another fairly accurate rendering of this and we could say that our Lord said when he hung upon the cross an end has been made. Now these three words are very interesting I think and this is why I have selected them.

The word pay suggests the doctrine of redemption. So our Lord when he said it is finished well he has paid the price for redemption. The word accomplish suggests a sacrifice.

And when he says it is finished he means that as the great high priest he has offered the once and for all sacrifice for the sheep. And the word to make an end suggests the total doctrine of salvation. And so when he says it or an end has been made he means simply that he has accomplished the work of salvation.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. They lose them all because an end has been made. An accomplishment has been made of the sacrifice.

The debt has been paid. Now our Lord's death is that which pays the price for sin and sinners. Now I think it is very important and we shall see this when we discuss the question of for whom did Christ die to remember that when the Lord Jesus said it is paid he means precisely that it is paid and salvation is accomplished.

Accomplished. Not simply made possible but accomplished. Now we must remember that.

It is paid. The price of the redemption for certain people is paid. Now I think we need to say something also about the point of this tense too.

He says it is finished. He uses what we call in Greek the perfect tense. Some of you are students of Greek like Mrs. Prior.

And I think her husband knows a little Greek too. And I'm not speaking about that one that lives around the corner either. But those of you that know a little Greek will know the significance of the perfect tense.

The perfect tense in Greek is a tense that indicates an action that took place in past time, the results of which action are considered by the author to have continued up to the time of the reference made in the text. So it refers to an action that is done in past time, the results of which continue. The English perfect tense is not precisely the same as the Greek.

But this idea is found in this Greek tense. It is finished. What our Lord means is that the price has been paid and the results of the payment of the price have continued to the present moment.

Now of course other texts of scripture tell us that they continue on down through the ages of eternity. The perfect tense doesn't tell us that. Other facts tell us that.

The perfect tense merely says that it has been paid. And we are living now in the results of the payment. And of course what he refers to by it is finished or it has been finished is what he has just said a few moments before, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And the experience to which he had been put in those immediately preceding moments.

Remember he was hanging upon the cross and then at twelve noon there came darkness over the face of the earth and for three hours our Lord hung in the darkness. It was during that period of time that he experienced spiritual death. And when he cries it is finished he means that is over.

It has been paid. We now have the results of that death available. That's what he means.

It is finished. That means of course that it is not necessary for any repetition of the work of Jesus Christ because the debt has been paid. We talk about the finished work of the Lord Jesus and what we mean by that is that our Lord has paid the whole price for human salvation.

This of course runs contrary to many types of doctrine that are common in the professing Christian church. For example this doctrine of the finished work of the Lord Jesus is directly opposed to the doctrine taught by some segments of the Christian church, professing Christian church, that a man can be saved and then lose his salvation. The whole idea that a man can have everlasting salvation but then can lose it through some act of his is utterly opposed to the idea of a finished work.

For if it is possible for me to believe in Jesus Christ and possess an everlasting life and then lose it by some act that I perform after I have believed and after I have been regenerated, then when our Lord said it

is finished it was not finished. It was only partially done. What remained to be done was my life thereafter.

Now I think that should be obvious to all of us that the idea of the death of our Lord as sufficient and full payment for sin is opposed to the doctrine that one may lose one's salvation. So when he said it is finished, it was really finished. And this also of course is opposed to having a kind of salvation which is procured by anything that we do, such as, for example, a kind of sacramental salvation, a salvation obtained through faith in Jesus Christ plus some sacramental work, the work of baptism, undergoing water baptism, or sitting at the Lord's table observing the Mass.

The Mass, as far as I can tell, is a constant Sunday by Sunday denial of the finished work of the Lord Jesus. Every time a person goes to Mass he in effect says my sins were not covered by the finished work of the Lord Jesus. He may not realize it, of course, but that is what he is saying theologically.

Our Lord said it is finished. And so that means that since we do not gain salvation by anything that we do, we cannot lose our salvation by anything that we do. And it also means that we do not obtain this salvation in the first place by anything that we do.

And even if we think of our salvation as a salvation that comes to us through our act of faith, we have wrongfully understood the New Testament. And even if we couch our phrase in non-meritorious faith, but nevertheless it is our act of faith by which we come to faith in Christ, not acknowledging that that faith comes from God, we are in contradiction with the finished work of the Lord Jesus. For if that faith really is a work of us, then our Lord did not do it all.

We do believe we come to Christ through faith, but it is a faith that is produced in our hearts by the Lord Jesus himself. So let's stop talking about non-meritorious faith if we mean by that that this is something that we do of ourselves. And then, of course, if we mean by this something that is done by God, then there's no need to talk about non-meritorious faith, because of course it's non-meritorious if it's done by God.

