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How stirring these brief words are! The Lord was being praised by His grateful people, and their singing was meaningful, sincere and joyful. Surely their experience long ago presents us with an example and a challenge as we think of our worship.

Neglect and disobedience had marked God’s people for sixteen years under the reign of Ahaz. Idolatry had been practised and God had found it necessary to humble His people because of their blatant sin (2 Chron.28:19). The shameful reign of Ahaz ended without a royal burial, and a new king ascended the throne - Hezekiah his son. It was not long before his true colours were seen. In the first year of his reign Hezekiah opened the doors of the temple and re-established the true worship of God. The Levites rose to the challenge and sanctified themselves before cleansing the house of the Lord. Sixteen years of idolatry were thus
followed by sixteen *days* of consecration (v.17), the Levites working conscientiously and with determination. Sin offerings were brought by the people in recognition of their disobedience. Burnt offerings followed as an act of worship to the Lord, and then the praises of God began to ring through the temple courts. The whole congregation worshipped, the singers proclaimed His praises to the accompaniment of trumpets, and Hezekiah and his courtiers bowed themselves in worship too. At Hezekiah’s instruction psalms were sung by the Levites in praise to the Lord. Truly it was a memorable occasion.

**UNCHANGING PRINCIPLES**

New Testament worship may be very different, but certain principles remain the same. Just as their praises followed repentance and sacrifice, we need true heart-repentance and an appreciation of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus whose blood was shed for our sins. This can prepare the way for our worship. Like the Israelites in Hezekiah’s day, we too can be helped by the words written by others. Songs that are truly scriptural should play an important part in our collective worship. However, beautiful words are not enough: we must, like them, sing with gladness to the Lord.

The Lord has done so much for us. Let us not be silent and unmoved, simply performing a kind of religious duty that lacks real feeling. May gladness characterize our worship as we also bow our heads in adoration before our God.

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*O sing unto the Lord*  
*(Psalm 96:1)*
If you had to draw up a short-list of the greatest men of the Old Testament, who would you include? The Jews in the time of Jesus often talked with great respect about Abraham and Moses - and surely, along with David, these men were some of the greatest characters of the Old Testament. Moses, as a prophet, was unique. Deuteronomy 34:10 tells us that no prophet in Israel was like him because he knew the Lord “face to face”. Yet Moses was human and therefore mortal. The time came when he had to face death. Who could possibly take his place and step into the great leader’s shoes? It was a tall order. Joshua was the man appointed by God to carry on the work Moses had begun. The book in the Old Testament that bears his name tells us a lot about his call, his service as a leader, and, eventually, his death - but it is not the only source of information. Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy all contain references to Joshua and introduce us to this man who became an eminent servant of the Lord in his own right.

**ENTER JOSHUA**

The first time Joshua is mentioned is in Exodus 17. The Israelites were journeying from Egypt towards their Promised Land when the Amalekites came out to attack
them. Without any record of his ancestry or any other information, the name of Joshua suddenly appears in the sacred text as the man chosen by Moses to lead the Israelites into battle. Moses must have recognized potential in this young man. Israel had never before had a commander to lead the army. Indeed, when facing Pharaoh’s armies earlier they were told to leave the fighting of the enemy to the Lord (Ex.14:14). Now the situation had changed. Knowing he was not alone but that Moses would be standing on the hilltop with the rod of God in his hand, “Joshua did as Moses had said” (Ex.17:10). The first point to notice therefore is his obedience. Joshua was to discover (on this as well as on many later occasions) that success in the Lord’s service is impossible without obedience. Just as he obeyed Moses, his superior, by leading the Israelites into battle, the Christian’s aim should be to please the Lord Jesus who has enlisted him (2 Tim.2:4).

**WHAT’S IN A NAME?**

To discover something about Joshua’s background we need to turn to Numbers 13. In this chapter we find he was a member of the tribe of Ephraim and was originally named Hoshea - meaning deliverer. His father’s name was Nun - meaning continuation. This was a fitting name for the one appointed to lead God’s people as a deliverer - a man characterized by continuance. However, Moses gave him a new name, Joshua, meaning Jehovah is Salvation (v.16). Joshua himself was not the deliverer of the people. Rather, through his life and service the salvation of the Lord was to be seen. For us today perseverance in the things of the Lord is vital too. (See 1 Cor.15:58). Like Joshua, our lives should display His salvation.

