

Easter: It Is Finished

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Easter Victory for an Anxious Age

Whatever the problem, we are constantly being told we are going to have to save the world. The only problem with this is, we can't.

Because the world has already been saved.

From the cross, Jesus' final cry in the Gospel of John was "it is finished." This was a cry of victory and triumph, not of defeat.

Because the world has already been saved, we don't have to be afraid, and we have all we need.

1. The World has been Saved: Blood and Water

The Greek root of the word for 'it is finished' is *telos*. *Telos* is a goal, purpose or outcome—the *telos* of an acorn is to become an oak tree.

The *telos* of salvific history, the drama of God and humanity, is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And it is finished.

In John 19:28-37, the proclamation of 'it is finished' is mixed in with the images of wine, blood, and water. Jesus turned water into wine (John 2: 1-12), promised living water to a woman at a well (John 4:1-26) and promised any who would follow Him would become a living fountain of God's Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). Blood is an important feature of Jewish religious practice regarding purification and protection.

Jesus' cries out in thirst, not as a failure of a man, but as someone who is going to drink the 'sour wine' of the bitterness of the world to the bottom (see Jeremiah 25:15-17). In His body, that sour wine becomes redemptive blood and flows as living water.

The one who turned water to wine drank the sour wine of wrath and turned it into redemption and life.

In Colossians 1:21-22 Paul writes:

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation..."

On the cross and through the resurrection, the world has been saved.

So don't be afraid.

Jesus can turn bitterness into living water, violence into redemption and death into resurrection life.

And if the world has already been saved, you have all you need.

John sees this moment through the lens of Zechariah chapters 12-13:

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”

– Zechariah 12:10

And, just a few verses later, Zechariah 13:1:

“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”

Jesus is the fountain at the center of Jerusalem predicted by the prophets (Ezekiel 47:1-12). He has enough grace to transform any of us. Later, John will write in a vision:

“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”

– Revelation 22:17-18

The cross is a call to action, a call to come and drink at the fountain of life.

2. The World is Being Saved: Breath

The world still needs our help. But the primary way that media tries to motivate us is through anger, fear, and shame. It's as if those peddling these feelings think that if they can make us angry enough, afraid enough, or ashamed enough, we'll do what needs to be done. We'll make things better.

Have you ever tried to do long division in a tiger's cage?

Yeah, it probably wouldn't work. Because fear, anger and shame can help us see that there's a problem, but they are bad at offering solutions.

It was not fear that had men and women look at birds and want to fly. It was not shame that had men and women look at fish and want to dive. It is not anger that has men and women look at the stars and want to go to them.

And, as we see in John 20:19-23, anger, fear, and shame are not how Jesus wants to motivate his followers either.

In these verses, Jesus sends His disciples into the world the same way He was sent. Which means that the world is being saved, by the Spirit in us.

So don't be afraid.

The classic dichotomy for scripture is not between fear and love or fear and peace, it's between fear and the Spirit. Paul writes in Romans 8:15:

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

Earlier, Paul says that the Spirit is the one who raised Jesus from the dead and that *same power* lives in His followers.

But this power is not there to have us act like ‘everything is sunny’. In Jesus’ greeting in John 20:19-20, He proclaims peace, shows them His scars, and proclaims peace again.

Edward Shillito once wrote a poem called *‘Jesus of the Scars’*:

“The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God’s wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.”

Jesus’ scars are his credentials to speak peace to a hurting world. In the same way, the victory of Easter allows us to proclaim peace not by avoiding pain and darkness, but by going through them.

By saying ‘do not be afraid’ because we’ve faced those fears.

The world is being saved by the Spirit in us, so we have all that we need.

Jesus’ image for the Spirit in John 20:19-23 is breath—rooted in the Hebrew and Greek word for ‘Spirit’ also meaning ‘breath’ or ‘wind’.

God’s very presence is coursing through our veins like oxygen. And, like breath, sometimes to receive the benefits of that revelation we must make our breathing conscious. We must take a moment to dwell on the Spirit’s presence to see His effects. He is always at work and always available, but we need to find ways to remind ourselves that He is with us.

This reminder would change things because, as John writes elsewhere:

“You dear children, are from God and have overcome them [the dark spiritual forces], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

– 1 John 4:4

But this power is not just given to us individually, in giving us the Spirit, God gave us to each other. It is as the community of Christ that we are saving the world through His Spirit.

And if you want to see it happen, take Jesus' advice in John, and make the focus of your work forgiving the world, and not condemning it (John 20:23).

3. The World Will Be Saved: Spring

Mr. Beaver, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, is asked about how Aslan will change the eternal winter Narnia is in. He responds in a rhyme:

“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.¹”

Jesus' victory on the cross puts us in a new age. A new era. Winter has ended, and spring has come. A spring that is just a foretaste of a glorious and eternal summer to begin when He returns.

Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 15:23-26:

“But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Jesus is the first sign of spring, the first cherry blossom to burst on a tree promising more. Like Jesus, we shall be raised from our death into a new life in an everlasting kingdom.

The world will be saved, so don't be afraid.

And, it will be saved, so you have all you need.

Not all tears are equal. Reflexive tears are usually just salt and water, but tears cried for emotional reasons release stress hormones—some of them with toxic proteins. The most stress hormones are released when we cry tears of futility.

Futility is one of the most stressful experiences for a person. It's damaging and disheartening to think that what we do doesn't matter, that we can't change things.²

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

² Gordon Neufeld often references these points, found in William H. Frey and Muriel Langseth, *Crying: The Mystery of Tears* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985) and Ad Vingerhoets, *Why Only Humans Weep: Unravelling the Mysteries of Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

As sure as spring leads to summer, Jesus' resurrection is the promise of the final victory of God. What we do, it really matters. It has eternal significance. And we need to know that.

So Go Out and Be Part of Saving the World

A friend of mine used to lead altar calls by asking:

“Who wants to make a difference in the world, specifically right now?”

As much as I used to make fun of him, Easter asks us that question as well. Jesus has saved the world, is saving it, and will save it.

Do you want to be part of what He is doing?

Discussion Questions

Open Up

The idea of 'victory' in Christianity has a complicated history. How has your tradition viewed the triumph of Jesus on the cross? How do you feel about the idea of the world 'already being saved'?

Dig In

Read **John 19:28-37** a couple times. First, read it just to get a sense of the scene. Then, invite your group to assume a posture of listening to God through the text—looking for a word, image, or idea that God speaks to them through.

- What image, phrase or idea did you get from the text?
- What might God be saying to you or your group tonight?
- Where do you need the reminder that 'it is finished'?

Turn to **John 20:19-23** and give it a read in the same fashion as above.

- Jesus gives the Spirit by breathing on the disciples, what insight do you feel you gain by thinking of the Spirit as 'breath'?
- What would it mean to see our Christian vocation as forgiving the world? How might that change things for you, personally?

Prayer

Feel free to engage in a traditional time of prayer. Or, perhaps, rolling with the image given by Jesus, share your requests with each other and spend some time in silence 'breathing on it'—listening for the Spirit and sharing what He says.