

The Perfect Love
Sermon for Good Friday
April 10, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Let us pray: “Lord, have mercy upon us, O Christ, have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy peace. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text this evening is recorded in the Gospel according to St. John, the 19th chapter, verses 28-30, “Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture, “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished,” and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. This is the Gospel of the Lord. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

“It is finished.” In the original language that the Bible was written, “It is finished” is actually one word: “tetelestai.” “Tetelestai” was a word that was connected to the idea of paying off a debt. Archeologists have uncovered many scraps of paper and papyrus that were first century bills, or bank notes. And at the bottom, if that bill was paid or that debt was paid off, you would find the word “tetelestai,” “it is finished.”

The matter has been resolved perfectly—by a perfect Savior—given with perfect love. This Good Friday evening we are going to use the verses of a little hymn to guide our meditation upon the death of the Son of God for us sinners. It is printed on page five of your service order, if you have opened that from our web site and are following along. If you have hymnal, it is number 452. The title is *O Perfect Life of Love*.

The first verse goes like this: “O perfect life of love! All, all, is finished now, All that He left His throne above to do for us below.” Jesus’ live for us was a perfect life of love. Perfection is, by definition, “The condition, state, or quality of being free or as free as possible from all flaws or defects.” The dictionary definition is revealing. Did you catch it? “The condition, state, or quality of being free or *as free as possible* from all flaws or defects.” If something is *as free as possible* it means that we allow it is not possible, yet we still want to call it perfect if it gets as close. That doesn’t work with God. God’s Word tells us, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (James 2:10).

It’s not just our failures to perfectly do what God wants us to do and our failures to perfectly avoid what God hates—and that is sin, you and I are conceived and born into spiritual debt, because people are conceived and born into sin. When you come into this world, you are born with a sinful nature, which means that spiritually, you are already “in the red.” And then, as you live your life, you commit more and more and more sins – you do things you’re not supposed to, you say things you’re not supposed to say, and you think things that you really shouldn’t be thinking. All these things are sins, and the more you sin, the more debt you pile up. And you can’t pay it off.

But Jesus had a perfect life of love for us. And all, all is finished now in His death, for He came to save us from our sins. Only perfection could measure up to God. Jesus measured up for us. It is finished. Our debt is paid. Tetelestai. It is finished.

The second verse of the hymn further speaks of Jesus’ perfection for us: “No work is left

undone Of all the Father willed; His toil, His sorrows, one by one, the Scriptures have fulfilled.” Jesus perfectly did everything His heavenly Father willed. He did it all for us. We didn’t deserve it. We certainly could never earn it. Rather Jesus took our place and completed the saving work. He was a man of sorrows because He took all of our sorrows. By His wounds we are healed.

Jesus perfectly did it all for us. Verse three of the hymn: “No pain that we can share But He has felt its smart; All forms of human grief and care Have pierced that tender heart.” Jesus knows your grief and your losses which come because of sin. Jesus died on that cross so that you and I may be comforted by His constant presence. When you feel like no one knows how you feel and maybe even that no one cares how you feel in the dark moments of life, Jesus knows. Jesus’ tender heart was pierced as He carried that load for you. He was abandoned by His Father on the cross so that you can be certain that you will never be abandoned. He loves you perfectly.

Our certainty of God’s love for us through Jesus is expressed in verse four of the hymn, “And on His thorn-crowned head And on His sinless soul Our sins in all their guilt were laid That He might make us whole.” Your debt was paid. And that’s why Jesus said, “tetelestai,” or “it is finished.” You never have to wonder, “What do I owe God? How do I pay for the sins I’ve committed in my life?” You never have to worry about that – Jesus paid for all those sins when he hung on the cross. “Is there anything left for me to do, to make myself right with God?” The answer is no. Everything has been finished. Every ounce of suffering that we owe God – it’s all been paid in full. You are right with God. There’s nothing that stands between you and God. He loves you, He forgives you, and He has a place for you in heaven. And it’s all because of Jesus, who paid your debt in full.

Verse five of the hymn reminds us *how* this forgiveness and certainty comes into our possession: “In perfect love He died; For me He dies, for me. O all-atoning Sacrifice, I cling by faith to Thee.” Jesus perfect love, His perfect sacrifice for your sins is yours by faith. All that Jesus has done is His gift to you. God has given you faith to receive the gift of Jesus’ perfect Sacrifice. You can be sure, as the hymn-writer says, “For me He dies, for me.”

With this certainty, with this gift of Jesus’ perfect, loving sacrifice in your place you and I can, as our 2nd Bible reading tonight said, “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” The hymn declares this truth in verse six: “In ev’ry time of need, Before the judgment throne, Thy work, O lamb of God, I’ll plead, Thy merits, not mine own.” This is why we pray, “Lord, have mercy.” We pray not based on how good we are, but because Jesus has opened the way for us by paying for our sins. We are accepted and we are welcomed into God’s presence in our every time of need. What need do you have right now? These are dark times for us all, even fearful times. St. John writes and reminds us that “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). God holds you and cares for you with His perfect love! God promises you, on account of Jesus, that He is “able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).

Hope abounds because of Jesus our Savior! Because we have hope we live each day in love for all that He has done for us and all that is ours because of Him, even heaven itself is open! So verse seven of the hymn, “Yet work, O Lord in me As Thou for me hast wrought; And let my love the answer be To grace Thy love has brought.” I hope you have noticed the perfection language that fills almost every verse of this short hymn. Jesus has done it all to save us with perfect love, He fulfilled all Scripture for us, He has carried all our sins and all our pains and all

our griefs and cares. He stands beside us in every time of need. There is only one thing left undone—our lives for Him!

St. Paul stood in awe and wonder while pondering the sacrificial love of Jesus and He wrote to the Corinthians, “For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again”

(2 Corinthians 5:14-15). How do we live for Jesus? Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commands” (John 14:15).

Our love for Jesus expressed in loving lives that honor Him and gladly do what He wills is all that is left undone. Clinging to our Savior and His perfect love “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). Amen.

Please join me in singing “O Perfect Life of Love.”

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1 O per - fect life of love! All, all, is fin - ished now,
 2 No work is left un - done Of all the Fa - ther willed;
 3 No pain that we can share But He has felt its smart;
 4 And on His thorn - crowned head And on His sin - less soul
 5 In per - fect love He dies; For me He dies, for me.



All that He left His throne a - bove To do for us be - low.
 His toil, His sor - rows, one by one, The Scrip - tures have ful - filled.
 All forms of hu - man grief and care Have pierced that ten - der heart.
 Our sins in all their guilt were laid That He might make us whole.
 O all - a - ton - ing Sac - ri - fice, I cling by faith to Thee.

- 6 In ev'ry time of need,
 Before the judgment throne,
 Thy work, O Lamb of God, I'll plead,
 Thy merits, not mine own.
- 7 Yet work, O Lord, in me
 As Thou for me hast wrought;
 And let my love the answer be
 To grace Thy love has brought.