**EARLY INFLUENCES**

All of us, to some degree or other, are products of our environment. Influences in our early lives mould us - and Joshua was no exception. In Exodus 24 Moses was summoned into the presence of the Lord along with Aaron, two of his sons, and 70 of the elders of Israel. All would ascend the mountain, but Moses alone would climb higher into the immediate presence of the Lord. Joshua was present with Moses on that occasion and witnessed something of the glory of God while he waited for Moses to reappear. Those sights and sounds of divine majesty surely made a deep impression upon Joshua. A little later, when Joshua descended from the mountain in the company of Moses, his inexperience is evident. Hearing the noise of shouting in the camp, he told Moses that a war must be raging. The experienced man of God knew otherwise. A golden calf had been made by the people and the noise to be heard was singing and celebration (Ex.32:17, 18). A new Christian does not always have proper discernment. Helpful lessons can be learned through fellowship with a wise, older believer.
Joshua, in his early days, was thoroughly loyal to Moses. When Eldad and Medad displayed the gift of prophecy, Joshua instinctively felt it was wrong and tried to defend Moses from what he perceived to be competition. Surely, they should be silenced, he reasoned! Moses used the occasion to teach Joshua to be large-hearted. He had no wish to monopolize any gift! He was glad to recognize the gifts possessed by others (Num.11:26-29).

Younger Christians can often be defensive or possessive. We need to learn to cultivate the generous spirit so clearly seen in Moses.

Another interesting feature of Joshua’s early life emerges in Exodus 33. Moses’ tent, pitched outside the camp, became a kind of oracle. Those who sought the Lord went to his tent. Joshua, described as “a young man” (v.11), would not leave that meeting place. He knew it was important to be there. Any young person who wants to make an impact for God today must do the same. In the words of an old hymn we must “spend much time in secret with Jesus alone”.

**FAITH REWARDED**

Joshua’s greatest test came when he was chosen with 11 others to spy out the land of Canaan. Representing the tribe of Ephraim, and with his friend Caleb from Judah, the 12 spies spent 40 days evaluating the Promised Land before staggering back under the weight of some enormous bunches of grapes. Ten of the spies were pessimists and lacked faith in God. Conquering the giants would be impossible, they declared. Caleb objected to their appraisal, and in Numbers 14:8 we find Joshua endorsing his comments. The Lord was able to bring them into Canaan and defeat all their enemies, he maintained. While the 10 unbelieving spies died in a plague, Joshua and Caleb were the only men of Israel living at that time who eventually entered the Promised Land. Joshua truly was “the son of continuation”, and he teaches us that faith is rewarded. Like him we need endurance to enter into the good of all God’s promises to us (Heb.10:36).

**A SHEPHERD, PLEASE**

Moses had already pleaded with God for extra helpers and had been provided with 70 elders to assist him in his responsibilities. However, as he neared the end of his life, Moses became profoundly aware of the need for a man with a shepherd’s heart to care for the people of God. It really comes as no surprise to us to discover that God had already prepared His man - and that man was Joshua. Filled with the Spirit of God, he was equipped to lead God’s people over Jordan (Num.27:15-18). There is no substitute to being filled with the Spirit of God. Ephesians 5:18 stresses the need to be continually filled with His power. The closing verses of Numbers 27 describe the occasion when Joshua was publicly commissioned to be
the new leader of the people. It was a solemn moment and marks the beginning of tremendous responsibilities for Joshua. How would he cope? The book of Deuteronomy explains.

As far as Moses was concerned, the Promised Land was closed. Even though he pleaded with the Lord to be allowed to enter it, access was denied. However, Moses still had something important to do. The Lord told him to “charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him” (Dt.3:28). In his addresses to the people, preserved for us in Deuteronomy, we find Moses doing that very thing. Not only does he remind Joshua of his heavy responsibilities, he also gives him personal encouragement. Many believers, ever since, have found his words reassuring and a source of great strength. “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (31:6). The Lord is with His people! We can depend on Him for all of the unknown future.

