We have all seen it - the last strikeout of the World Series and the mad rush from the dugout that follows. Or the final seconds ticked away in the Super Bowl or the March Madness tournament. Finished! The training, the practice, the hopes, the dreams, the efforts of a long season – all finished!

**But, you say, you cannot compare that to the scene on Good Friday at Calvary under skies of divine darkness.** And you are right. On that hill outside Jerusalem is a scene more like when the Allies broke into concentration camps at the end of WW II and the skeleton-like survivors could scarcely believe it was over. They were in shock, blinded by the light, breaking down in tears upon their rescue. They had been pushed to the limits of human endurance - and now it is finished.

Yet even those situations pale in comparison to what happened on Good Friday. Who can even begin to understand the torments of soul, the very pains of hell that the Son of God endured on the cross? Who can even begin to comprehend what he went through as he was despised and rejected by man and forsaken by God his Father - to say nothing of the physical torment of crucifixion?

Moreover, Jesus was not alive by the end of Good Friday, shedding tears of a survivor’s relief in the embrace of family and friends. No. When all was finished: **He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.** On the cross the Son of Man and the Son of God died; the soldiers pierced his side to prove it. Then he was placed in a nearby tomb.

But just before he died, Jesus spoke three words of truth, perhaps the three most important words he ever spoke: **It is finished.** We do not know if he shouted them in a loud voice or forced them out between breaths. Yet whether spoken loudly or softly between gasps, these three words echoed throughout heaven and earth - and hell! - and continue to echo in this sin-filled world, giving eternal hope and comfort to all who hear and believe: **It is finished!** But what is finished? Everything done for the Father’s glory and everything done for us and our salvation.

The sign that Pilate had posted above the cross said: **Jesus of Nazareth.** And he was; Jesus grew up there, the son of Mary and Joseph (so everyone naturally assumed). **Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?** the people asked years later. Yet something told them that this was not a typical man from Nazareth.

They were right, of course. The son of Joseph was also the Son of God with a greater Father. Even at the age of 12 Jesus was aware of who his true Father was and that this Father had sent him to earth to do his business. At the beginning of his ministry, the Father in heaven publicly recognized the vital work of living a holy life, which Jesus had been faithfully doing up to that pt: **This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**

But following Jesus’ baptism, the list of things his Father wanted accomplished became more detailed. After his baptism, he went into the desert to face his foe. Then he began preaching, sharing **not his own** words but the very words his Father had given him to say. The same was true of the miracles, which were planned out by the Father to bring glory to his name. Jesus was not living as he pleased or just doing his thing; he was on a mission.

Yet the greatest reason why Jesus was sent from heaven to earth was to make his
Father known. By nature we have such a vague picture of who God is. Born in sin as we are, we also have a natural terror of God. God looks like nothing more than a huge shadow, towering above us - dark, unnatural in shape, no details. And that is all we see because, as John tells us: No one has ever seen God.

But, as John also says, the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. In the person of Jesus, God stepped out of the shadows. What do we see? A God who is also true man, our brother. We see a face of deep love. We hear words of incredible comfort. We see a warrior who came to destroy the devil's work. We see a God who desires nothing more than that we have an eternal bond of love and fellowship like that which once existed between God and the crown of his creation, before Adam’s tragic fall.

On the cross, we see Jesus revealing the Father’s glory. We can only see it with eyes of faith - this deep love that sacrificed his own Son, this great power that will destroy sin and death, this heart beating for and bleeding for our salvation. It is finished - all the work the Father gave Jesus to do so that a world of sinners might truly know him as he truly is - the God who saves.

And on the cross, we also see the power of God doing what we are unable to do. As true as it is, the human mind cannot wrap itself around this thought. More than that, the human mind does not want to wrap itself around this thought. We know from Scripture that we are born dead in transgressions and sins. We look around society and see evidence of man's sin all over the place.

Yet the greatest display of our sin, the greatest resistance to the will of God, is not confined to the dark alleys and the jails. Rather, it is found on your street, in your workplace, in rich homes in the suburbs and in poverty-stricken cities of the world. What is this great sin? It is to spit in God’s face by looking at the cross, looking at the Father’s incredible sacrifice, and saying: No thanks, God; I’ll pay my own way. No thanks, God; I’m basically a good person, and I’ll make it on my own. It is stubborn human pride that believes that I can actually, with my own sacrifices, with my own efforts and general good will, become deserving of God's praise and the reward of heaven. This is what Satan planted in the human heart when he led the world into sin: to make God accept me on my terms, not his. To the sinful mind this all makes sense; in every other aspect of life, good work and good deeds get praise and reward.

Yet Paul says this about the sinful mind: The mind governed by the flesh is death. And it is. Ironically, the sinful mind does not understand sin - how serious it is and what punishment it deserves from a holy God. There is no quicker path to eternal death, no quicker path that takes you further from the glory of the Father than choosing to stand on your own goodness.

Here, on the cross, we see God’s way - the better way, the only way. We have said it so often in the Nicene Creed: For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. And there, on the cross, it was finished:

- It is finished - the suffering Jesus endured for the sins of the world
- It is finished - the full payment, the complete punishment of your sins and mine
- It is finished - God does not - will not - punish you for your sins, since they have already been punished
- It is finished - since God himself did it all, it was done fully and perfectly
- It is finished - Satan cannot accuse you anymore
- It is finished - your sins need not burden your conscience
- It is finished - death no longer is a haunting fear
- It is finished - hell has no power over you who put your faith in Jesus the crucified.

And we know for certain it is finished because Jesus’ last words from the cross began with the word Father. God’s face was once again turned to his Son. The punishment was over; the sacrifice, accepted. Father and Son were again at peace.

For you, this also means that your punishment is over and that God is at peace with you. Through faith in his Son, you are clothed in Jesus’ holiness; you are a dear son, a dear daughter, adopted into God’s own family through Baptism. Doesn’t he bless you each week as you leave his house, reminding you that he too turns his face toward you now and gives you peace?

And because of this cross and these three words of truth, on that day when each of us has finished our earthly journey, we can gently bow our heads as Jesus did on the cross - as if going to sleep - and commend our spirits into our Father’s hands. Life is not finished then - but just beginning. For this God of all power and love will take us, call us by name, and bring us into his eternal joy. Amen.

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