

**Romans 6:1-11**

**John 19:16-30**

**August 11, 2019**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

***All In God's Time***  
**A PERFECT FINISH**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

He pitched in the Major Leagues for fourteen years and had a career record of 81-91. Were it not for his perfect finish in Game Five of the 1956 World Series, Don Larsen of the New York Yankees might not be remembered today. In Game Two three days earlier, Larsen lasted two innings as the Yankees lost to the Dodgers 13-8. On October 8, however, Larsen needed only ninety-seven pitches to retire the entire Dodgers line-up in the first perfect game in major league baseball postseason history. In case you don't know, a perfect game happens when a pitcher faces the minimum twenty-seven batters and not one reaches base — no hits, no walks, no errors. Larsen retired future Hall-of-Famers Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, and Roy Campanella. There have only been twenty-three perfect games in Major League Baseball history.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1972 National Football League Season, the Miami Dolphins finished the regular season undefeated with a 14-0 record. They extended their undefeated season by winning three playoff games, including Super Bowl VII when they beat the Washington Redskins. Their 17-0 record makes them the only NFL team to have a perfect finish, undefeated and untied.<sup>2</sup>

On August 3, 1984, in Pauley Pavilion in Los Angeles, sixteen year old Mary Lou Retton stuck her landings on her floor exercise and vault. She needed a perfect score of 10.0 to win the gold medal and she did it. She was the U.S. woman gymnast to win the individual all-around gymnastics gold medal. Many people do not know that six weeks earlier, she had undergone arthroscopic knee surgery. Her score of 10.0 was the perfect finish. However, she wasn't the first gymnast to score a perfect 10.0. On July 18, 1976, Nadia Comaneci, only fourteen years old, displayed perfection in her uneven bars performance. But when her score flashed on the screen, it read 1.0. There was lots of confusion, until the crowd began cheering as they realized she had actually scored 10.0. The scoreboard was not designed to display a score higher than 9.9 because no one had ever scored a 10.0. She went on to achieve seven perfect 10.0's in the Summer Olympics.<sup>3</sup>

“A Perfect Finish” — rare and significant and memorable. “A Perfect Finish” — that's how I'm describing the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death in John 19. “A Perfect Finish” — that's what Jesus accomplished when he said “It is finished,” bowed his head, and gave up his spirit. As exciting as a perfectly pitched World Series game, an undefeated NFL season, and a record-shattering gymnastics score of 10.0 are, they pale in comparison to the perfect finish on The Place of the Skull, Golgotha.

In 1787, composer Joseph Haydn was commissioned by a priest in Cádiz to write music for a Good Friday service to accompany the reading of the seven last words of Jesus on the cross. According to Haydn's own words in the preface to the 1801 edition, the priest would read one of Christ's words, make comments on that word, then kneel before the altar. Haydn's music was played as the priest knelt. Haydn wrote, "My composition was subject to these conditions, and it was no easy task to compose seven adagios lasting ten minutes each, and to succeed one another without fatiguing the listeners; indeed, I found it quite impossible to confine myself to the appointed limits." The priest who commissioned the original work paid Haydn with a cake. When the composer cut the cake, it found it was filled with gold coins.<sup>4</sup>

Many churches use some form of "The Seven Last Words of Christ" during the Season of Lent or on Good Friday. The seven last words of Christ on the cross are:

1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)
2. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)
3. "Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother." (John 19:26-27)
4. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)
5. "I am thirsty." (John 19:28)
6. "It is finished." (John 19:30)
7. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Although they are #6 on the list, Jesus' words "It is finished" are the last words he speaks from the cross in John's gospel. The three English words "It is finished" translate one Greek word,

## ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ

The word is a form of a Greek verb that means "make perfect, make complete, finish, accomplish, fulfill." The particular form used in John's story of Jesus' crucifixion and death is what we call the third person singular perfect indicative middle/passive.

When I was doing my graduate work in biblical studies, I had a professor who cautioned us against hanging too much theology on any one particular grammatical construction. However, in this case, the one word — *tetelestai* - seems perfectly (pun intended!) capable of doing just that. In New Testament Greek, the perfect tense is used to describe an action that has taken place in the past (for example, Jesus died on the cross) that continues to have results in the present (in this case, salvation and freedom from sin).