**THE MOMENT OF TRUTH**

When we open the book of Joshua, the Lord’s first words to the new leader of His people may take us by surprise: “Moses my servant is dead.” Surely that was obvious! Why was he being told such a thing? Very simply, God deals with realities and always wants us to face the situation as it really is. It was the end of an era. Moses had played his part: now it was time for Joshua to “take up the mantle” and step into the former leader’s shoes. This may have been the first time the Lord spoke directly to Joshua - but what a time to speak! Joshua probably felt crushed and alone. The man he admired so much, the one he had looked up to so often, had gone. It was true that Moses had encouraged him - but how could be take on the new responsibility? “Now” was the time to cross the Jordan with all the people of Israel (even though the Jordan was in full flood at the time - 3:15) and take possession of the land (Josh.1:1-3). It was time to “be strong and of a good courage” - even though he might be feeling weak and overawed. For his part that initial obedience noted at the beginning of this article must be maintained. He must carefully obey “all the law” of God and meditate constantly upon that holy book. For the Lord’s part he heard again those familiar words that Moses had spoken, but this time they came from the Lord’s own lips: “The Lord thy God is with thee whithersover thou goest” (1:7-9).

Are you facing a new task or do you find yourself in a new situation? Has a prop been removed from your life? Perhaps someone you loved and respected has gone. Learn from Joshua. Meditate upon God’s Word and be careful to obey its teachings. Rely on His promises, for they cannot fail. As He was with Joshua, He will help you face the unknown with boldness and with confidence.
Talk to the proverbial “man in the street” about the Church and at once you will discover he has his own thoughts about it. In fact, people have many different ideas when the subject of the Church is raised. If you want to find the way to some place, you may well be given directions which highlight certain landmarks to look out for. Often these include either an inn or a church building!

Some church buildings are very noticeable, so it is not surprising that they are mentioned by a person who helpfully gives directions to someone who is lost. “Go past St. Peter’s Church on the left,” you may be told. “It is the church with the tall spire and the beautiful stained-glass windows.” Many old churches are admired for their architectural design, their aesthetic quality, or their sheer magnificence. But if we think of the Church in these terms alone, we are on the wrong track. The Bible has something quite different to say.

**WHAT’S IN A WORD?**

The word “church” in our Bibles is a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*. If the word was translated literally into English it would be “a calling out of” - which sounds rather clumsy! It refers, not to a building, but to a group of people. A body
of Roman citizens who met to discuss the affairs of State was an ekklesia. (The word is used in this way in Acts 19:39 KJV, where it is translated “assembly”.) When the leaders of Israel met together the same word was also used to describe their “assembly”. So to use the word “church” when we are referring to a building is actually incorrect biblically - though the word in today’s society has come to refer to a building. We need to keep this distinction in mind. When we read “church” in the New Testament, we must remember that it is the people who are in view and not the building. Church buildings, as we know them, did not exist in those early days. In Bible times Christian believers usually met simply in a home.

**THE FIRST TIME**

The word “church” as used in the New Testament is first found in Matthew 16:18. Jesus had asked His disciples who people thought He was. Different ideas were in circulation at the time. When asked directly for their own thoughts on the matter, Peter replied without any hesitation, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt.16:16 KJV).

The Lord Jesus gave Peter credit for his answer but pointed out that Peter had only made the statement because the Father had revealed the truth to him. Jesus continued: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell (“Hades” NKJV) shall not prevail against it” (Mt.16:18). The Lord was not suggesting that Peter was the rock and that the Church would be built on him. (It would be a poor Church if it was built on Peter who later denied his Lord!) Rather, the Church would be built upon the foundation of Peter’s statement. Christ Himself is the Rock, and the Church is built on Him. Notice at this point that the Church is spoke of as future. It did not yet exist. So it is Christ’s Church - and when Jesus spoke it was yet to be built.

