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## A Completed Work

### John 17:4-5

**Intro:** We are looking at the Lord's High Priestly prayer in **ch17** and we are still considering the first of Jesus' 3 petitions to the Father in this prayer – a prayer for Himself. We are taking our time as we go through this prayer but it's not for the purpose of dragging it out as long as possible. No, there is a very important theological reason why we are spending so much time in John's Gospel and it has to do with God's purposes for us, His church. Whereas the purpose of the church is generally assumed by most of its members to be to make converts, the biblical purpose of the Body of Christ is actually to make disciples. Of course, you can't make disciples without making converts. But, while conversions are necessary, they are not the chief end of the church. The chief end of the church is to glorify God and we do that by obeying His command to make disciples.

Many modern Christians believe that salvation merely involves praying a prayer, participating in a ceremony or being baptized into a particular denomination. Biblical salvation is always personal – it assumes a personal encounter with and a proper response to the person and work of Jesus Christ. That proper response always contains a recognition of personal sin, faith in the claims of Jesus and an acceptance of His gift of salvation. But that's not all! Genuine faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior also involves both hearing (understanding) and doing (obeying) along with that heartfelt trust in eternal salvation. Herein lays the difference between a convert and a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Being a disciple involves much more than just “knowing” things. Simply having a head knowledge of Scripture or of biblical doctrine isn't enough to make one a true disciple of Christ. By itself, head knowledge (intellectual assent) of spiritual truth goes no further than “cheap grace” or “easy believism” – a belief in the forgiveness of Christ without repentance. This kind of belief merely admires Jesus but it stops well short of actually following Him, which means it actually falls well short of fully trusting in Him as Lord and Savior.

We are taking our time through John's Gospels because as students of the

Word, we must constantly ask ourselves 2 very important questions. 1) Who is Jesus Christ for me today? 2) Who am I for Jesus Christ today? The answers to these questions are what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and what form this discipleship should take in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So, on the one hand, it's critical for us to look at Scripture for the purpose of discovering just who Jesus Christ really is (doctrine). On the other hand, once we've established the theology of Jesus Christ, we must then apply that truth to our own Christian lives and discover who we are for Jesus – this is true discipleship.

So, our overriding purpose in studying John's Gospel is not just to glean information but to discover truth that affects our lives. We cannot afford to be merely hearers of the Word. James teaches us that clearly with an appropriate metaphor in [Jam 1:22-25](#). Those who look into the mirror of Scripture will see themselves as they really are: children of light. But, if one just hears the truth but fails to do it, it's like forgetting your true identity. Simply hearing the truth but not doing it is like having amnesia (unstable mental condition). You're less likely to behave like a child of the King if you've forgotten you belong to the royal family (unstable spiritual condition). The theology of Scripture teaches disciples who they are "in Christ" and they have to understand and remember whose Way they belong to.

We're not just marking time here on Sunday morning; we're digging into the Word to discover the details of Who Jesus is so that we will know better who we are in Him and how we should live because of that. Having said all that, let's look at the last 2 verses that make up the Lord's petition for Himself ([4-5](#)).

[4](#)- There are few things in life more satisfying than a job well done. From the young child who makes their bed for the first time to the team of scientists who rocket satellites out into the solar system to discover new things about our near cosmic neighborhood; everyone enjoys accomplishing a difficult task. It's the satisfaction of a graduation or of a musician who's mastered a difficult piece of music. We hear this same satisfaction in Paul's second letter to Timothy, written near the end of the Apostle's life ([II Tim 4:6-8](#)).

Still, although we can say that there's satisfaction in a job well done, there's never really the satisfaction that the job was done perfectly or completely. There's only one human being who ever lived who could say that, and that's

Jesus Christ. We do many things; some of them rather well, but most of them are not finished, and none are done perfectly. In all honesty, our work is never really completed and the small parts that get done are never done perfectly. Yet, this was not true of Jesus for He declares that He has finished the work that the Father has given Him to do. But, had He “finished” it? Wasn’t there still more to do – like a really important thing about going to the cross?

