

"I Thirst"

This evening I'd like to draw our attention primarily to one word uttered by Jesus on the cross. In English it's translated as two words, but in the original it's just one word. Verse 28. I thirst.

Now I must confess. In the past, I've already attached a sort of basic and limited significance to this saying of Jesus on the cross. I've acknowledge in my mind how this reminds us of Jesus' humanity. He actually thirsted on the cross. Even though he is God, fully divine, we acknowledge that he became fully human as well. The mystery of the incarnation is seen even on the cross, where clearly he suffered in his humanity, as he cries out here that he thirsts.

Of course, I've also acknowledged in my mind as I read this verse, that Jesus was fulfilling Scripture here. It tells us right here in verse 28 that he said this in part to fulfill Scripture. Well, Psalm 69:21 describes David lamenting how his enemies gave him sour wine to drink for his thirst. That's believed to be the Scripture in reference here in John. And so that would tells us that Jesus, as a part of his humanity, suffered like humans do. So many psalms describe the sufferings of humans, and Jesus repeatedly took on those sufferings in fulfillment of those Psalms. Certainly in my mind I've acknowledged that again here. We so often point out today that Jesus is God. But we need to also be reminded on Good Friday that Jesus also had become man. His suffering was as a human. He took on all our pains and sorrows.

And yet as I prepared this sermon, these sorts of initial observations by me seemed to not say enough. They are all very true and quite a fitting understanding of this passage. But I think there's so much more that can be said. As I studied this simple verse, I felt gripped by a newfound appreciation of it. There's so much significance in this one word by Jesus on the cross. And so let's spend some time this evening thinking about the thirst Jesus experienced on the cross.

Let me begin by pointing out that this is a common subject in Scripture. Just get out a concordance, or do a search of the Bible online for the words "thirst" or "thirsty." What you'll find is that this subject of thirst is spoken about repeatedly from cover to cover in the Bible. Both Old and New Testaments speak about thirst being a real concern in our life. Some of these passages talk about our physical thirst, some talk about our spiritual thirst.

Of course, this is understandable, because thirst is such a fundamental and basic concern of life, isn't it? Surely we've all been thirsty before. Though in our country, probably few of us have actually experienced any life-threatening thirst. And yet this is such a fundamental need for us. Our bodies are about 60% water. Our need for water is something even more fundamental than our need for food. Most of us can survive many days without food, but not more than a few days without water. The only thing that's probably more fundamentally needed for our survival than water is... air!

And so Jesus cries out, "I thirst," and we can all relate. And yet think of how ironic these words are. John alone chooses to record this word of Jesus on the cross. And he probably did it quite intentionally, for it's also John who records some pretty profound statements by Jesus in contrast. Think of the irony here. This is the same Jesus who told the Samaritan woman in John 4:14 that he possessed

water that if you drank of it, you would never be thirsty again! This is the same Jesus who said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." This is the same Jesus who stood up on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles in John 7:37 and said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink," saying that whoever believes in him will have rivers of living water flowing from their heart. Of course don't miss the context of that last statement. That was at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast that commemorated Israel's historic forty years of wilderness wandering. What happened during that wilderness wandering? God satisfied their thirst by bringing forth flowing water from the rock. Here Jesus at the end of that feast proclaims that he is the ultimate solution for the people's thirst.

Now obviously Jesus in these statements is first and foremost speaking of our spiritual thirst. He is promising to give people a way to find spiritual satisfaction. We each have a thirst that's greater than physical thirst. We each thirst to know our God. We each thirst to be in communion and fellowship with our creator. We each thirst spiritually. Man's chronic problem is that he tries to fill that thirst with worldly things; things that won't truly satisfy. But Jesus is trying to get people to see that their spiritual thirst will only be solved by God. And he points to himself, because he said that he is only way to God. Even now, people's spiritual thirst could be solved only through Jesus. That's what he was ultimately telling them. And yet in heaven we're also told that there even our physical thirst will be solved as well. In heaven, we will not thirst either physically or spiritually.

And yet don't miss the irony here. He who promised to be able to quench people's thirst, and to quench it forever, he himself is thirsty. He himself cries out on the cross, "I thirst!" But it's in this cry that we begin to realize how he's able to quench thirst. Jesus was struck, to bear our sins, to bear the wrath of God in our place, so that we would never have to thirst again. He thirsts, so that we would never have to thirst again.

Let me explain what I mean. You see, what we really all deserve because of our sins is thirst. Our rebellion against God deserves God's wrath and curse. That curse in the Bible is described in many ways, but often it's put in terms of thirst. Just look at the earthly curses that God threatened and even placed on wayward Israel. Deuteronomy 28:48 says that one of the curses against Israel would be thirst if they broke God's covenant. The prophets threaten thirst against wayward Israel if they keep up their rebellion; you can look up Hosea 2:3 and Isaiah 50:2 on your own for examples of this. Hosea 2:3 and Isaiah 50:2. And of course if you read Lamentations 4:4 it records the fulfillment of this. It records Israel suffering in thirst as part of God's punishment on them after they were destroyed by Babylon.

