

What Did Jesus Christ Mean When He Said, “It is finished” (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.” (John 19:30)

One of the last words of Jesus Christ on the cross was the victory cry, “It is finished!” What exactly did He mean when He said those words? In order to answer this frequently asked question, we shall look at the finished work of salvation that was accomplished by Jesus Christ and what that means to all of us today.

Essentially, Jesus Christ meant 3 things when He said, “It is finished”:

1. Salvation is Finished
2. Salvation is Forever
3. Salvation is Freely Available

1. Salvation is Finished

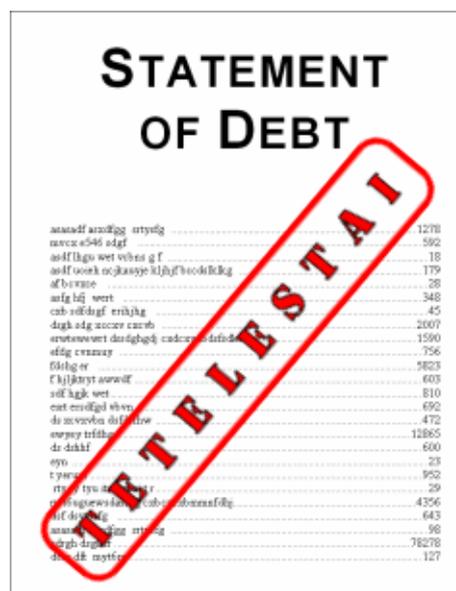
In English, it is 3 words – “*It is finished*”

In Bahasa Indonesia, it is 2 words – “*Sudah selesai*”

However, in order to understand what Jesus Christ really meant, we need to look at the original language that He used (this is an important principle in Biblical interpretation).

In the original Greek, Jesus Christ used only 1 word – “*Tetelestai*”

The Greek word, “*Tetelestai*”, is a common accounting term which means, “**Paid in Full**”. It was a familiar word used by merchants to mean that a debt had been fully paid, i.e. **no further payment needed**.



It is Finished!

Hence, when Jesus Christ used the word, *“Tetelestai”*, the people clearly understood it to mean that He had paid for “something” in full with no further payment needed.

What was the “something” that Jesus Christ had paid for in full? The “something” was our debt of sin which we could never pay for on our own. On the cross, Jesus Christ took all our sins upon Himself and paid for every single one of them. As man, He suffered for our sins; but as God, He paid for our sins.

After paying for the very last sin, Jesus Christ said, *“Tetelestai!”*, or literally translated, **“Paid in Full!”** He was saying that he had paid in full the price of all our sins. His mission *“to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10) was accomplished. He had *“finished the work”* (John 17:4) which God the Father had given Him to do. **The work of salvation was finished! Sin had been completely paid for!**

What does the finished work of salvation that was accomplished by Jesus Christ mean to all of us today? Many people have a wrong idea of salvation simply because they do not understand that salvation is finished. Thus it is vital to understand this truth because it has direct implications for us today.

Salvation is finished means that:

a. Salvation is not an instalment plan

Jesus Christ did not pay for **some** of our sins and then require us to pay for **the rest**. He paid it **ALL!**

1 John 1:7b tells us that *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from **all** sin.”* The word, *“all”*, in this verse refers to **our past, present and future sins**.

Jesus Christ did not say, *“I have only paid for your past and present sins. As for your future sins, you have to pay for them yourself.”* If so, nobody would ever be saved!

Jesus Christ said, *“Tetelestai!”* With that, we can have the confidence that the payment for our sins is complete. He paid for all our sins (including our future sins).

How could Jesus Christ have paid for our future sins which have not even been committed? We need to remember that Jesus Christ died on the cross about 2,000 years ago, before any of us was born. All of our sins (including our past and present sins) were actually future sins at the time of His death. Hence, Jesus Christ was paying for future sins when He died on the cross. He saw every one of our sins which had not been committed and paid for all of them.

Now, if the payment for our sins is complete, is there anything left for us to pay? Absolutely not! Yet there are many people who mistakenly think that salvation is like an instalment plan, with His death on the cross as the **“downpayment”** for sin and their own efforts as **“instalment payments”**. They see believing in Him as **“step 1”** in getting them to Heaven, and depending on other things as **“subsequent steps”** to make sure that they get to Heaven, e.g. good works, religious activities, etc.

“*Tetelestai*” implies that something has been paid for and that you never have to pay for it again. In fact, if something has already been paid for, it would be foolish to try to pay for it again.

Today, many people are still trying to pay for their sins when Jesus Christ has already paid it all. If there is something else that we still need to do to add to what Jesus Christ has already done for us, then salvation is not “*tetelestai*”, i.e. He did not pay for our sins in full. If this were true, it would mean that the work of salvation is not finished. It would mean that salvation is not “*sudah selesai*”, but “*belum selesai*”, which would make Jesus Christ a liar!