Apart from some references to “church” in Matthew 18 (which clearly concern an assembly of people) the next time the “Church” is mentioned is in Acts. Not all ancient manuscripts contain the word translated “Church” in Acts 2:47 (“the Lord added to the Church”), but the word is found shortly afterwards where we read, “Great fear came upon all the Church” (Acts 5:11). What event comes between Matthew 16 and Acts 5 to account for that which was future having now come into existence? Pentecost! It was on the Day of Pentecost that the Church was formed, when all who believed were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:13).
**A BUILDING NOT MADE WITH HANDS**

In order to help us understand what the Church is, a number of different pictures are used in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus spoke of His Church as a building in Matthew 16:18. A building is made up of individual bricks or stones, and Peter takes up this figure when he refers to Christ as the Living Stone and to believers as living stones too that are being built into a spiritual house (1 Pet.2:5). In absolute harmony with this teaching, Paul describes the Church in the same way - a building growing into a “holy temple in the Lord”, individual believers being built together into a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph.2:20-22). God does not dwell in a literal earthly building but in the hearts of all His children, by His Spirit.

Perhaps another distinction should be made at this point. All the references considered thus far relate to the Church universal which could be called the macrocosm. However, the New Testament also envisages the microcosm - that small-scale representation of the Church universal, meeting together at a certain time in any locality.

**A BODY WITH MEMBERS**

Another helpful picture used in the New Testament is that of the Church as a body. Christ is “the head” of the Church “which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph.1:22-23). The human body is made up of many members, the body itself needing all of its respective parts. This is something Paul develops in detail in 1 Corinthians 12. Together, believers form “the body of Christ”, and individually we are “members in particular” (1 Cor.12:27). All the parts of the human body are necessary and are to work in harmony with one another under the direction of the head.

Spiritually, the application is simple. Christ is the Head of the Church, and the local expression of that universal Church must recognize this fact. Christ’s Word must be obeyed, and fellowship between the individual members of this “body” must be enjoyed. Obviously Christ has no human body on earth today as once He did, for He is now glorified in heaven. Believers corporately make up His spiritual Body on earth today and represent Him here below. Just as the human body is what we see of a person, so Christ’s Body (the Church) is the vessel that makes Him known in the world today. How important, therefore, that the members of the Church should glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.
A BRIDE TO BE

The third illustration takes us into the future. Not only is the Church Christ’s Body here on earth; it is also His Bride. This theme is developed in Ephesians 5 where Paul compares the relationship between Christ and the Church with a man and his wife. Christ “loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church...” (Eph.5:25-27). The Church is Christ’s Bride and is precious to Him. That complete body of believers will one day be presented in glory, “without blemish”, and will be His companion for all eternity.

John was invited to catch a glimpse of “the Bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev.21:9). This “body” of blood-bought believers is seen in Revelation to be beautifully “adorned” (Rev.21:2) and “arrayed” (Rev.19:8) for eternity. Earlier we noted the difference between the universal Church and the local church. Another distinction needs to be made. The Church on earth is not the complete Church. Millions of its members have passed from this life and have gone to be with Christ - “which is far better” (Phil.1:23). Those believers found on earth today are just a fragment of the complete Church. Christ, however, is coming again to take His redeemed people to heaven. When the remaining members of the Church on earth are caught up to meet the Lord in the air and are reunited with those who have already entered His presence, we all shall be for ever with the Lord (1 Thess.4:17). The Church - from Pentecost until the moment of the Lord’s return - will then be complete, with all its members together. This is its glorious destiny.

COMPLETE IN GLORY

The “building” is not yet complete. A living stone is added to it every time an individual is born again. But one day the “building” will be complete, and then the Lord will come. Only He knows when that day will be. The “bride of Christ” is now very much in the position of Isaac’s bride, Rebekah, in Genesis 24, who was travelling to a new home to meet her beloved. Believers today are “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet.2:11) who are not really at home here on earth. We are looking for our heavenly home and waiting to see our Redeemer face to face.

