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Good Friday – John 19:30 – Crucial Last Words

4/15/22 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

You know the worst thing about bills? No matter how many times you pay them, they always come back. I brought a copy of my energy bill here that says \$226 is due this coming Monday, and I'm sure you know the feeling: didn't I just get done paying this last month? And actually, what makes this even worse is that we're on the budget plan – that means we pay the same amount every month for six months and then that number gets adjusted based on our energy usage. Well right now, with energy costs going up, our balance forward is going up each month, too, with extra charges we're eventually going to have to reconcile down the line. So not only do these bills keep coming back month after month, but the amounts keep going up, too. We had one month last winter that was over \$400! Now, I'm happy to say that the Lord has blessed us and you have supported us well enough that we can handle this right now, but things would start getting pretty tight pretty fast if that became the norm.

And you know, there's a lesson to be learned here about the bill, the debt that we all owe to God, too. Only this one isn't paid in dollars and cents. It's paid in blood, the price we owe for the obedience to God's Law that we should have given but haven't. God made us to be holy, to love him with all our hearts and souls and minds, to love our neighbors as ourselves – but instead we've blended in with this sinful world and loved ourselves more than anything. God calls us not to disrespect our authorities or murder or commit adultery or steal or lie or covet, but instead in our thoughts and words and actions we've done all those things again and again. We've done the evil we shouldn't and haven't done the good we should, and all that makes the bill we owe to God longer and longer and longer.

But yet, we all have ways of trying to pay down that debt, right? We try to compare ourselves to others, or we try to do more good than bad, or we try to climb the ladder to get a little better and more godly every day. But here's the problem – those payments we try to make can never fully, truly, finally pay that bill and take away that debt. Those are all like my energy bill. \$226 may be better than \$400, but that's still money that I owe. \$226 is a nice, consistent budget payment for the next few months yet, but I'm using more energy than I'm paying for so eventually I'm going to have to make that up. And unless I'm willing to shut down my power and disconnect my gas entirely, nothing is going to stop those bills from coming and I can never get the money back that I've already had to pay in.

See, my problem with God isn't just with what I consciously do, it's with who I am and how I'm wired – and ever since Adam and Eve first fell into sin way back in the Garden of Eden, our wiring has been crossed and wrong and broken so that the debt of our sin before God has been going up so much faster than we could ever hope to pay it down.

But that's why Jesus' last words on Good Friday were so crucial. Remember that that word *crucial* means cross-like, and Jesus' crucifixion was really the crossroads for all humanity. Down one path, we could try and try and try to handle our own debts with God, and continue to lose ground every step of the way. But down the other path is our Savior, with his perfect life to our credit, with his sacrificial death for our forgiveness, with those all-important words he wishes for every ear to hear and every heart to believe: "It is finished."

What Jesus said there on that cross was just one word in Greek: *tetelestai*. That's what a shopkeeper would write on someone's bill when it had been paid. And this verb was spoken in what's called the Greek perfect tense: that means this was completed action with ongoing results. See, when it comes to the shopkeeper or the energy company, you might pay off last month's bill, but then again you might see a new bill this month, too. But not with God. No, when Jesus said, "*tetelestai*," it is finished, over God's bill for our sin, that meant our debt was totally, perfectly paid off, once and for all, done and gone, for a lifetime and forever!

And this "finished" concept really isn't meant to be measured on a spectrum or a scale, either, as if I'm *almost* finished, *getting close* to finished, *pretty much* finished. No, either it is finished or it's not. And that concept is so very important because if it's not finished for us, then it's on us to finish it and that is a terrible truth, because it was our failures and shortcomings that got us into this mess in the first place. We rack up debts much faster than we pay them down, so how could we ever have confidence or peace that we could finish what Jesus started? We couldn't, and that's why what Jesus said is so important: *it is finished*. That means our eternal life, our standing with God, our place in heaven isn't about us, not about our works or efforts or contributions or decisions or any of that. Our salvation is 100% done, complete, finished, based entirely on what Jesus did for us. We call today Good Friday – against all appearances otherwise – because this is the day our debt before God was fully forgiven, paid in full forever, and it's never coming back, because Jesus himself guaranteed it!

Yes, these were crucial last words: *Tetelestai*, "It is finished." Just one word in Greek, three in English, but what this word from the cross may lack in quantity, it more than makes up for in significance and power. So what does "it is finished" mean for you? Finished is the work of your salvation. Finished is the devil's power over this world. Finished is the influence of sin and evil over God's people. Finished is the reign of death and hell forever. Finished are all your doubts and fears about your relationship with God. And finished are all your sufferings, your sorrows, your guilt and all the consequences of sin in your lives, because finished is Jesus' job of redemption as your substitute. All your struggles, all your battles, all your failures are finished because Jesus said so there on the cross. No, never have greater words been uttered than *tetelestai*, "it is finished," the crucial last words of our perfect Savior proclaimed for every ear to hear and every believing heart to celebrate, both now and forevermore. Amen.