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Sermon preached by MR. J. DELVES at "Rehoboth" Chapel, Swindon,
on Sunday evening, 18th May, 1958.

Text: John XIX, v.30.

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."

How sacred are these chapters in the gospel by John, especially from the 14th chapter, where we have those words of the Lord addressed to His disciples, - wonderful words indeed they were! - and following that address, His prayer to His Father that we have read this evening. A wonderful prayer! A separating, searching, confirming prayer! It is noticeable how often the Lord referred to the world and to His dear people, drawing a line of distinction, as it were, between them, that will mark their eternal destiny. Solemn words, where He says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me." O, poor world! What is there in the world for a lost soul, for a needy sinner, for a convinced, guilty, wretch, as he feels in himself when sin is charged home upon his conscience? There is no prayer for the world, but for those given Him by His Father. O, if you and I are in that chapter, we shall get to heaven, as sure as though we were there already; for His prayer prevails, and none can be lost for whom Christ prayed. What a wonderful consideration is this! All are safe there.

Is it not noticeable, too, how He refers to those given Him by His Father? The Father gave them to Christ, a definite number; as He says in the opening of the prayer: "As Thou hast

given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." What a separating line is drawn! And what tremendous issues await every one of us! We have an eternity to spend; you have; I have. O, where, where shall we spend it? And what concern have we as to where we shall spend it? How very faintly at most can we conceive the tremendous issues that await us! We see through a glass darkly at best; but this we are advised, that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Every one of us must appear there one day. We may escape many things, but we shall never escape God. A solemn thought indeed! Our greatest mercy, then, must be to be found in Him; and our greatest calamity will be to be left to perish in our sins.

After that wonderful prayer the dear Redeemer proceeded to Gethsemane, and O, who can conceive what He suffered there? The agony of His soul in Olive's Mount is beyond all words to express; but there He was, an agonizing God, incarnate Deity, groaning, sweating blood under the intolerable load of imputed guilt. He was made sin. A profound word indeed! "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

After the gloomy scene in Gethsemane, the Saviour was apprehended and taken to the judgment hall, and condemned to be crucified. He was delivered to be crucified, and they took Him, and led Him away; and these words that I have read this evening were the Redeemer's words just before He gave up the ghost, when He was suspended upon the cross, and when, as you know, He

suffered the revilings of men, and the darkness for a time covered Him and caused Him to cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" O, we cannot conceive all that is involved in this, but it shows to us just a faint light upon the tremendous cost of our redemption, the cost being the price of His Own most precious blood.

But when the Saviour said, "It is finished," we believe the conflict was over, the darkness dispersed, and that He felt His Father's smile and approbation; the warfare, substantially viewed, was thus accomplished, and He said, "It is finished;" and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. This reference to the Saviour's bowing His head has evidently a sacred significance, indicating His holy subjection to the will of His Father, obedience to the commandment that He received that He lay down His life; so that when all was accomplished, finished, He bowed His head, indicating the voluntary nature of His death. It did not drop through physical exhaustion, but He bowed His head; the work was done; He laid down His life. It shows the power that He possessed to lay down His life and to take it again. And O, here is the foundation of our hope of deliverance from the wrath to come, of deliverance from eternal punishment, deserved wrath, - for that is all we deserve. But if, in the Lord's infinite mercy, we were placed amongst His people, then the curse is borne away, ^{our} ~~are~~ sins are borne away in His Own body on the tree. A humbling consideration, if only we could rightly feel it. One sin would cost us a bitter weeping if we could but feel in any sense the bitterness of it to the Saviour.

But this is repentance; and indeed it is a sweet repentance, too, when it is felt. There is a great difference between repentance and remorse. Remorse is in the power of nature. We may regret having done things because of the consequences of our folly; we may have bitter remorse. Judas had remorse for his sin when he went out and hanged himself. But repentance is very different from this. Repentance is a heavenly grace that Jesus is exalted to give His people for whom He suffered. O, and if you should be favoured by faith to look upon Him and mourn, you will shed the sweetest tears and yet the most bitter tears.

"'Tis not the fear of hell alone,
Though that may prove extreme;
Repenting saints the Saviour own,
And grieve for grieving Him."

When we think of these important matters, we may contemplate the motive that moved the Saviour to come, to undertake the cause of His people with all that was involved in it, and knowing what was involved in it, too. Was it not love in His heart to His people, - everlasting love?

"And why, dear Saviour, tell me why,
Thou thus wouldst suffer, bleed, and die;
What mighty motive could Thee move?
The motive's plain; 'twas all for love."

"For love of whom? Of sinners base,
A hardened herd, a rebel race;
That mocked and trampled on Thy blood,
And wanted with the wounds of God."

