

John 19:30

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“Further up, Further in”

Jesus said, “**It is finished**” (John 19:30). I confess I came to this Scripture Monday morning with a lot of questions. I think it is healthier to have a lot of questions about Scripture than to think I have the whole thing figured out. Too often when we think we have it all figured out we have missed the point all together. Monday morning my questions were, What was finished; the crucifixion; Jesus’ life; the prophecies about the Messiah, the pain Jesus endured; all of it, none of it? What was finished? (**pause**) I wrestled with this verse. I started looking through commentaries by renowned theologians, and that is where I discovered this John Ruskin quote in *The Interpreter’s Bible*.

“Our best finishing is but coarse and blundering work after all. We may smooth, and soften and sharpen till we are sick at heart; but take a good magnifying glass to our miracle of skill, and the invisible edge is a jagged saw, and the silky thread is a rugged cable, and the soft surface a granite desert. ... God alone can finish; and the more intelligent a human mind becomes, the more infiniteness of interval is felt between human and divine work in this respect.”¹

Suddenly this verse came into focus for me. How many of us have things in our lives we want to do? (**raise my hand and pause**) How many of us have things in our lives we have tried to do and failed? (**raise my hand and pause**) How many of us have things we have tried to do – I mean really tried to do, failed at ; and are now haunted by the broken pieces of our shattered dreams? (**pause**) That is a part of our human condition. Some days that part of being a human being really stinks.

Then there is Jesus. Hanging on the cross Jesus had lost everything. Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples. His followers left Him. Jesus was arrested, mocked, beaten, and falsely convicted. Jesus was beaten again, scourged, and crown of thorns was shoved onto His head and Jesus’ nakedness was publicly exposed. Jesus was forced to carry His own cross. Jesus was crucified upon that old rugged cross. Jesus went through all of this so it would be said Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus suffered all these things because that was the price that had to be paid for all of **our** wanton acts of disobedience to God. When it was over Jesus said, “**It is finished.**” It was finished; or was it?

“It is finished,” are the words Jesus uttered on the cross. Then Jesus breathed His last breath and died. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus appeared to the disciples and others for forty days before ascending into heaven (Acts 1:3). The work of fulfilling the prophecies concerning the Messiah were finished (Hosea 6:2). Jesus fulfilled this work and bore the punishments for all of our sins. This work was finished, but the adventure was not over. The poor are still with us. The poor in spirit are still among us. The naked still need to be clothed. The hungry still need to be fed. Children still need protection and guidance. If it was all finished at the cross then when is this work completed? How do we grow closer to God?

I think many of you know I am a fan of C. S. Lewis’ work? There is a phrase in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle* which I’ll share with you now. The phrase is, “further up, and further in.” This week as I considered Jesus’ last words on the cross this phrase kept coming back to me, and I wondered, If it was all finished on the cross why are we even in this place today? If it was finished on the cross why are there churches, Sunday school classes; confirmation classes or Disciple Bible studies? Why do we need the South Davidson Family Resource Center, or feel the need to reach out to kids in school? Or for that matter why is there a book of Acts, or Paul’s

¹ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (Boston: Oldine Book Publishing Co., n.d.), III, 153 found in *The Interpreters Bible*, Vol 8 (Nashville: Abbingdon Press 1952), 785.

letters or the whole of the rest of the New Testament? The reason is the cross is only the end of one journey. Much the same way someone graduates from grade school, but goes on to middle school and then high school. The journey goes on; sometimes straight to work, and sometimes to college. But even those journey's come to an end after college there is work. After work there is vacation, and then back to work. Then one day retirement, and death. (pause) To say this is all there is to life is the same as saying everything finished at the cross. (pause) But it did not end at the cross, did it? There is something more. There is a good deal more.

Here. Try to think about it this way. How many of y'all have ever been to Carrowinds? Let's have a show of hands. When we go my kids start getting excited as soon as they see the first roller coasters over the tree line. Their excitement grows as we enter the parking lot, and they are about bonkers by the time we get through the gate. (pause) That is salvation. Coming all this way and making it through the gate. The journey to get there is finished. Let me ask you church. Who, having driven the nearly two hours to Carrowinds would not go further up and further in to the park? Who wouldn't ride the rides, watch the shows, listen to the music, play the games and eat the food?

You might say coming to the cross of Jesus Christ is like coming through the gates at Carrowinds and heading into the water park. We take off the dry clothes and put on a bathing suit. We put on a new garment because we need a different set of clothes for the water park. Sisters and brothers, there is life to be lived after the cross. There is life to be lived after the moment of salvation. Just as Jesus' ministry didn't end with the cross, our lives are not meant to end the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. There is so much more to this relationship. Prevenient grace brings us to the cross of Jesus Christ. Justifying grace washes us clean of all our sins. Regenerating grace restores us to a place where we can make the choice to choose Christ. Sanctifying grace shows us how to choose Christ. If justification were all there was then why did Jesus talk about more abundant life (John 10:10)?

We must go further up and further in to a journey that has no end. All of our lives up to the point we come to the cross of Jesus Christ has been like the drive to get to Carrowinds. There is still so much left inside. C.S. Lewis described this world as the "shadow world," and what comes next is the true creation – unbroken – a new heaven and a new earth, where we are in God's presence continually. That may be what awaits us after death, but there is tremendous abundance of life to be lived in the here and now. Too many people see the laws and rules of the Old Testament as restrictive. Too many people see the warnings and concerns Paul faces in the New Testament and think, "I don't wanna live that way." (pause) My sisters and brothers they are mistaken. To look at the Law of Moses and the commandments and Paul's correction as something that is too hard and too restrictive is like seeing the roller coasters at Carrowinds from afar off and deciding to turn back before you even make it to the gates of the park. Those who have devoted themselves to the love of God, to traveling further up and further in to a relationship with Jesus Christ are like those who have been to Carrowinds; ridden the rides and discovered something that many other people may never know. It is better to have gone further up and further in to God's love than to have stayed outside the gates and complained. There is more abundant life inside of God's loving grace than we could ever imagine just looking at the roller coasters from the interstate. The same is true of attending church, searching scriptures, being in prayer, participating in Holy Communion, and serving others. Let us not be like those who would refuse to abundance of life Christ has to offer. Let us instead travel further up and further in.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen