

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Finish Well



“Let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV

## IT IS FINISHED

“Jesus ... said, ‘It is finished,’ and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30).

Both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus cried out in a loud voice just before dying. It’s possible that this is the content of that loud cry. This is not Jesus finally succumbing to all of His pain. It’s not what happens when you’re exhausted and you can’t go on and you simply say, “I’m done.” Jesus isn’t wiped out. This is a joyful exclamation, often called the Word of Victory. With this cry, Jesus declares that He has accomplished everything that the Father sent Him to accomplish. It’s done. It’s really done.

The Bible is not an encyclopedia that answers all our questions about how things work. It is not a collection of different opinions on what God is like. Part of what makes the Bible incredible is that it is a narrative, written over hundreds of years by different human authors, yet it all comes together as one seamless story. On the first page, we see that the Bible opens with the words, “In the beginning.” It tells of a terrible tragedy that marred life as we know it for all time. Then it records God’s steady and intentional plan throughout history to restore what had been lost. That story involves individuals and nations, kings and queens, shepherds and swordsmen. There are some really promising moments and some desperately dark times. People act with incredible courage and unbelievable stupidity. The whole story leads up to this moment. This is what Jesus declared when He said with a victorious cry: “It is finished.”

## THE ATONEMENT

Now we need to go deeper. What happened at the cross? Atonement is what Christ did on the cross. Atonement is why He died. Atonement may sound like a churchy word, but we’re actually quite familiar with it. This past Christmas holiday I ate a lot. So the first few weeks of January, I tried to eat less than normal to reverse some of that. That’s atonement. A few weeks ago, I got a parking ticket for parking longer than four hours in a four-hour parking zone. That meant I had to write the city a check for \$53. That’s atonement.

In the New Testament, the cross is described in relational terms, commercial terms, judicial terms, religious terms, and military terms. When you put all of these metaphors together, you get a way of understanding the atonement, but each individual metaphor sheds a different kind of light on what is meant by the atonement.

**One of the main Scriptural themes for atonement is a relational theme.** The relationship between God and His people was fractured by their rebellion. That relationship needed to be healed. Jesus died on the cross to bring reconciliation between God and His people. Listen to Colossians 1:19–20, “*For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.*” We live in a world of relationships, so we understand what it’s like to have a broken relationship and we long for reconciliation. That’s what the cross offers.

**But we also live in a world of commerce.** We buy things, we

sell things, and we trade things. All throughout history, something valuable is redeemed by paying the price for it. This is another way the Scripture describes the cross. Listen to Ephesians 1:7–8, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.”* Christ’s death is a price that was paid to purchase us so that we could belong to God.

We also live in a legal world of laws, courts, and judges. We get in trouble if we steal or hurt someone. In legal terms, we are guilty of crimes against God. Here’s Romans 5:1–2, *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.”* The cross of Christ allows us to be justified. It takes away our guilt. Because of what Jesus has done, we can stand innocent, justified of our wrong-doing.

**The Bible also uses religious imagery to describe the atonement.** Jesus was a Jew, and most people consider following Jesus to be a religion. So His death on the cross is also described in religious terms that Jews and non-Jews would be familiar with. Hebrews 9:14 describes Him as the perfect sacrifice, *“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”* Jesus is completely unblemished, and He cleanses us perfectly because He is perfect. He does what no sacrifice before has been able to do: perfectly please God.

**One more primary image the New Testament uses is a military image.** Jesus’ death is often pictured

as a brilliant military victory. Jesus outsmarted Satan and won the final battle. Listen to Colossians 2:14–15, *“This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame.”* Jesus went into battle with the most brilliant tactic ever employed. He would defeat death by dying Himself. When He died and rose again, He humiliated death and evil and proclaimed victory. The atonement is a triumph over evil.

### REST IN CHRIST’S ATONEMENT

On the cross, Jesus says that atonement is finished. But so many of us are walking around as if that atonement isn’t complete. We want to pay things back ourselves. We want to earn our way back to God. We want to be worthy of His love.

We can’t experience the freedom of forgiveness if we don’t really believe Jesus’ words on the cross. We walk around feeling abandoned, worthless, guilty, sinful, and defeated. But then we see Jesus on the cross and we hear Him proclaim, “It is finished.”