O, what amazing love! And this love is the love of the Trinity; and it is the love that His dear people feel, too, when they love Him, in the measure in which that love is felt. Ah, and the nature of it is the same, according to the Lord's Own prayer

when He said, "That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." A profound word, which means that when you feel your poor heart touched with the love of Christ you may know that is Christ's love in you. Indeed it is His love in you, as He said: "Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also." O, it is a great gospel; and yet, O, how hardened are men's hearts against it! -Which shows the deadening nature of sin. But it is a great and a glorious gospel. It will be the joy of ransomed sinners world without end.

Not only was He moved by that mighty motive, but think also of the grace that sustained Him under the awful load of imputed guilt. We cannot conceive of what that was, but this we believe, we trust, that He endured our hell in order that He might give us His heaven. He went down into the depths of hell, as it were, to lift us up from it; He bore the curse, He suffered an equivalent, He was sustained in the deepest depths; and although, as we read in prophecy, He speaks of the floods that overwhelmed Him and the mire into which He sank where there was no standing, as Man, - for though He was almighty God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, - yet as Man, having assumed our nature, He suffered, sustained by divinity's rays. O, what an amazing mystery, and what a glory centres in the cross of Christ! Evidently the apostle felt this when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And it will crucify you. Nothing will crucify a vessel of mercy to the world like a sight by faith of a suffering

Christ. Nothing will do it like this; and nothing will produce such repentance, either. "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for Him." Yes, and when one feels in some measure that his own sins were like to the nails that fastened Him there, O, this will close the mouth against any resentment of God's justice and sovereignty, and His supreme right to do as He will with sinners. Solemn indeed are the words of one who said,

"Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce Thee just in death;
And if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

Have you ever said that? Has the Lord ever brought you to the place of the stopping of mouths, to own Him to be just in His divine sovereignty, even if He condemns you? If He has, I believe you will get to heaven. It is sensible sinners that are brought there, those to whom the Lord designs mercy. O, but the sight of the cross, while it brings home to us a solemn sense of our deserts, opens the mouth, because a door of mercy is seen, a way to heaven, a hope of pardon, and peace through the flowing wounds and blood of an incarnate God!

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, it is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." What are we to understand by this profound statement? - three words that have more heights and depths in them than we shall ever fully understand; and I am disposed to say that there were never words uttered of such profound significance as these: "It is finished." That is, the salvation of all His people, substantially; because we know, although the dear Saviour

laid down His life, died, and was buried, yet that it was equally necessary for Him to rise again and thus to prove that His sacrifice was accepted. By His resurrection He was "declared to be the Son of God with power;" He was "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." O, think of this then, -if you have a hope of heaven, if I have, if you can believe that one day you will reach heaven, that when you come to the end of your days here it will be to be "absent from the body, present with the Lord," -if you feel you can believe that, then think of the cost, the tremendous cost; think of Calvary, think of the agonies of Gethsemane, of the price the Saviour paid.

But now He says, "It is finished." What was finished then? Many things. Everything was finished that was required of Him to do on our behalf. It was all accomplished. The work of redemption was done. O, what a mercy! And all the sacrifices under the Levitical law, burnt offerings and oblations, that were divinely appointed under the legal dispensation, were all finished when the Saviour died; because they were all typical of His death. Every beast that was slain was slain as a type of the Antitype who should die for His people's sins in the end of the dispensation. Indeed, there was no virtue in those sacrifices to take away sin; therefore they were continually offered. But O, think of that! This seems to throw a light on the tremendous importance of redemption's work. Think of the hundreds of thousands of beasts that were slain by divine ordinance, and yet all that sea of animal blood did not save

one soul. They had an outward sanctifying effect, to the purification of the flesh; they were typical; but no sinner was saved by means of the sacrifices. There was a weakness in them; They could not make the comers thereunto perfect. But the blood, the precious cleansing blood of One Man had sufficient efficacy to save every one that was given to Him by His Father, and in whose place He stood. He gave Himself a ransom for all. He could not give more. He gave Himself. And less would not suffice. "It is finished." All those legal sacrifices, all finished in the great and glorious Antitype.

And the prophets, O, how blessedly they set Him forth and predicted His coming, especially in such chapters as the 53rd of Isaiah that speaks of the Saviour's passion and death. All is fulfilled, though that reads as though it were already accomplished: "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed," ~~was~~ it was not accomplished literally till the dear, suffering Saviour said, "It is finished." That 53rd chapter of Isaiah, - it is finished. But it is written as in the past tense, evidently to indicate the certainty of it in the purposes of God, for He was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

"It is finished." He poured out His soul unto death. "It is finished." He was wounded for our transgressions. "It is finished," on the cross. And not only those blessed prophets, but every promise is finished; that is, it finds its fulfilment in this word. After the fall of our first parents,

the Saviour was promised: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." "It is finished." That was fulfilled when the Saviour said, "It is finished;" and so, indeed, it has proved.