Do you get it? Hudson Taylor is one of the great missionaries to China, and it was through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ that he came to his salvation. He had wrestled with his salvation, the question of salvation, for a long, long time. In fact, one of the most interesting biographies is the biography of Hudson Taylor, because in it there is a recounting of the spiritual struggle through which he went to come to the sense of salvation.

I don't remember all of the details, but as I remember, some of the things that I remember was that he had a godly mother who had prayed for him often. And one day when he was in another place from his mother, she was praying for her son again, and it so happened that there came into his hands a gospel tract. I vaguely remember that he took it out of a waste paper basket, but I may have mixed the story of some other person's salvation with his.

But I think that there came to his hand a gospel tract in a very unusual way, and it had the expression in it, the finished work of Christ. And he was on a hayloft. How he was there I don't remember, but he was on a hayloft.

It would be interesting to go back and read the true story after you've heard my explanation, not having read it in about twenty years. But he was on a hayloft, and he was pondering the expression, the finished work of Christ. The finished work of Christ.

And then it dawned upon him, in the hayloft, that since, and I'm giving his words, that since the whole work was finished, and the whole debt paid upon the cross, there was nothing for me to do but to fall upon my knees and accept the Savior. If the work truly is finished, then I don't have to do anything. All I need to do is to say, thank you, Lord, for what you have done.

Dr. Chaffer at the seminary used to preach the gospel that way. I don't know whether he read the conversion of Hudson Taylor, but nevertheless, that's the way he used to preach it. That the only response that we have to make to the finished work of the Lord Jesus is simply to say, thank you, Lord, for what you have done.

That is faith. Well now, we want to take a look at the seventh saying. This one is, in some ways, the most interesting of all the sayings, because I don't think it is quite as well understood as the others.

So let's turn over to the seventh saying in Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23, verse 44 through verse 46. The sixth saying, it is finished, expresses our Lord's satisfaction with regard to the past.

The seventh saying, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, expresses his satisfaction with regard to the future. And if we have a pattern of dying manners in the Bible, this is our pattern. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Now John finished, remember, his statement concerning it is finished, by saying at the end of that thirtieth verse, it is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up the spirit. That is the preparation for the physical death. He bowed his head.

Now many have made comment concerning this. You notice the Lord Jesus is the subject of that active participle. And having bowed his head, it is our Lord who does it.

And isn't it striking that in our Lord's death, his death is so different from ours, and in the very difference of that death, you can see his sovereignty. I'm just trying to prepare a message on the sovereignty of God, one message on the sovereignty of God. That is almost a task for angels or apostles, one message on the sovereignty of God.

Well, this is one of the evidences of the sovereignty of God. How do men die? Men don't die like this. They give up their life, and then their head falls.

Have you noticed that? A man has his head up, and he's talking, and if he dies, but before his head falls, his spirit goes. That's why his head falls. But did you notice the way our Lord died? He bows his head, then he releases his spirit.

He is in total control of everything that is happening there. He is sovereign in his death. Isn't that interesting? Just little things like that.

I must confess, I read that for about five years before I ever noticed what was being said. Bowed his head and gave up the ghost. I never saw that in that text there was a reference to the sovereignty of God.

I know you knew all of that. Now we want to look at the statement that he made just before he gave up the spirit. He said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Now you remember that in these seven sayings, which we've been talking about for about four messages or five, the first saying is, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. The middle one is, my God,

my God, why'st thou forsaken me? And we pointed out that in the first, the relationship that exists between the Son and the Father is a paternal one, a relationship in the family expressed by Father, forgive them. But the central utterance, when he says, my God, my God, why'st thou forsaken me? He is trying to stress the fact that there is a judicial relationship now between the Son and the Father because the Son is dying under the judgment of God as the substitute.

Now that having finished, since he has finished that judicial work, he again addresses God as the Father in the last saying. Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. A false emphasis is sometimes given concerning this because the impression is given by reading this, I must confess, and by listening to expositions, including some of mine in the distant past, the impression is given that this is only a dying utterance of our Lord.

And I am not, I know that this is not only a dying reference of our Lord, and I'm not even sure that it is primarily a dying reference of our Lord. Now one of the interesting things which we have noticed as we have gone through, I'm sure you have as well as I have, has been the fact that almost all of these sayings that our Lord uttered are from the Old Testament. Now he doesn't say, I'm citing the Old Testament.

He had just made the Old Testament so much a part of his life, the scriptures were so much a part of his life that he was speaking of them because they were part of him. He said, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And you know, of course, that is the first verse of Psalm 22. He says, it is finished, and that also is related to Psalm 22, verse 30.

He has said, I thirst that the scripture might be fulfilled, and we referred that to Psalm 69, which is another messianic psalm. So he is thinking and living the experiences of, referred to by the Old Testament, the prophets and Moses. The things that they said would be true of the Messiah, he is now experiencing them, and he is so full of the Word of God, and it is so much a part of him that he just utters, I'm sure in impromptu fashion, the parts of scripture that pertain to his life.