The amazing message of the gospel is that all of these things are available to us. We can be reconciled with God. We can be reconciled with each other. We can be redeemed from our worthlessness and low self-esteem. We can be justified from the guilt that plagues us and the shame that hangs over our head. We can be sure that God is pleased with us because the perfect sacrifice has been offered on our behalf. And we can go out in victory because of what Jesus has done. We don’t have to live defeated lives. We can be free. Through Christ, we have won! Jesus declared “It is finished.” In that moment everything changed. Can you rest in that?

—Paul Taylor, condensed

## PAID IN FULL

Of the last sayings of Christ on the cross, none is more important or more poignant than, “It is finished.” Found only in the Gospel of John, the Greek word translated “it is finished” is *tetelestai*, an accounting term that means “paid in full.” When Jesus uttered those words, He was declaring that the debt owed to His Father was wiped away completely and forever. Not that Jesus wiped away any debt that He owed to the Father; rather, Jesus eliminated the debt owed by mankind—the debt of sin.

Just prior to His arrest by the Romans, Jesus prayed His last public prayer, asking the Father to glorify Him, just as Jesus had glorified the Father on earth, having “accomplished the work that You gave Me to do” (John 17:4). The work Jesus was sent to do was to “seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), to provide atonement for the sins of all who would ever believe in Him (Romans 3:23–25), and to reconcile sinful men to a holy God. “In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). None other but God in the flesh could accomplish such a task.

Also completed was the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies, symbols, and foreshadowings of the coming Messiah. From Genesis to Malachi, there are over 300 specific prophecies detailing the coming of the Anointed One, all fulfilled by Jesus. From the “seed” who would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15), to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, to the prediction of the “messenger” of the Lord (John the Baptist) who would “prepare the way” for the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3), all prophecies

of Jesus’ life, ministry, and death were fulfilled and finished at the cross.

Although the redemption of mankind is the most important finished task, many other things were finished at the cross. The sufferings Jesus endured while on the earth, and especially in His last hours, were at last over. God’s will for Jesus was accomplished in His perfect obedience to the Father (John 5:30; 6:38). Most importantly, the power of sin and Satan was finished. No longer would mankind have to suffer the “flaming darts of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16). By raising the “shield of faith” in the One who completed the work of redemption and salvation, we can, by faith, live as new creations in Christ. Jesus’ finished work on the cross was the beginning of new life for all who were once “dead in ... trespasses and sins” but who are now made “alive ... with Christ” (Ephesians 2:1,5).

—GotQuestions.org

## ADDING TO A MASTERPIECE

Could you improve on a masterpiece? Imagine that you are walking through the Louvre museum in Paris. As you approach the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci, would you think about taking a palette and brushes and touching up the painting? Maybe put some more color in her cheeks? Perhaps change her nose a little?

“That’s ridiculous!” you say. For nearly 500 years the Mona Lisa has been considered one of the greatest artistic works of all time. How absurd to think we could add anything to this masterpiece!

Yet that’s what many people try to do with Christ’s masterpiece—salvation. They think they must improve on it with some work of their own. But that masterpiece was completed when Jesus said, “It is finished,” while

hanging on the cross (John 19:30). Then He proved that His work of redemption was done when He rose from the dead.

When you hear that Jesus paid the price for your sin and you don't have to do anything to merit God's grace, do you think it's too good to be true? Do you think there's something you must do to earn it? You can't add anything! Receive God's gift of salvation. Jesus paid it all. The masterpiece is complete. Salvation is a gift to be received—not a goal to be achieved.

—Dave Branon, *Our Daily Bread*

## IS GOD FINISHED WITH ME?

Someone reading this article—it may be you—has failed the Lord, and you think perhaps God is finished with you.

In Joshua 7 we read that, coming off the incredible victory over Jericho, God's people Israel met a stunning defeat against the small city of Ai, because there was sin in the camp. The sin was discovered and dealt with, but Joshua was dejected—even though he had not been personally responsible.

As Joshua chapter 8 opens, God basically says to Joshua, "I'm giving you another chance. I'm giving you another day." I want to tell you, God is no more finished with you than God was finished with the children of Israel just because they sinned. God wants to give you another chance.

God is the God of the second chance. God is the God of grace, of forgiveness, of beginning again. Failures are neither fatal nor final as long as there's a God in Heaven.