The 1<sup>st</sup> thing this verse tells us is that Jesus was given a work to do by the Father. And what a great work it was! It was the greatest accomplishment in the history of accomplishments, both human and divine! Now, we mustn’t think Jesus waited until His work on the cross to glorify His Father. The truth is, His entire life glorified the Father. In fact, everything Jesus had done up to this point was an aspect of the work He had been given and God was glorified by it.

We know Jesus was active in the creation of our universe ([Col 1:16-17](#)). We know it was Jesus who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, guided the Jewish people during the OT period. He was even the “angel of the Lord,” who appeared at strategic times in the history of the patriarchs and those who followed. It’s also true that the work includes the whole of Christ’s life and ministry; from His circumcision and dedication at the temple through His quiet years of obedience in Nazareth. Jesus glorified the Father through His unwavering faith, steadfast obedience and uncompromising work during the years of His earthly ministry. Every sermon preached, every blind or sick person healed, every bit of instruction and training for the disciples, every confrontation with the corrupt religious leaders, every question answered, every loving touch – they all glorified God the Father.

Yet, none of these things can possibly be the heart of what Jesus is speaking about, for the great work that was given to Him and that He completed perfectly was the atonement for sin, which He alone accomplished on the cross. Thus, it’s this work above all that He declares He has finished. But, how can this be? He hasn’t died yet!

To answer this question properly is to understand what it’s like to be God. Since we can’t do that, let’s consider what we know about God. God has always existed, for all eternity, which is not a linear concept like time but simply a different plane of existence. God created the time-space continuum

that is our universe so it stands to reason that He exists outside of it and it not subject to its laws of physics or otherwise. Since God is outside our universe and 1 of His divine attribute is omniscience, God doesn't see the panorama of human history as a parade that passes by Him year after year. No, He sees the whole parade, the whole of all human history, at one time. Thus, the concepts of past, present and future doesn't apply to God in eternity – He knows everything there is to know and He knows it all at the same time.

Because of this, Jesus, with all divine confidence and assurance, was able to see the work on the cross as already finished. There was, of course, a sense in which the work was not finished (humanly speaking) because He hadn't yet gone to the cross but in a divine sense, Jesus was, at that very moment, already and fully the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ([Rev 13:8b](#)). From this greater sense, this divine perspective, the work was already finished for it had been completed in the heart and mind of God since before the creation of the universe. Now, it just had to be accomplished physically. While this concept may be hard to grasp with our limited human minds, it plays a very important and encouraging role in our own Christian lives today.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we're overjoyed with the idea of being forgiven and of the promise of new life in Christ. But it doesn't take long for us to realize that this new life, which is freely given to every child of God, doesn't automatically take over our thoughts and actions. Very quickly we realize we are still the same person with the same hang-ups and negative tendencies. We may even think that our salvation is incomplete, like maybe I didn't hold my mouth just right when I prayed to accept Christ – why is it still so hard to live holy? Am I a failure as a child of God?

We may see ourselves that way but God doesn't. Just as Jesus saw His work of atonement finished before He went to the cross, so now God sees our own work of transformation and perfection as being already complete, before the fact. [Col 3:1-4](#) teaches us that as far as God is concerned, we are already perfected, having our lives hidden with Christ in God. Where is Jesus now? Sitting at the right hand of the Father and we are there in Him, with Him, at least that's how God currently sees us. We are there in a spiritual sense but physically (human perspective) it still has to be done. That's why Paul exhorts us to set our minds on things above and he goes

on to tell us how we should live in light of our spiritual standing in Christ. So, the fact that Jesus considered His work finished before it was finished has bearing in our own lives and I'm so glad that it does. It's encouraging to know that my relationship with God doesn't depend one bit on my ability to maintain it.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing this verse teaches us is that not only did the Father give Jesus a great work of salvation to do but Jesus didn't just give it the old college try and then drop it. He didn't just make a half-hearted attempt and then quit. No, Jesus finished the work! The evidence that the work was finished and accepted as payment by the Father is the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus means that the Father was satisfied that Jesus' work of atonement and salvation was completed. They are the Father's seal of approval upon Christ's work on the cross.

Paul points this out perfectly in [Rom 4:25](#). He's not saying we're justified by Christ's resurrection, His death did that. It just means that by the resurrection, God gave notice that Christ's death was that perfect substitution for sin and that the Father had accepted it in place of the condemnation of the sinner. The resurrection serves as proof that the price of our sin has been "Paid in full" and when you accept that payment then no one will ever have any record of sin against you. God's justice was satisfied and this just God will never demand anything else for our salvation.