Sometimes you may be asked, “Are you a church member?” All believers are members of the true Church, but we need to have fellowship in a local church where the truths of God’s Word are believed and proclaimed. Perhaps now we can see that thinking of the Church as simply a building on the street corner misses the point. The Bible teaches us there is so much more.
Christians often talk about the finished work of Christ. The term refers to the work that He came to do at Calvary, to give His life as a sacrifice for lost and guilty sinners. Anticipating that atoning death, the Lord Jesus could say in prayer to His Father, “I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (Jn.17:4 KJV). When He uttered that loud triumphant cry from the cross, “It is finished,” the work of redemption was complete (Jn.19:30).

Many different “works” are mentioned in the Bible. For instance, there are “the works of the flesh” (Gal.5:19), the “works of darkness” (Eph.5:11), “good works” (Rom.13:3), and simply “works” (Jas.2:14). The meaning of each must be determined by its context. In this article our purpose is to discover what the Bible has to say about good works.

**AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION**

Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians makes an important distinction that is vital for us to grasp at the commencement of this subject. In explaining Christ’s work of salvation which gives new life to those who were dead, Paul states: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph.2:8-9). Our own works, or efforts, played absolutely no part in our salvation. If they had done, we might have had grounds to boast. Salvation is undeserved: it is entirely of God’s grace.

However, the next verse develops this thought of works. Paul wrote: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath...
before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph.2:10). Literally, we are something God has made, rather like a work of art. (The original Greek word is like the English word poem.) God has created us anew in Christ Jesus for good works, meaning works which are of a good character and thus beneficial to others. God’s purpose for us is that our lives as Christian believers should be lived in the context of good works - that we should be found doing things that are pleasing to Him and helpful to others. Although our own efforts played no part in our salvation, and we were not saved by our good works, we are saved for good works. Those saved lives should now display good works.

James, in his epistle, writes about faith and works and explains the relationship between the two. Faith, by itself, is invisible to man. If someone’s “faith” is not practical and visible, on the human level it is unprofitable. Indeed, “faith without works is dead” (Jas.2:20). James gives two examples of individuals from the Old Testament to prove his point. Abraham and Rahab were very different characters, but both were people of faith and both demonstrated their faith by what they did.

In practical terms, James tells us, real faith is not just a matter of wishing people well but of caring for the needy - perhaps providing clothing and food for those who are without (Jas.2:14-17). Faith in Christ is living, and if it does not naturally display itself in action, it must be questioned whether it is real faith at all.

The first time good works are mentioned in the New Testament is in Matthew 5:16. The Lord Jesus said: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” He had been speaking about light. A lamp is not lit to be hidden away but to shine and to help those who are in darkness. Consequently, His people’s light must shine before men - the light being the “good works” they do. Notice however that the purpose of this light shining is not to result in praise for the one who has done the good works. Rather, those who experience the good works should realize that they are directly connected to God’s working in the life of the individual who did them, and all the glory should be given to Him.
The Lord Jesus Himself is our example in this. Peter, who knew Jesus well, could declare that He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). Literally, He went about bestowing benefit upon people. Think of the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the sick that were healed. Think of those who experienced kindness from His hand or heard a word of comfort or encouragement. The “good works” were done because His Father had sent Him, and they brought glory to the Father. Sadly, at the same time they aroused the hatred of the Jews (Jn.10:32). Those who follow the Lord Jesus are called “disciples” and should be like their Master. If He did good, they should do the same.

**A SHINING EXAMPLE**

In Acts 9 there is a beautiful example of one who followed the Lord. Dorcas was “full of good works” (Acts 9:36). The word here translated “good” means beneficial, and we can see how people were helped by what she did. Dorcas had done the very things James had written about, making clothing for needy widows (Acts 9:39). Interestingly, two different words are used to describe the items of clothing: “coats and garments” (KJV). Not only did she make outer garments that could be seen and admired, but Dorcas was practical and also made undergarments. Had she done her work to impress, she would only have made the former, not the latter. Many were helped by this dear Christian woman’s demonstration of her faith.

In his first letter to Timothy Paul wrote about the ministry of Christian woman and twice we learn of the importance of “good works” (1 Tim.2:10; 5:10). Real godly women are those who care for others in practical ways. Even today there is still plenty of scope for Christian women to engage in “good works” - acts of kindness that will glorify their Heavenly Father.

