

## **REFORMATION500 SERMON SERIES**

**October 2017**

### **Reformation500 CHRIST ALONE**

John 19:30

Leo Douma

29/10/2017



Years ago, a Catholic friend of mine wanted to pray for me. But they were a bit confused because they didn't know which saint to pray to. Today they would be helped with the internet. The Catholic Community Forum answers the question 'How do you know which saint to pray to?' Another site provides model prayers to the saints. For example, 'O Saint Anthony! Saint of Miracles! Saint of Help! I, also have need of your assistance; I have a need of this special favour... [mention the favour] ... I carry your image with your illustrious name and I invoke you to do justice for me at all times. Help me in my present and urgent petition: ... [say your request] ... Saint Anthony, Saint of Miracles, pray for us.'

These examples take us to the heart of the issue of the fourth idea of the Reformation: 'Christ Alone'. The Reformers argued that Jesus is the sole mediator between God and us. The Roman Catholic Church taught that 'there is a purgatory and that the souls there detained are helped by the intercessions of the faithful' and that 'saints are to be venerated and invoked'. In other words, they help in paying the debt for sin. The Reformers said No! Salvation is by Christ's work alone. Our statement of faith, the Heidelberg Catechism asks: "Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only saviour Jesus? No. Although they boast of being his, by their deeds they deny the only Saviour and deliverer, Jesus. Either Jesus is not a perfect saviour, or those who in true faith accept this saviour have in him all they need for their salvation.' So, the Reformers said Christ alone saves. We don't need saints to help us or spend time in purgatory or battle with being good enough. Jesus, and Jesus alone, has done it all for us. This was the key point that Thomas Cranmer made clear as a key figure in the Reformation in England in the time of King Henry VIII.

The issue of Christ Alone is seen clearly in John 19:30. At one stage, while on the cross, Jesus says "It is finished!" It may seem odd, but here on the cross Jesus makes his most excited statement during his entire time on earth. In the Greek it is a one-word exclamation 'Tetelestai!' Done! Completed! This is a shout of jubilation. What Jesus says

is not the groan of a person giving up: 'I am finished, I've had enough'. The crowd at the cross might have expected such a groan. After all, just before this Jesus had let out that violent scream, complaining of God forsaking him. And then Jesus had croaked a complaint of being thirsty. No one would have been surprised if Jesus had groaned: 'I am finished. I can't go on.' But it is not like that. This is a cry of joy: 'Father it's been done'. There is excitement in the voice of Jesus. It's a taste of victory, that the decisive battle has been fought.

One commentator said that the one Greek word, 'tetelestai' is the greatest word ever spoken in all of history. This word is filled with meaning. When uttered by Jesus it terrified hell and sent a thrill running through heaven. It means 'all has been done that needed to be done. Nothing more is needed.' People in the first century would have understood the word because it was used in many ways. A Jewish farmer used it to describe an animal so beautiful that it seemed to have no faults. If he brought that lamb to the temple for sacrifice, the priest would look at it and say 'Tetelestai! What a perfect animal you are offering to God!' A carpenter, after finishing a perfect piece of furniture would smile and say 'Tetelestai!' An artist, putting on his finishing touch would step back and pronounce, 'Tetelestai!' A servant would return to his master after finishing his job and report 'Tetelestai- Done! I have finished the work you gave me to do'. And, perhaps most importantly, this Greek word was a banking term. When a person had paid off his debt, the banker would hand him a receipt with the word 'Tetelestai' written across it: 'Paid in full'. So, you get the sense of this word. It is finished. There are no defects. It is perfect. The job has been performed exactly to the specifications. The debt is fully paid. [x]