So, when Jesus says from the cross, "It is finished," he means more than simply "My life is coming to an end. I am dying." Instead, Jesus means "My work is finished." In fact, John tells us that very thing just two verses earlier, when he writes, "After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished . . ." (John 19:28)

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus mentions the work he was sent to do, which is now finished on the cross.

\* In John 4, when his disciples urged Jesus to eat something, he told them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." The disciples were puzzled, and thought someone had already given him something to eat. Jesus told them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work." (John 4:31-34)

\* In John 5:36, Jesus says, "But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me."

\* And in his prayer the night before he died, Jesus said to God, "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed." (John 17:4-5)

When Jesus' hour finally came, he knew his work was finished, and he was obedient unto death — even death on a cross. So he said, "It is finished."

"It is finished." That certainly sounds like the end, maybe even a resounding defeat. From the world's point of view, a man hanging on a cross with his head bowed in death doesn't present a picture of victory or strength. And, as we know all too well, death feels final. Listen to two reflections on Jesus' death that were written by Rev. Roddy Hamilton, pastor of the New Kilpatrick Parish Church in the Church of Scotland. The first is called "Reflection" —

*and so it is done  
love is crushed  
and the world has got away with it  
the light seems paler  
the air thinner  
the birds quieter  
the shadows longer  
the wine more bitter  
the bread dry  
and the path doesn't seem to go anywhere now*

The second writing is called "Endings" —

*When the alleluias fall silent  
and the story comes to a stop  
and the words fade out mid-sentence  
and even the stones keep quiet*

*and those who still find there is something to say  
shout for the wrong side*

*then you know  
the Lord of Life  
has finished the parable  
with one final sentence  
“It is finished”*

*and the tragedy bows its final bow in the world  
and is entombed*

*all that remains  
is the fear  
that we may never find our voices again  
and we will forget  
how to speak of love  
now the word  
has been silenced  
and the story  
run out of endings<sup>5</sup>*

But, you see, it's a perfect finish, which means the finish isn't the end at all. Jesus' final word in John — “It is finished” — is a victory cry. Someone has called Jesus' word — “It is finished” — his last sermon which sums up the entire gospel message of God's love. And his resurrection three days later was God's “Amen!” to the sermon!

Remember that the Greek perfect tense means that an event in the past continues to have results in the present. And so it is with Christ's death on the cross when he finished the work God sent him to do. Romans 6 is something of a commentary by the apostle Paul on the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross for your life and mine. Paul's words are a perfect reflection of “It is finished.”

Jesus Christ died on the cross . . .

Christ Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father . . .

We have been buried with him by baptism into death . . .

So we too might walk in newness of life . . .

If we have died with Christ . . .

We believe that we will also live with him . . .

The death he died, he died to sin, once for all . . .

The life he live, he lives to God . . .

We must consider ourselves dead to sin . . .

And alive to God in Christ Jesus.

And that, my friends, is a perfect finish!

***Let us pray: Almighty God, look with mercy on your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and to be given over to the hands of sinners and to suffer death on the cross. Help us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to you in Christ Jesus. Amen.***

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Craig Muder, “Don Larsen Defined World Series Perfection,” at [www.baseballhall.org](http://www.baseballhall.org).

<sup>2</sup> “1972 Miami Dolphins Season,” at [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org).

<sup>3</sup> “100 Greatest Moments in Sports History: Summer Olympics, An American 10,” at [www.si.com](http://www.si.com) and “Perfect 10 (gymnastics)” at [www.en.m.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.m.wikipedia.org).

<sup>4</sup> “The Seven Last Words of Christ (Haydn),” at [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org).

<sup>5</sup> Roddy Hamilton: “Reflection” posted on [www.nkchurch.org.uk](http://www.nkchurch.org.uk) and found on [www.re-worship.blogspot.com](http://www.re-worship.blogspot.com). “Endings” posted on [www.nkchurch.org.uk](http://www.nkchurch.org.uk) and found on [www.re-worship.blogspot.com](http://www.re-worship.blogspot.com).