**PASTORAL CHALLENGES**

Consider two challenges found in Paul’s pastoral epistles. First, he instructs Timothy concerning the rich. Instead of boasting of their riches and selfishly hoarding them, let them recognize that God is the giver, and let them seek to use their riches for Him. “Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share” (1 Tim.6:18 NKJV). Rather than just **being** rich, let them possess another kind of riches - being rich in good works. If the Lord has blessed you materially, be willing to share with others.
Titus faced a challenge too. In his teaching ministry in Crete he was to be an example to others. Younger men, in particular, might take notice of him, and Titus was therefore to display “a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7 KJV). Not only was he to engage in a spoken ministry, he was to live the Christian life. The word translated “good” here means that which is intrinsically good - in other words, good in itself; something beautiful. Indeed, all of God’s people should be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14 NKJV). Our lives this side of heaven should be made to count for God, and good deeds play an important part in that.

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

Three verses challenge us as to what we can do. First, we need to meditate upon the Scriptures themselves. The Word of God is instrumental in making us what we should be, equipping us for every good work (2 Tim.3:16-17). The Bible teaches us how to live the Christian life - not seeking to please ourselves or live for ourselves. We have a responsibility to be like our Master and to live for others.

Secondly, those who believe in God are instructed to “be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8 KJV). We glorify Him by living beautiful lives. We must not slacken our efforts and become careless, but rather must be careful that good works should be maintained as we continue to live our Christian lives day by day. Of course we will need the Lord’s help in order to please Him, and we must pray and seek His direction in what we do.

Finally, the fellowship of other Christians is vital too. The exhortation not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb.10:25) is often quoted, but the previous verse is perhaps a little less familiar. Hebrews 10:24 states: “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” The Lord Jesus Himself did this. He considered His disciples and encouraged them to follow Him. We too need to think of others and seek, by our example, to encourage them in doing good deeds.

Nothing can add to Christ’s work at Calvary, but if we have obtained benefit from His sacrifice we are eternally indebted to Him. His purpose is that we should live for Him day by day, seeking to do good in this world and to let there be an outworking in our actions of what God has done in our hearts - for His glory.
Preachers of the gospel sometimes refer to “the finished work of Christ”. People who are unfamiliar with the Christian message may wonder what exactly is meant by this expression. It is possible to fall into the trap of using jargon in preaching, assuming that others will understand the things we easily take for granted. Where did this expression originate?

The key to unlock the meaning of this expression is found in John 19:30. After experiencing six hours of agony upon the cross (the last three hours being spent in total darkness) Jesus uttered a loud cry before dismissing His spirit. Most English Bible translations render His exclamation as a phrase: “It is finished”. In the Greek text, however, only one word is used - 

*tetelestai*, meaning paid in full.

This particular word has an interesting background. It was written on Roman tax receipts when a bill had been paid. The expression uttered by Christ was one of triumph, for Luke 23:46 tells us that He “cried with a loud voice” (KJV). Listeners standing near the cross would have understood something from the everyday use of that expression that we may not appreciate today. What did Jesus mean by that cry? What had been paid in full?
FINISHED!

Work is not always finished. Many ambitious projects are commenced enthusiastically and then for one reason or another abandoned. During His earthly ministry Jesus spoke of a man who started a building project and was not able to finish (Lk.14:28-30). How he would be ridiculed for commencing something he could not complete! Human history is littered with such failures.

The opening verses of the Bible, by contrast, describe a work that was finished. We are told clearly in Genesis 2:1-2 (KJV) that “the heavens and the earth were finished” and that “God ended His work which He had made”. (By the way, these statements do not allow much room for the theory of evolution!) Having finished His work, God rested.

In John 19:30 another work was finished and Jesus in one sense rested - for we are told that “He bowed His head” after uttering His loud triumphant cry. People often picture a scarred and disfigured head dropping weakly forward as if weary, but the expression used suggests otherwise. Actually, Jesus reclined His head; He deliberately placed it in a position of rest, as on a pillow, with His face looking upwards. Like the work of creation, another great work had been finished, and the One who had completed it could rest. What was this work?