Moreover, the power of Satan to destroy one vessel of mercy is finished; for when the Saviour died He destroyed Satan's power; He destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. He did not destroy his person; he tempts the Lord's people still, and harassed them to the last degree sometimes; but he has no power to condemn them. There is no condemnation. Blessed word indeed is that, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "It is finished." A very blessed promise this; and moreover the power of Satan to destroy is finished. Yes, and death is finished, too, for the Lord's people, -Not corporeal death, but eternal death; for He has the keys: "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

The cup is finished that His Father gave Him to drink, and concerning which He prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." And why was all this necessary? In order that a way to heaven should be opened for a sin-burdened sinner, through the Lord's redeeming blood. Here is the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; and this, I believe, will be the one thing before a sin-burdened sinner who longs for a taste of

pardoning love, and to feel an interest in the Saviour's death. This will be the one thing, to hear the Shepherd's voice saying, "It is finished," - and finished for him; and I believe the Lord has spoken it to some people. I believe that this word, "It is finished," has been spoken to some of the Lord's people in their experience as a voice from heaven, and as a blessed witness of their own interest in His sufferings and death.

"It is finished." It was finished, then, in order that rebellious man might be reconciled and made nigh; as Paul has it in writing to the Ephesians: "And ye who some times were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Nothing can bridge the awful gulf that sin has made but the blood of Christ. Nothing can be a way to heaven for us, - for you, for me, - but the blood of Christ. Nothing else! But O, full redemption is here! We need no greater price. All is finished.

"All is settled,
And my soul approves it well."

Moreover, by this coming sinners have a ground to stand upon, a Name to plead before the Father. "Just as I am," said one, "without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me." O, then, the great and all-important point is to know whether this work of redemption was finished for us. Can you hope that it is in your own case? Have you any ground upon which you may so conclude? O, sinner, eternity is before you; it is before me. We shall soon come to the end of life and pass through the vale of death; but we shall never come to the end of eternity. A solemn consideration. But O, a happy sound to poor sinners blessed with a hope in Calvary! A tremendous sound indeed to a

trampling, guilty conscience; but O, happy indeed are they who are now before the throne of God! "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." This washing of their robes indicates the exercise of faith in the Redeemer's blood, renouncing all for His sake, casting away their own filthy rags, as it were, and by faith receiving the robe of the Saviour's righteousness; the exercise of faith in Calvary's precious blood. They "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They had no hope beside Him. None of us has any hope out of Christ. O, glorious Person, blessed Person! What a mercy to be born to know Him! As I have hinted, this is the greatest mercy we have.

Well, may the Lord bring it home upon our hearts. It was finished for a definite number of people; to us, "a number that no man can number," as we have it in the Revelation, where John saw a mighty multitude, a number whom no man could number; and as we read, too, in an earlier chapter, where John saw thousands and thousands of elders and saints, ten thousand and thousands of thousands, an innumerable number to every one but to the Lord Himself. And with Him the number is definite, - "Those whom Thou hast given Me." And these are the chosen of God, the elect of God in the divine settlements of eternity. What a profound consideration! Has it ever dawned upon your mind that it may be that the Lord had thoughts of peace toward you before the world was?

"It is finished." Here, then, is our only ground of

hope; and it is a good ground, a sure foundation. O, once in my life, when extremely weak and ill bodily, I got for a moment a view, I believe, by faith of the atonement, and I felt I could die; I felt that I could pass into eternity resting my soul upon it. I feel like that now, but I do not often feel the sweetness of it as I felt then. It breaks you when you get it. Nothing is so soul-humbling as a sight of a bleeding Saviour. It will break you to pieces. It will give you a broken heart in the sweetest sense in which you can have it, - a broken and a contrite spirit.

"It is finished." O, sometimes we can say that "numbered with them we would be, now and to eternity." Ah, it is a mercy to possess a real religion. I was told recently of a clergyman who visited a hospital ward and went from one patient to another; and he came to a man and said to him, "Well, and what persuasion are you?" He replied, "I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord." What a wonderful answer! Do you feel you could say that? O, what a mercy to feel a persuasion, a hope of heaven, a hope, a glimmering hope, that one day we shall reap the eternal benefits of the Saviour's sufferings!

Here I must leave it. May the word abide with us in its importance and solemnity. "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished; and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."