But the earthly curse of thirst in the Old Testament was just a picture of a greater curse to come. Earthly thirst is a picture of an eternal thirst in hell. Part of the punishment of eternal damnation can be put in terms of thirst. Just remember the parable Jesus told in Luke 16 about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man entered hell, and Lazarus, the poor man, entered heaven. The rich man was in torment in the fires of hell. This rich man was allowed to see Lazarus being comforted by Father Abraham in heaven. And so Jesus says that rich man cried out to Father Abraham saying, "Have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame," Luke 16:24. Certainly that gives a very vivid picture to the eternal, unquenchable, physical thirst that awaits any who go to hell.

And yet in hell, the even greater thirst is still a spiritual one. For those in hell will be eternally cut off from God and his goodness. They'll be eternally separated from God. No longer will any of God's common graces and kindnesses fall on the wicked in hell. The thirst they had all their life for their creator will go unmet for all eternity. What they didn't realize they needed all their life, will be what they don't have, for all eternity. That's a punishment even greater than the physical tortures of hell.

You see, Christ experienced thirst on the cross, to save us from this future. Christ experienced thirst in our place, so that we who believe in him will never have this eternal thirst of damnation. That's because on the cross, Christ was our substitute. He thirsted in our place. We each have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's what the Bible says is the result of all the ways we've lived our lives apart from God. The Bible says it's something each of us is guilty of. No one deserves, on their own, anything but to suffer this thirst in hell for eternity. But on the cross, Christ bore our punishment. For him to cry out, I thirst, is him telling us that he is thirsting in our place. He thirsted, so we won't have to.

This thirst was certainly physical. After all he went through on that Good Friday, he must have been so thirsty. He probably had little or no sleep, having been arrested in the middle of the night before. He had been shuttled back and forth from trial to trial. He had been beaten, forced to carry his cross, and now he had hung for hours on this cross. He surely thirsted. As verse 28 tells us, this thirst was in fulfillment of Scripture. As I mentioned, Psalm 69:21 talks about the thirst inflicted on the Psalmist by his enemies. Psalm 22:15, another Psalm of David, also talks about the physical thirst afflicted upon him, bringing him to the brink of death. Jesus in his humanity suffered real, physical, thirst. Some people go thirsty as a result of the persecution and sin of others; that's what these two Psalms record. Others went thirsty in the Old Testament as a result of God's punishment upon them for their own sins; we talked about that. Here on the cross, Christ suffers physical thirst in the place of all these sorts of sins. He bore the sins that in so many different ways result in thirst. That's represented by his cry of thirst on the cross. That's why it says here that Scripture had to be fulfilled in this area. For this thirst is what we actually deserved, and so he suffers in our place instead.

But I would argue that this cry by Jesus on the cross represents more than just physical thirst. As I mentioned, this cry of thirst is not recorded in other gospels. And yet the giving of the sour wine is recorded. That fills in some additional context for us. For example, in Matthew's gospel, Matthew 27:48 records them giving him the sour wine immediately after Jesus cry of being forsaken by God. And so likely his cry of being forsaken and his cry of thirst were spoken closely together, maybe even at the same time.

Brothers and sisters, his thirst was more than just physical. He spiritual thirsted. He thirsted for that satisfaction that only can come from God. He yearned for that fellowship he had always had with his Father; He wanted so badly that satisfaction which he had for eternity before. But now on the cross he hung their forsaken. Forsaken by God the Father. The forsaking of the Father left Jesus thirsting. On the cross he experienced the eternal thirst of hell. Not only physical thirst, but the thirst of being separated from God. He experienced this in our place. He bore this so that after his resurrection he could then in turn give us the springs of living water that he promised.

Remember how this was illustrated in the Old Testament. Remember that wilderness wandering of Israel. At that time they thirsted physically. And so God provided

water for them from the rock. God told Moses to strike the rock. He did, and streams of water gushed forth from the rock. Later on in the wilderness, the people again thirsted. So God then told Moses to talk to the rock. Moses actually in rebellion instead struck the rock. God still send forth water again, but Moses God in trouble for that. God punished Moses severely for that, not allowing him to enter the earthly Promised Land. Why was this such a serious sin for Moses? Well, I believe the answer lies in what the rock was intended to represent. Paul tells us what the rock represented in 1 Corinthians 10:4. Paul says the rock was Christ.

This physical water-giving-rock in the Old Testament was supposed to represent Christ who gives the streams of living water to us. Christ satisfies our real thirst, but he could only do that by being struck. Christ had to be struck so that he could pour forth springs of living water into our hearts. He had to be struck by taking on our guilt; that guilt which said we don't deserve to have our thirst quenched. He was struck to pay for that guilt. