

John 19:28-29

March 18, 2018

John 4:7-15

"Thirst"

It Is Finished

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. John 19:28-29.

We have come to the fifth week in Lent and the fifth in our series of messages taken from our small group study "It Is Finished." We began the series by reflecting on Jesus' words of forgiveness extended to his detractors and torturers. Then He spoke words of hope to another who was suffering with him, offering that man a place in Jesus' own glorious future. We heard also how, from the cross, Jesus continued to focus on His love for others and His duty to care for His mother, and we reflected on how His blood shed on the cross can bind believers in His family. Last week Darrell helped us understand Jesus' words of despair when he uttered the cry "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Because He took on all the sin of humanity He felt the crushing burden of sin's end result: total distance from God, a sense of being absolutely lost and out of God's grace.

Today we focus on the only words He spoke that dealt with his personal, physical suffering. Hanging there He cried out "I thirst." (Greek is: dipso), bringing to mind the words of Psalms: *"My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth"* (Psalm 22:15) and, *"They gave me vinegar for my thirst."* (Psalm 69:21).

So Human

His cry of pain is so human. And that is precisely the point. We must remember what He endured in the 12 hours before His death to appreciate His words and how difficult it must have been for Him to even say them. Arrested in the middle of the night, He was slapped and punched, pushed and mocked. He was crowned with thorns that were pressed down into his scalp. He was whipped with the cat o' nine tails, sharp pieces of leather studded with bits of bone and stone and metal. His back was shredded, until you could see His bones. They ripped His beard and beat him as they made him carry the cross. They drove nails through his hands and feet. Not for one second did he have a moment's rest, nor did anyone offer him anything. Oh, except the soldiers *"...tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it"* Mark 15:23. It was a potion that helped to deaden the pain. It is instructive that Jesus refused that minor comfort – as He was taking on all the sin of the world, He willingly

took on all the pain that humans can experience. So, when Jesus hung on the cross he was not the beautiful, manicured Savior we often see in the artists' renditions. Rather, He was a bloody, maimed, disfigured version of a human being. It is quite possible that the last drink Jesus had was at the Passover – early in the previous night. With all the blood loss, exposure, and heat, doubtless He was suffering severe dehydration.

We've known for 2,000 years that He was and is divine, the only begotten Son of God. We know the outcome of this terrible drama of the cross – in three days He will arise from death. But let us not forget that Jesus was human. He suffered as God and as human, paying the price of sin that was too great for humans. In order to redeem flesh, He became flesh. He entered into the suffering, pain, and agony that humans live in. "I thirst" – it's the experience we all know.

He knows what it means to be one of us. The Nicene Creed says that He, "... was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human." This simply reflects the truth found in the book of Hebrews: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin"* Hebrews 4.15.

Where Is The Water of Life?

I suppose one of the ultimate ironies of the Bible is that the One who offers "living water" now cries out "I thirst." Thirsting as any man or woman has thirsted, reminding us how down-to-earth Christianity really is. You may recall His talk with a Samaritan woman at a well – the story is found in John chapter 4. He asks her to give Him a drink. Not just because He wants to teach her a spiritual lesson. But because it is Samaria, a hot, dry country and when you walk all day you get thirsty. Yet, He used the occasion to say to her, *"Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst..."* John 4:13-14.

Another great irony is that He who turned water into wine (His first recorded miracle at a wedding in Cana) – the finest wine available - on His arrival at Golgotha was offered wine mixed with a narcotic to deaden pain. He refused it and suffered all the pain that anyone could ever suffer. Later, in response to His cry of thirst, he's given cheap vinegar wine, that gave only a momentary relief to the lips and tongue. Water alone can truly quench thirst.

Only in the last moments of His life does He cry these words of personal pain, "I thirst." The Bible tells us that when Jesus hung on the cross He knew that he had borne the sins of the human race and suffered all the painful consequences. He knew that he had done everything he could for you and for me. He knew that his work had been completed. And having done what God

sent him to do—having cared for the needs of others—only then does he make a comment about his own intense suffering.

He who is the water of life now dies of thirst. When they put the crown on his head he didn't say "O, my head." When they ripped the beard from his face he didn't say "O, my face." When they scourged him he didn't say "O, my aching back." As the old spiritual says, through it all, "He never said a mumblin' word."