Now this is from Psalm 31, and I want you to turn over to that psalm for a moment. This statement from Psalm 31, because in this particular statement in Psalm 31, we will have a clue to the significance of the statement that our Lord utters in his last words. Let me read a few verses of the psalm.

Verse 5, into thy hand I commit my spirit. That's the passage that he cites. Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

Verse 7, I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble, thou hast known my soul in adversities, and hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy. Thou hast set my feet in a large room. He's talking about the blessing that God has brought to his life.

Verse 15, my times are in thy hands. Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies and from those who persecute me. Verse 21, blessed be the Lord for he hath shown me his marvelous kindness in a strong city.

And finally, verse 23, O love the Lord, all ye his saints, for the Lord preserveth the faithful and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. If you read through the psalm and read through it a number of times, you will discover that the psalmist is writing out of an experience of adversity in the midst of his enemies, but he is thanking God for deliverance. He's not a man who expects to die.

He's a man who prays that God will take him through these experiences and he fully expects to be taken through them. In other words, the man here is not a man who is certain of death, but a man who is certain of preservation from death for life. Now, this is, this is borne out by the fact that the old Jews, and you will find this in rabbinic literature, for example, in Strach and Billerbeck, which is the outstanding work on the relationship of the Jewish literature to the New Testament.

You needn't think about going off and getting it. It's about seven volumes and it is in German. But in Strach and Billerbeck, in the second volume of that, there is a reference made to this particular passage in the citation from Psalm 31 and certain statements are made concerning Psalm 31.

This psalm was a prayer that Jewish people prayed and were recommended to pray on the evening as they went to bed. It was an evening prayer. In other words, it was the equivalent of, now I lay me down to sleep.

I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless mama, daddy, brother, sister, and so on.

As many names as you can think of to avoid the final turning out of the light and the good night. As you know, all of your kids have done, if you taught them that particular prayer. Now I prayed that prayer probably five hundred times and I never expected to die.

I used to say, if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. But that was a prayer to carry me through the night. Now that is the kind of prayer and that is the kind of psalm that 31 is.

It is a petition that a person would be carried through the experiences into the life that is beyond. So what our Lord is praying is something that represents a praying about something that is just a milestone in the uninterrupted life which he the son of God lives. He said, I am he that liveth and I was dead and behold I am alive forevermore.

This is the hymn of his continuation, someone has said. Father, we shall go on together. Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit, not because I'm dying and everything is over, but because this is simply a milestone in the experience that I the son have with my God.

Now the enemies think that they have ended him, but he negates them by affirming the onward march of his life. This is just one of the times which are in his father's hands. And so the thing that is prominent here is not dying.

The thing that is prominent is his activity. The dying is secondary. Someone has said, in this you have Jesus going out, the human name, but Christ going on.

Christ goes out and God and his work go on. What did our Lord say when he began his ministry? Well, the first words that we have our Lord saying were, I must be about my father's business. And so from the first words that our Lord utters to the last, the will of God is primary.

This is his way of saying as he finishes his life, I must be about my father's business. Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit for this experience and what lies ahead. Now we have a few minutes and perhaps you have a question or two that you would like to ask because I have finished saying what I am going to say.

Maybe in the tape room they won't have to apply the machine that makes me sound like someone else on this particular tape. I've had two or three people come to me recently. Are you listening Mr. Pryor? And have said, I'm getting those tapes from Believer's Chapel, but you don't sound like yourself there.

Is that really you? Anybody have a question? That's all said in fun, you understand how it... Good. The question is, could our Lord be looking forward to the resurrection in the light of that statement? Yes, that is exactly what I would say because that's part of what he is going to be doing. And that's really what I meant by saying that this is an evening prayer and he prays it as an evening prayer and he commits himself to the Father for what lies ahead.

And the resurrection, of course, is the immediate thing that lies ahead. I was not going to be disappointed, Gerald. I knew that you would have some questions.

So fire away. I'm going to make you dare to answer it. Go ahead.

I'm always afraid of these questions he asks. And would not have died unless he voluntarily gave up his life. Well of course, we would have to say that because our Lord is a divine person.

And because of his divine personality, there has to be that element of voluntariness in his death. But he did possess a human nature. And part of the capabilities of human nature is death.

And so he was, you know, the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews in the second chapter mentions that he was for a time made subject to death or for the suffering of death. And so part of his humiliation was to take a body in which he could die. So that is a potential thing.

But no, death would not have, could not have taken him unless there was acquiescence. Because of his divine personality. It was impossible that he should be holden of death.

Well, I don't think it's so much sovereign and responsibility as it is sovereignty, the sovereignty of God and human activity. Working, working together. Human responsibility results from this, yes.