Religion says, “**DO.**” True Christianity says, “**DONE.**”

b. Jesus Christ does not need your help to save you

Salvation is by grace through **faith alone** (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8,9). As we have learnt in Frequently Asked Question 8, **true saving faith is DEPENDING on JESUS CHRIST ALONE to save you from your sins.**

True saving faith is NOT depending on **JESUS CHRIST + SOMETHING ELSE** (e.g. Bible knowledge, good works, religious activities, etc.), but depending on **JESUS CHRIST + NOTHING ELSE (i.e. JESUS CHRIST ALONE).**

Hence, salvation is **FAITH WITHOUT WORKS**. When we think that works are necessary for salvation, we are telling Jesus Christ that His work of salvation is not finished, and that He needs our help to complete the work of salvation. But Jesus Christ certainly does NOT need our help to save us!

However, in order to avoid confusion, salvation is **FAITH THAT PRODUCES WORKS**. A person with true saving faith will produce works in his life as a **result of his faith**. He does not do good works to save himself, but he does good works as an **expression of his faith** so as to please God. The works that he does are an outflow of his relationship with Jesus Christ and are fruit of his salvation (John 15:8; Galatians 5:22,23; Ephesians 2:10; James 2:17,18).

2. Salvation is Forever

“*Tetelestai*” is in the perfect tense in Greek. It is used to describe a past action which has continuing effects in the present. It is different from the past tense which looks back to an event and says, “*This happened.*” The perfect tense has the idea that “*this happened and it is still in effect today*”.

Hence, when Jesus Christ used the word, “*Tetelestai*”, He was saying, “***It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!***”

This is clearly described in the Book of Hebrews which tells us that Jesus Christ died **one time and for all time:**

*“By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**...But this Man, after He had offered **one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God...For by **one offering** He has perfected **forever** those who are being sanctified.”* (Hebrews 10:10,12,14)

Salvation is not a temporary work. Salvation is forever. Many people do not have assurance of salvation simply because they do not understand that salvation is forever.

Salvation is forever means that:

a. You cannot lose your salvation

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me **has everlasting life**.”* (John 6:47)

*“And I give them **eternal life**, and they **shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand**. My Father, who has given them to Me, is **greater than all**; and **no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand**.”* (John 10:28,29)

Jesus Christ assures us that the moment we believe in Him, we **have (i.e. possess) everlasting life**. What does it mean to have everlasting life? If Jesus Christ said to you, *“I forgive you and give you salvation that lasts for a hundred trillion years,”* would that be everlasting life? No, everlasting life has no end. It lasts forever. You cannot stop having everlasting life, i.e. you cannot lose everlasting life. If you can lose everlasting life, then it is not everlasting!

The believer’s salvation in Jesus Christ is secure. Salvation cannot be lost. Once you place your faith in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, you are eternally safe in His hand and *“shall never perish”* in Hell. God is *“greater than all”* (including us, our biggest sins and even the devil) and nothing and nobody can cause a believer to lose his salvation. **Once saved, always saved!**

b. You only need to receive Jesus Christ once

Once you have everlasting life, you have it forever. Hence, you do not need to keep asking Jesus Christ to save you. To think you need to indicates that you do not believe that salvation is forever. Many people think that they have to receive Jesus Christ over and over again, especially after they have sinned, because they think that their salvation can be lost due to sin.

Once you are a child of God, you are forever a child of God. Your sin does not affect God’s **relationship** with you (i.e. your status as a child of God does not change), but it affects your **fellowship** with God (i.e. your communion with God is affected).

When you sin, you do not need to receive Jesus Christ again or ask Him to save you again because your salvation was never lost and will never be lost. You simply need to ask for His forgiveness to restore your fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9).

3. Salvation is Freely Available

*“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, **the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom**; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,” (Matthew 27:50,51)*



Before the death of Jesus Christ, there was only one way a person could come to God. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would represent the people and enter into a special place in the Temple of God called the Holy of Holies to offer a sacrifice to God for their sins. There was a veil which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. **The veil represented a barrier between God and man due to sin.** Because of man’s sins, nobody except the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, which represented the presence of God. Thus when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he was representing the people to enter into the presence of God. Using the blood of animals, he would offer a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He opened *“a new and living way”* (Hebrews 10:20) to God. After He cried, *“Tetelestai!”*, *“the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”*. **The tearing of the veil signified that the barrier between God and man due to sin was broken.** Man did not need a human High Priest to represent him anymore. Jesus Christ became the new High Priest. There was now free access to God through Jesus Christ. The way was now open for man to enter into the presence of God personally through Jesus Christ.

Today, salvation is freely available to us! Sin has separated us from God, but we are *“reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (Romans 5:10). Because of the finished work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ, we can now enter into a personal relationship with God through Him (John 14:6; Romans 6:23).