

***Signed, Sealed and Delivered***

March 20, 2014

“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘**It is finished.**’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” Recorded in John 19:30, these words ring loud with **a plan** completed, **a purpose** carried out and **a promise** for all who believe: It is finished—*Tetelestai!* Words said by Jesus Christ—his last before his sacrificial death for us! These words have the power to bring repentant sinners to saving faith as the Holy Spirit reveals their full and blessed meaning.

◆During one Saturday afternoon, while his mother—unbeknown to him—was agonizing in prayer for her only son’s salvation, James Hudson Taylor was musing through his father’s books. Reading a booklet that had caught his fancy, he was arrested by the words: “The finished work of Christ.” He’d heard those words before, but now, this day, the Spirit of the Living God impressed him deeply with the “finished work” phrase. What was finished?

The Spirit then spoke to his heart in answer, and Taylor wrote: “A full and perfect atonement for sin—the debt was paid by the great Substitute. ‘Christ died for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.’ Then came the thought with startling clearness, ‘if the whole work is finished, the whole debt is paid, **what is there left for me to do?**’ There was nothing in the world for me to do,” says Taylor, “**save to fall upon my knees and accepting this Savior and his salvation to praise him for evermore.**”

In that moment, conversion took place, and Hudson Taylor received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; his life changed forever! He went on to spend his life—more than 50 years in China—so that others would have an opportunity to hear the gospel, and he founded China Inland Mission which is now *Overseas Missionary Fellowship* based in Littleton, CO. The Holy Spirit spoke to him through words familiar to him, yet, in a particular moment brought to him the full realization of what Christ had “finished” for him and for the world.

We absolutely never know when God’s Word will jump off the page, or leap from the proclaiming mouth and penetrate and permeate the recesses of our hearts. **This should prompt us to want to be always in a place where we can hear from God—ready with listening ear, waiting soul and expecting heart.** A cooperative work of the Trinity, for those who have trusted in the atoning and sacrificing work of the Lord Jesus Christ, their salvation has been **signed** in His blood covenant, **sealed** by the Holy Spirit and **delivered** to the Father’s house.

We are already there—in promise and in practice. We need to trust the promise so much so that we live it out, as Asaph records in Psalm 73:23-24, “*Yet I (the believer) am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. 34You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*” We are **signed** by Jesus Christ the Son who “holds us”, **sealed** by the Holy Spirit who “guides us” through life, and then we will be **delivered** into the Father’s presence to dwell in his house forever—“*you will take me into glory*”.

Again, in Ephesians 1:13-14 “*And you also were **included in Christ** when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit**, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing **our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.*”

- Signed—**included in Christ**—“when we heard the word of truth...having believed”!
- Sealed—**marked in him with a seal**—by “the promised Holy Spirit”—the moment that we believed!
- To be delivered to—**our inheritance**— “to the praise of his (Father’s) glory”!

Are we getting the signed, sealed and delivered message? The best thing about being older, now, is that I have the opportunity to look back over my life and see God’s hand all over it. Even in my lost-state—before salvation—I can see his drawing-hand at work. As hymn writer, Robert Robinson, in *Come, Thou Fount*, pens in his second verse: “Here I raise mine Ebenezer—Hither by Thy help I’m come,” I can raise my Ebenezer—stone of remembrance—as well:

♥My “signed” salvation—after a nine-year altar call—receiving Christ at age 16 in revival services in a storefront Baptist Church in Council Grove, KS.

♥Yielding, again, to the Spirit’s “sealed” work to follow Christ implicitly at the Governors Hotel in Jefferson City, MO, at age 19. Days later witnessing a woman—full of years—singing to the Lord God out beyond the railroad tracks along the Missouri River. And I remember asking God if this was me in advanced age, or someone I would meet in glory—and his *silence*!

♥At 27—after being left alone with my two young children—on the backyard swing at Kingsley Dr. in Colorado Springs, experiencing yet again the Spirit’s “sealed” work reminding me of his constant guidance, care and provision. “*I will be a husband to you*” the Spirit affirmed, while encouraging me to **trust**: Psalm 62:5 “*Honor God by steadfast **trust** in him through trials of faith.*”

♥At 49, while positioned in a CT Scan on March 10, 1996—later learning that I had coded—and finding God’s hand in my left hand assuring me that he’d be there to receive me when it was time to cross Jordon. But it wasn’t time, yet, and so the Holy Spirit’s “sealed” work remains. Psalm 49:15 “*But **God will redeem my life from the grave, he will surely take me to himself.***”

♥April 2008, Grove, OK, God the Holy Spirit again opens the “sealed” way for ministry, this time through *Women & More* as His copy comes pouring out. At 61, I was learning: “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power*” 1 Corinthians 4:22. Satan will use anything and anyone to attack every ministry for God, because if he can tear away just one part of our **trust**, he can put us in a pitiful pit of distrust. But God’s Word is faithful to reassure us: “*Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me*” Psalm 138:7.

To think and to **trust** that the “finished work” of signing, sealing and delivering me was already a done deal means more to me than I can verbalize! Mrs. Charles Cowman said “It is far better for us to learn to **trust** God than to enjoy life.” And I’ll just add to that by saying that to fully enjoy the Christian life, we absolutely must learn to **trust** God! We must **trust** everything that he has said in his word **to us**, everything he is doing **in us and through us**, and everything he has promised **for us**.