### GOD IS THE GIVER OF SECOND CHANCES

He gave **Samson** another chance, didn't He? Remember how Samson got his hair cut in the devil's barber shop? He lost his power and utterly

failed to be the judge in Israel he had been chosen to be. Yet Samson said, "Oh God, hear me one more time!" And he was more victorious in his death than he was in his life.

God gave **Jacob** a second chance. Remember that Jacob went to Bethel and there he met the Lord. He saw a ladder descending out of Heaven. He made vows to God. Then later on he got away from God. But the Bible says he went back to Bethel. God gave him a second chance.

God gave **John Mark** a second chance. The apostle Paul gave up on Mark. He said, "Mark's been a failure—he's been a deserter." Mark even caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39)! Yet God gave Mark a second chance. In later years Paul wrote to Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Not only that, God gave him the privilege of writing the Gospel of Mark.

God gave **Peter** a second chance. Simon Peter cursed, swore and denied Christ in the darkest hour of His life, and yet Simon Peter was a great preacher on the day of Pentecost.

For **Paul**, it was hunting down and murdering Christians. *It's difficult to commit a "failure" which surpasses that.*

### SERVING WITH FRESH ENERGY

Aren't you glad that God is the God of a second chance? Bring your failure to Him. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If you confess your sin, He will forgive you and give you a brand new start. And after you get this new start, you may serve Him better than ever because you've learned a lesson. You've known the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Now you're ready to

serve the Lord with power that you never had before.

Lamentations 3:22–23 may be a word from God for you today: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (NKJV).

Aren’t you glad that His compassions fail not? They are new every morning! Aren’t you glad that regardless of what happened yesterday, today is “the day that the Lord has made” (Psalm 118:24)? Aren’t you glad He is the God of the second chance? He is the God of a fresh start.

There is something about the nature and character of God revealed in Joshua 8:1. Don’t miss it. The God who judges failure is also the God who is willing to forgive sin when it’s confessed, repented of, repudiated and put away.

God will give you a second chance.

—Adrian Rogers

## GOD WILL FINISH IT

*“I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion” (Philippians 1:6).*

God always finishes what He starts. All who love Christ desire to be like Him in spiritual perfection and absolute holiness. We want to please Him in every respect. However, that noble pursuit is often met with frustration and discouragement as human frailties and sin block our pathway.

Paul’s cry in Romans 7 is ours as well: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (vv. 15,21,24). His answer resonates

with confidence and relief: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25).

Paul was convinced that God always completes the good work of salvation He begins in every new believer—a work that progressively conforms us to the image of His Son (2 Corinthians 3:18). That might seem like a painfully slow process at times, but be assured He will complete it. All whom He justifies will be glorified (Romans 8:29–30).

In the meantime, you have an active role to play in the process. Paul called it “work[ing] out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). You must discipline yourself for holiness through prayer, Bible study, obedience, and accountability to other believers. All the resources you need are at your disposal as God Himself works in you to produce “His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Believer, rejoice in knowing that you belong to God and that He is conforming you to the image of His Son. See every event of this day as part of that process. Yield to the Spirit’s prompting, and take heart that God will accomplish His will.

—John MacArthur, *Drawing Near*

## FINISHING WELL

How do you want to be remembered? What do you hope people will say about you after you are gone? How will the people who knew you best summarize 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 or 80 years of living?

Here is Paul’s answer to that question. Writing from a Roman jail, with the certain knowledge that he would soon be dead, he looked back at his journey with Christ, and then he looked forward to what would happen after he died. Then he wrote his own

epitaph: “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

After an exhaustive study of the men and women of the Bible, Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary concluded that there are approximately 100 detailed biographies in the Bible. He notes that approximately two-thirds of those men and women ended poorly. Either they turned to immorality or they drifted away from the faith or they ended their life in a backslidden condition. The Apostle Paul was not among them. He finished well.

Out there somewhere is a finish line for each of us—maybe ten years or 20 years or 30 years away. But whether sooner or later, it is bound to come because “it is appointed for man to die once” (Hebrews 9:27). I have an appointment with death. I don’t know when or where or how, but it’s in God’s book in Heaven. That’s one appointment I won’t miss and can’t postpone.

As Paul approached his own death, he drew some conclusions about his own life and what would happen next. Based on his words, I would like us to think about three questions together.