So, what has Jesus finished? Has all Jesus' saving work been completed? No, at this point on the cross he has yet to rise from the dead and return to heaven. He has yet to pour out his Spirit and rule from his father's right hand. Has the full plan of God been completed? No, not really. Such will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to judge all creation and Jesus presents the kingdom to his father in its final glory. Then God's plan will be fully completed. Has Jesus suffering and humiliation been finished? No, Jesus has yet to die and be buried. Well, then, what is finished? The torment of hell, the payment, the suffering of the penalty for sin that is over. Now, you notice that Jesus does not say 'I have finished'. There is not just personal relief here. Jesus says, "It is finished". Jesus himself is not the subject of this statement. It's more about God's plan. The task that God the father had given him is central here. Jesus as the obedient servant has carried out the will of the loving father. Jesus' joy is that, in this moment his suffering has fulfilled the eternal plan of God to bring reconciliation. No more suffering, ever, needs to be done to pay for the sin of those who come in faith.

Jesus was thirty-three when he was crucified. When people die young they usually leave behind a lot of unfinished business. Many might think that at thirty-three years of age, and only three years in his ministry, surely Jesus' work on earth had just begun. Yet John writes (19:28), "Later, knowing that all was now completed (tetelestai) and so that the scriptures would be fulfilled..." That's why Jesus jubilated "It is finished". Scripture is completed. Someone once counted the number of promises there are in the Bible; more than 300. And there are also more than 300 prophecies about the Messiah which had also at this point been completed. Not only the prophecies but the whole sacrificial system pointed to what Jesus had just finished on the cross. The book of Leviticus describes the system that involved offering animals to be sacrificed. The Law was very specific. There could be no unblemished animals. They had to be perfect. The priest spent a good part of every day killing animals and splashing the blood on the altar. He did this day after day, week after week, month after month. The work of priests was never done because people kept sinning. But now Jesus can triumphantly say "It is finished". Jesus was the perfect, completely sinless sacrifice. His suffering of hell has paid the price in full. Never, ever again was there, is there, a need for sacrifices for sin. Jesus has done it all.

Now, there are some implications when we say, 'Christ alone'. If Jesus suffering that makes atonement for sin, then he is the only way to be right with God. As he said (John 14:16) "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father but through me". But how does that play out in a post-modern world where all religions are seen as valid. 'You have your religion, I have my religion'. To say Christ alone is regarded as being very arrogant. Many have openly, and angrily, said so. Is Jesus just one of the many approaches to God? Well, no because he is the only one who has paid for sin. If we are going to be 'Hope in the Hills' and provide hope, then we must maintain the Reformational idea of 'Christ alone'. That's not something we say in arrogance. We don't shove our ideas onto others. We say it to be gracious and loving because we know that Jesus is our only hope.

But if that is truly the case, we should live in a way that demonstrates the truth of what we believe. Christ alone means that Jesus is the key focus of our lives. It means we look to him as our friend, our brother, our saviour, our hope and hero, our God whom we love and worship with all we have. If we believe in Christ alone, we will seriously look to having an ongoing personal relationship with him. So, let's be open to his speaking to us through his Word and Spirit. Let's (Hebrews 4:16) "...boldly approach the throne of grace...and find grace to help us..." The greatest privilege God gives us is the freedom to approach him at any time. We don't need to go through the saints or Mary to speak

with Jesus. We will strive to grow up spiritually and become mature just like he is. We will do that, so people can see the humility and gentleness of Jesus that has brought us forgiveness and hope.

Christ alone means that Jesus is the ultimate answer to everything. He is our saviour, and also the Lord of all. So how we do our work, how we relate to others, how we care for the environment and issues of justice, are all issues where we strive with our utmost to do as Jesus would. In all of this we demonstrate hope to the hills communities. We are saying that in Christ alone, all has been done for God to deal with the curse of sin in our lives and on the creation. So that guarantees that in time Jesus will come and restore the creation. He will restore an environment ruined by sin, bring justice to all who have suffered, and recreate the world so it is a place of peace. It will be a place of shalom, where there will be no more crying or mourning or pain. And the tears we might see will only be those of utter joy. This will come about because Jesus has done it all on the cross. Sin has been dealt with. When Jesus said, 'It is finished' he was absolutely correct. Christ has done it and Christ alone.