Am I prone to forget, to not trust, to wander from full trust? Yes, yes, and yes! So, just one more time, the last two lines in *Come, Thou Fount* say, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.” Here’s my heart (signed), O take and seal it (sealed); seal it for thy courts above (delivered)!

And after we’ve **trusted**, it’s critical for us to remember God’s faithful work that He has finished. We mentioned our Ebenezer—stone of remembrance—and in 1 Samuel 7:12 Scripture says, “*Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer saying, ‘Thus far has the LORD helped us.’*”

We’ll discover what Samuel is remembering about the LORD’s help beginning in 1 Samuel 7:2-4: “*It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD. 3And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, ‘If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.’ 4So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.*” The ark of God represented His very presence, and had remained at Kiriath Jearim for twenty years. Now the Israelites longed for God’s presence in their lives in part, because of course, they were in great fear of the threatening Philistines and knew that they needed God to deliver them. Samuel tells them to get rid of their wickedness. 2 Timothy 2:19 warns us today: “*Nevertheless, **God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.**’*”

Verses 5-6 “Then Samuel said, ‘Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you.’ <sup>6</sup>When **they had assembled at Mizpah**, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day **they fasted and there they confessed**, ‘We have sinned against the LORD.’ And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah.” Notice that there was a way that they were to seek God’s presence, just as there is a way—through Jesus Christ—that we are to seek God’s presence today! Notice, too, that they had assembled to fast and confess, and when the assembled are threatened by attack God prevailed for them:

<sup>7</sup>“When the Philistines heard that Israel had **assembled at Mizpah**, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. <sup>8</sup>They said to Samuel, ‘**Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.**’ <sup>9</sup>Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. **He cried out to the LORD on Israel’s behalf, and the LORD answered him.**”

Lord, we come to thee; we bow to thee; we worship thee, and we ask of thee. And when we come in the right attitude of **trust**, God hears and God answers! Now for the rest of this true-life story from God’s Word: We can know that God was already about their deliverance! 1 Samuel 7:10-11 says, “**While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.** <sup>11</sup>The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.”

And then Samuel raised an Ebenezer—stone of remembrance—to the faithfulness of God. We don’t know how much the Israelites trusted, but we know that Samuel did. Perhaps he recalled words God had given to Moses in Deuteronomy 33:27, “*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’*” Someone has said that **to trust is to triumph** for the battle is the Lord’s! Dr. J. H. Jowett says it this way: “Evil never surrenders its hold without a sore fight. We never pass into any **spiritual inheritance** through the delightful exercise of a picnic, but always through the grim contentions of the battlefield.”

When Jesus Christ announced “*It is finished*” from the cross, moments before giving up his spirit to the Father, he was telling those who **trust** in him for salvation, for life, for eternity, that the whole ‘deal’ is done—start to finish! And while we know that we are signed and sealed, do we realize that we are, while yet living on this earth, as good as delivered? Of the believing, Paul states our position in Christ in **Ephesians 2:6**, “**And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ....**”

Here's commentary on this passage from Matthew Henry: "What remains yet to be done is here spoken of as though it were already past, though indeed we are raised up in virtue of our union with him whom God hath raised from the dead. When he raised Christ from the dead, he did in effect raise up all believers together with him, he being their common head; and when he placed him at his right hand in heavenly places, he advanced and glorified them in and with him, their raised and exalted head and forerunner." To make it a little more understandable, Henry further gives this insight: "Sinners roll themselves in the dust; sanctified souls sit in heavenly places, are raised above the world."

But what about what's coming up on the world scene? What about the end times, God's judgment, and what we may have to endure? Wherever and whenever God has judged the world, believers can see beautifully tucked inside the sign of God's activity of faithfulness. When enduring God's wrath, we can fully **trust** that His hand is fully engaged, and we can absolutely **trust** God to work out his deliverance for us—physically, mentally, and spiritually—for all eternity. "Nothing is more secure than that which is abandoned to God," said Hudson Taylor. And God's Word reminds us in Psalm 91:2 "*I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'*"

When we see a rainbow in the clouds of the sky, no matter what the physical scientists say about it being a phenomenon which occurs because of droplets etcetera, there's a promise in God's own hand written there—a covenant that God made with Noah after the flood so many thousand years ago. God is still speaking because the promise still holds! God is indeed that "skillful writer" of his bow in the sky. In verse 13 of Genesis 9 he says: "*I have set my rainbow.*"

Donald Ahrens in his text *Meteorology Today* describes a rainbow as "one of the most spectacular light shows observed on earth". And Rene Descartes' so-called clear discussion of the problem in optics—1637—adds nothing to God's very brilliant description of His rainbow and its purpose in Scripture. God must be smiling when the world takes what is his, for his purpose, and describes it practically into oblivion. We must **trust** implicitly what God says, and not turn to the world for a definition of God's handiwork.

"There are a hundred touches of kindness that come to us every day to tell us that we are not orphans or outcasts upon the earth," says Henry van Dyke. "Every trace of order, every gleam of beauty, every provision of bounty in the natural world, is an evidence that it is God's house." Romans 11:36 "*For from him (signed) and through him (sealed) and to him (delivered) are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*"