#### **WHAT KIND OF DEPARTURE WILL YOU HAVE?**

When Paul says he is being poured out like a drink offering, he is referring to an Old Testament ritual that accompanied certain sacrifices. The Law mandated that when a worshiper brought an offering, part of it was

consumed upon the altar and part was given to the priest for his own use. When the offering was consumed by fire, the worshiper would sometimes pour a “drink offering” of wine upon the burning sacrifice. All the wine was to be poured out. None was to be given to the priest. As the wine hit the burning coals, it evaporated and a sweet smell rose from the altar. Keep in mind that wine was a symbol of joy in the Old Testament. The drink offering was a symbolic way of saying, “I gladly give all that I have to the Lord. This sacrifice that I offer is given as a symbol of my wholehearted commitment to God. Nothing is held back. All that I have, I gladly give to my God.”

Was Paul afraid to die? Not at all. He viewed his death as simply going home to be with the Lord. What kind of departure will you have? Do you have that same confidence about your own death? You can face death with that buoyant faith if you will do what Paul did—offer your life as a “living sacrifice” to the Lord with nothing held back.

#### **WHAT KIND OF LEGACY WILL YOU LEAVE?**

Finishing well doesn’t happen by accident. Paul lived a disciplined life. “I have fought the good fight.” Think of the words Paul used to describe his own life: trouble, distress, tribulation, trials, hardships (see 2 Corinthians 6:4–5). Whatever else you can say about Paul, you can’t say he had an easy life. He never stopped fighting for Jesus until the day he died.

Paul also lived a directional life. “I have finished the race.” Paul followed the course the Lord Jesus set out for him the day He saved him on the road to Damascus. Ever since that day, Paul had been following the Lord, doing whatever the Lord had for him to do.

Paul lived a doctrinal life. “I have kept the faith.” This simply means he refused to compromise the truth. When other people fell away, Paul preached the Word. When the world was against him, Paul paid no attention. When it would have been easy to trim his message to save his own life, Paul proclaimed the whole counsel of God. He did not back down, he did not compromise, and he would not preach what people wanted to hear. He kept the faith.

Because Paul knew that nothing could touch him that did not come from the hand of God, he never gave in to discouragement. He truly believed that everything that happened to him was for his good and for God’s glory. Therefore, he kept on going for God to the very end. Even the chains of a Roman jail could not destroy his faith or shatter his confidence in God.

#### **WHAT KIND OF REWARD WILL YOU RECEIVE?**

“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Here we see Paul’s faith shining so brightly that the darkness of the Roman prison cell seems to disappear. By faith he sees beyond his own beheading. The pain of that moment is now past and the suffering of this life is left far behind. By faith he sees a day when he will receive his reward from the Lord.

This is what is ahead for you and me if we will faithfully serve Jesus Christ in this life. Be encouraged, child of God. The Lord is not so unjust as to forget your suffering for Him. He sees all that you go through. He knows all about your struggles. He sees how hard the fight is, how you are sometimes tempted to quit, and

how you keep on going when others around you throw in the towel. He sees and He knows, and in a coming day the Lord Himself will reward us if we are faithful to Him now.

So the word of the Lord is this: Keep on fighting. Keep on running. Keep on believing!

—Ray Pritchard, condensed

## **FOCUS TO THE FINISH**

I read a humorous story about a bloodhound. He started chasing a deer but a fox crossed his path, so he started chasing the fox instead. After a while, a rabbit crossed his path, so the hound chased the rabbit. Yet later, a mouse crossed his path and the hound chased the mouse into a hole. The hound, which had begun his hunt on the trail of a magnificent deer, ended up watching a mouse hole!

Most of us will laugh at the bloodhound. But if we stop and think, we’ll realize that often we too are easily distracted. At times we may even be sidetracked from following Christ. It is so easy to start well but then run after things that cross our paths.

We need to take to heart the words of the apostle Paul. He told Timothy to focus on the purpose of his life and ministry (2 Timothy chapters 1–3). He urged him to tell others about Christ and to warn them not to turn aside (2 Timothy 4).

The values of this world can easily influence us, tempting us to despise “sound teaching” and accept what is false. So we need to know and proclaim God’s Word, persevere through hardships, and keep the faith.

Yes, with God’s help, we can keep our eyes on Christ, stay close to Him, and finish well.

You can’t turn your back on Christ if you keep your eyes on Him.

—Albert Lee, *Our Daily Bread*