But, not only is the Father satisfied by Christ's death, so was Jesus! You can hear it in the tone of His voice ([4a](#)). There is no wavering or doubt in His voice here at all. And He's not currently sitting up in heaven wringing His hands and biting His lip wondering if something was left undone, nothing was left undone. He came into this world for the purpose of accomplishing this work, He said Himself that He was distressed until it was completed (focus of His life) and after it was accomplished, after He fulfilled His Father's will, He looks back and is satisfied ([Isa 53:11](#)).

Consider this then: If the Father is satisfied in Christ's death and if Jesus is satisfied in His own death, shouldn't we, the ones who benefit from it the most, also be satisfied in it? Yes, and more than just being satisfied, should we not rejoice in that completed work, knowing that it is our glory! But, it's not just our glory; it's Jesus' and the Father's too!

How does the work of Christ on the cross bring glory to God? It does so by clearly revealing God's great attributes. Remember when we studied the word glory that we saw that to glorify God meant to acknowledge His attributes or make them known. It means proclaiming His sovereignty, justice, righteousness, wisdom, love, and everything else that can be rightly said about Him. Where are these attributes best known? At the cross! Only here is the perfection of God's attributes abundantly and unmistakably displayed.

We see God's sovereignty in the way in which the death of Christ was planned, promised, and then executed, without the slightest deviation from OT prophecies. We see God's justice in sin actually being punished. Without the cross God could have forgiven our sin gratuitously, but it wouldn't have been just. Only in Christ is that justice satisfied. We see God's righteousness in the fact that only Jesus, the righteous One, could pay sin's penalty. We see God's wisdom in the planning and ordering of such a great salvation. Of course, we see His love, for it's only at the cross that we know beyond doubt that God loves us even as he loves Jesus. Jesus fully revealed these attributes of the Father by His death. Thus, His obedience to the Father's will in dying, fully glorified Him.

3- Jesus then prays for the Father to return to Him the brilliant, divine glory He possessed with the Father from all of eternity before His set it aside to be clothed in humanity. But notice, Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him with the same glory the Father Himself has. This request was in no way a prayer of independence from the Father but a picture of His utter and continued dependence upon the Father.

What are we to make of this prayer? If it teaches us about the mind of Christ, what bearing does it have on our own lives? What truth does it convey, what direction does it give to guide those who claim to be true disciples of Christ?

1) If Jesus' atoning work of salvation is finished and has been accepted as such by the Father, wouldn't it be foolish and the height of ingratitude to think that we could add to His work? Millions of people do this regularly. They don't particularly disbelieve His work, but they fail to trust it wholly. Instead, they try to add to it by tears and confessions and charity and by

every other kind of supposed “good work.” They believe that by all these works God will be forced to be gracious to them and save them in the end. What an insult to God! It’s insulting to everything Jesus did to think you can add to that salvation that He in His own great love and wisdom planned from before the foundation of the world and then brought to completion in time through the death of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus.

2) If Christ’s work of atonement is really a finished work and if God has accepted it as the sole grounds of salvation, let’s declare it as such. We can’t honestly proclaim this truth until we’ve entered into it ourselves first. But if we have come to God on the basis of Jesus’ sacrifice, then we have an obligation to make this Gospel widely known. It should be joy for us to do so because so many need it and God has promised that all those He has called will respond positively to the Gospel message. They need to hear that all that’s necessary for their salvation has been done by Christ. He has died, and “it is finished.”

3) The Father gave Jesus a work to do and He completed it perfectly. The Father has given each of His children a work to do and while none of us can say that we have completed it perfectly, we can say that we are working on the work that He gave us to do; we can say that we are about our Father’s business. If this is you, then the exhortation from this passage is: Keep at it! Don’t quit! Hang onto what God has made you custodian of! While our work may never be perfectly accomplished we can still finish it, like Paul did, if we just, with the Spirit’s help, keep working at it to the very end.

We can put a lot of “finish” in it by constantly striving to improve our service to the Lord through the grace He has given us to perform His will! 😊