This Is Life

Yet a tough question lingers at this scene of Jesus on the cross. Did it really matter what Jesus said and did? Was Jesus actually a failure? You could make a good case for that. Look at his life: He was born into an unimportant family in an unimportant little village. He was laughed at. When he talked and spoke, the powers that be wanted nothing to do with him. He had a few devoted followers, but many opposed, misunderstood, or ignored Him. Perhaps even as today many ignore Him or take Him for granted. In the end he was crucified just like an ordinary criminal in unspeakable suffering. When he died he appeared to be another forgotten footnote in history. Yes, I think you could make the case that our Lord was a failure.

But don't you know that you can do everything you know to be right and still end up suffering tremendously? Isn't it true that you can walk the path of righteous integrity and still end up having nothing to show for it? You can pray and pray and pray and your prayers sometimes will not be answered. You can go to work and you can live by the rules. You can do a good job and still the day comes when you lose it without warning. You may save your money for the dream of your life and suddenly have your money taken away from you. You may work and work and work to make a marriage hold together and in the end it may fall apart though you have done everything humanly possible to save it. You may have dear friends whom you love who will turn against you in the moment of crisis even though you know you have walked in integrity and told the truth. There's no guarantee, is there? You could do everything right and it could turn out all wrong.

There are no guarantees in life. Indeed, we do all we can to avoid suffering and tragedy and to ameliorate it. Yet suffering and tragedy nevertheless come unbidden. To stretch the metaphor: life can oft times seem like a desert with little shade or sustenance when we need it most. Our desert is the opposite of the Paradise Jesus offered the penitent thief. Out here life is hard and we long for someone to help us, yet we seem to wander from the very One who can bring us relief.

Suffering and hard times are no sign that you are out of the will of God, nor necessarily a sign that you are doing something wrong. Oh sure, you may be doing something wrong or did something wrong back in the past and that's why you're suffering now. There are real-time and delayed consequences for our

mistakes and our sins. **“The power of sin is the false promise that it will bring more happiness than holiness will bring. The power of sin is the power of a lie.”** John Piper. And we do succumb to that lie.

But many of the difficulties we face do not come because we have done something wrong. Suffering can just as well come because we have done something right. Case in point—the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at him, a bloody mess on the cross. Look at him begging for water. What has he done wrong? What sin has he committed? What terrible crime has he committed? He has done nothing but obey the Father’s will perfectly. And what he got for it was the cross.

Are you so sure that you can avoid suffering and tragedy by your good deeds? Or do you buy into that other philosophy that says if you do everything right all will come up roses for you? It didn’t happen that way for Jesus. Why should it happen that way for you? You’ve perhaps heard the old saying “If everything’s coming your way, you’re in the wrong lane!”

Do you understand what this means? I’m saying your loneliness, your brokenness, your disappointment and frustration, does not necessarily mean you are outside the will of God. Your poverty does not necessarily mean you are outside the will of God. Your pain does not necessarily mean you are outside the will of God. The broken relationships you’ve experienced do not necessarily mean you are outside the will of God. Your sickness does not necessarily mean you are outside the will of God. We all suffer the consequences of sin, be it our own, that of others near or far, or just the general brokenness of all creation. Look! Our Lord Jesus Christ did not himself sin, He lived the will of God, and yet he ended up on the cross. Still He sought after His heavenly Father. We might recall His promise *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied,”* Matthew 5.6.

Was He a failure? No! He was not. He was the greatest success this world has ever seen. Jesus wasn’t broken ... he was and still is fixing the relationship that humanity broke with God. Nobody ever accomplished more than Jesus Christ did. Is he not illustrating that true success comes through suffering, hardship, and loss? Here’s another truth we learn from Him: sacrifice precedes success.

Thirst for Life

“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them’” John 7:37-38. The question is not DO you thirst? It is HOW LONG will you thirst? Our physical thirst is easily satisfied with a glass of water. Yet, *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,”* Jesus said. *“But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will*

give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:13-14. He’s speaking of spiritual water, the water of life. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” Psalm 42.

It’s really a “come to Jesus” moment, and that moment is just now. Stop drinking the “kool-aide” that the world offers: pleasure, instant gratification, comfort, along with false promises of fame, fortune, and success without sacrifice. Come to the living water of Jesus where your thirst for meaning and significance and eternity will be satisfied.

Living with an eye on heaven your sufferings and tragedies and all that life can through at you, will become meaningful. With the One who bore all the sin and suffering of humanity at your side your troubles will become bearable. Are you suffering right now? Do you live in darkness? Is the way unclear, or do you feel the pain of those you love turning against you? Fear not and do not lose heart. We know He triumphed and we know we will share His glory. The final chapter of our grand story – found in Revelation – calls to us

“... let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” Revelation 22:17.