UNFINISHED WORK

The book of Hebrews presents a contrast to this. The priests of the Old Testament were constantly busy in their work and hardly able to rest. They are pictured as standing (not sitting) and “offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb.10:11 NKJV). They had to adhere to strict regulations in the daily routine of offering animal sacrifices upon the altar at the tabernacle or in the temple at Jerusalem. The annual Day of Atonement, in particular, served as a reminder of sins because the blood of bulls and goats could never deal with the root problem. Sin required sacrifice, and although animal sacrifices could be made, a “consciousness of sins” remained, and the worshippers were not made completely what God wanted them to be (Heb.10:1-4 NKJV).

God had all the time been planning something far better. The sacrificial system practised before Christ’s death served as a kind of picture book - an illustration of
an eternal truth that God was waiting to reveal. Those animal sacrifices did not really bring Him pleasure - but something else did. In obedience to that eternal plan Christ willingly came into the world and offered Himself as the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin upon the cross at Calvary (Heb.10:5-10). Unlike the work of those priests of old, His sacrificial work has been finished. “One sacrifice for sins forever” has been offered, and following that finished work He has “sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb.10:12 NKJV). The work He has done never needs to be repeated.

This is the emphatic message of Hebrews. The epistle throws light upon the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament and shows how it has all been fulfilled and abolished in Christ. In his hymn which begins with the words “Hark! the voice of love and mercy sounds aloud from Calvary,” Jonathan Evans (1748-1809) summarizes the truth so well with these words:

Finished all the types and shadows
Of the ceremonial law,
Finished what our God had promised;
Death and hell no more shall awe.
“It is finished!”
Saints, from hence your comfort draw.

Christ’s work of atonement at the cross will never be repeated.

**REAL ASSURANCE**

The message of Christ’s finished work is one of comfort and assurance. If we were not certain that the work had been finished, how could we be sure of our own salvation? If the Lord Jesus had not completed the work, then we might need to make our own contribution in order to complete it. But how much might we have to do in order to be sure of salvation? Is there anything we can do? Can we add to the work of Christ?

The answer to that question is a simple and straightforward “No!” We can add nothing to that finished work! We need to appreciate the Person who uttered that loud triumphant cry from the cross. It was the second Person of the Trinity, the Eternal Word, the Son of the Living God. He alone is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb.7:26 KJV). He needed no sacrifice for His own sins for He was sinless. His work was a “once forever” act that, unlike the work of the priests of old, needs no repetition (Heb.7:27).
When we consider His Person and His work, how could we possibly add to what He has done? Our part is simply to accept what He has done and rest upon that finished work. Salvation is not deserved and cannot be earned. It is by God’s grace that we are saved, through faith, and it is “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph.2:8-9). Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) in his well-loved hymn “Rock of Ages” wrote the lines,

“Nothing in my hand I bring,
    Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

This must be our attitude. We come empty-handed, as needy, guilty sinners, to a holy God. Conscious of our sin and unholiness, and aware that we deserve to be cast into hell and separated from God for ever, we recognize that Another has taken our place. Christ died under the righteous judgment of God. He gave Himself as the one sacrifice for sinners and “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet.2:24 NKJV). We must cling, by faith, to that work of His, believing that He did it for us.

**DO YOU ACCEPT IT?**

Remember the expression tetelestai meaning paid in full. Each of us is in debt. We have sinned against God and are guilty. Sin must be dealt with, for God is righteous. The Lord Jesus bore that punishment so that believing sinners might have their debt cancelled. Are you trusting in Christ? Can you say with the poet Frances Ridley Havergal,

“I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee!
    Trusting Thee for full salvation, great and free”?

We need no other, for only Jesus can save lost sinners. In Hebrews we read these wonderful words: “Once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb.9:26 NKJV). The debt has been paid! How can we, poor finite sinful mortals, add anything to the work of God’s own Son? It is impossible! We cannot! Our part is simply to accept what He has done, praise and thank Him for it, and then tell others the good news.

Still today in the 21st century this incomparable message is proclaimed: “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb.7:25 KJV). His redeemed people will praise Him eternally for that perfect and finished work completed at Calvary, but we can begin the song of heartfelt worship now. With P.P. Bliss we exclaim, “Hallelujah! What a Saviour!”