In fact, the death of our Lord is traceable to the Father. Remember? He said, thou hast brought me into the dust of death. And in Isaiah chapter fifty-three, what was the passage, what, what does it say there? Someone quickly.

About verse eight or nine. Yes. And it is verse ten.

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. And so our Lord's death is traceable to himself, it is traceable to the Father, and it is traceable to wicked men. So they all conspired together.

I hate to use that term in reference to the Son and the Father, and that really is probably not the proper term, but they all were involved in it. Not subject to death, but capable of dying. Yeah, that's right.

That's why I said capable of dying. In other words, it is part of the capability of human nature to die. The evidence of it, of course, is man has died.

The text that I had referenced to is Hebrews chapter two and verse eight and nine. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Yes, sir? Would you repeat that again, because I'm not quite sure I understand what you mean.

I know, of course, you said that the death of our Lord was the defeat of Satan. OK. Yes, all right.

Yes. No, I don't think it has anything to do with Satan in that sense. The reason that our Lord overcame Satan and the way in which he overcame Satan was related to what you were saying right at the beginning.

Satan's hold upon man is a hold that is related to the sin of man. And so when our Lord offered the sacrifice that makes the payment for sin, then those who were held by sin now are able to escape from Satan. So it is by virtue of what our Lord accomplished when he died on the cross that Satan now is no longer able to have authority over those who have believed in the law of Jesus.

And Satan's authority, remember, is a delegated authority to begin with, because we do not believe in Christianity and a dualism of two eternal principles of Satan and...or persons as Satan and God. But Satan is under the sovereignty of God. But he apparently has delegated authority by virtue of man's sin.

Man has given himself into the hands of Satan by virtue of his sin. But when our Lord came and paid the price for sin, we are delivered from our jailer, so to speak. A legal release has been...the basis of a legal release has been offered, and thus we escape from Satan, and he is defeated in that sense.

I don't think it has anything to do with Satan. Satan is an angelic being and does not have a body, and the things that pertain to the human body don't really pertain to him at all. One final question.

Yes, sir. Does human nature presuppose the capability of sin? Yes, in Jesus' name. Our Lord's human nature...yes, our Lord's human nature is human nature just as your human nature and my human nature.

The same. And in human nature, there is the potential for sin. The evidence for that is clearly Adam's sin.

The potential was there. Now, in our Lord's case, however, he was a divine person. And being a divine person who took to himself human nature, the human nature that he took to himself, now being united with a divine personality, partakes of the strength of the divine nature.

And thus our Lord was impeccable. He could not sin. But his human nature, taken by itself, was the same as ours.

Now, you know, various illustrations have...and they never completely satisfy, but various illustrations have been given by theologians to explain the impeccability of Christ. And one of the most effective, I think, is the illustration that Professor Shedd used. He spoke of a steel beam.

And that was to represent the divine personality of our Lord. And it's impossible, he would suppose, it's impossible for anybody to break a steel beam. But then we were...if we also presuppose by the side of it a thin piece of iron wire, it's quite easy to break that.

But...and that represents, of course, the human nature of our Lord. Now, if we take the human nature of our Lord, unite the human nature to divine person, it is the same as if we are to take the easily breakable iron wire and wrap it around the steel beam, and then try to break the iron wire. And of course it cannot be done, because the strength of the steel beam is now the strength of the iron wire.

And so likewise, in our Lord's case, and only by analogy, being a divine person, he could not sin. But his human nature itself, taken as it was, was exactly like ours. Our Lord Jesus was temptable because he possessed a human nature, but he was impeccable.

He could not sin. That doesn't mean he did not sin. That's sinlessness.

Of course, all believe that. But some who believe he did not sin, believe he could have sinned. But I think the Bible doctrine is rather, our Lord was temptable, and not peccable, but impeccable.

He could not sin, by virtue of the union of the nature with the divine. Yes, sir. Well, I don't think it is related to that for this reason.

If our Lord does not possess... Now, I'm not sure I heard exactly what you said. Would you repeat it again? I was just kind of... Well, he did have direct lineage to Adam. But that is, yes, that is expressed in Scripture, of course.

So he has a complete human nature, and it is as our human nature, apart from sin. So, no, I think that otherwise you could attack the incarnation of our Lord and say it was not a true incarnation, which is what many of the docetists did in the early church. They claimed that our Lord was not really a human being, and the apostles attacked that doctrine.

No, he possessed human nature just as ours, but he was preserved. His human nature was preserved from sin by the action of the Holy Spirit, according to Luke chapter 1, verse 34 and 35. So it was by virtue of the miracle of the virgin conception that our Lord's human nature was preserved from sin.

Well, our time is up. Let's close with a word of prayer. Father, we are thankful to thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures.

We ask thy blessing upon us as we part, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/27/SID27695.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/s-lewis-johnson/the-finished-work-of-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net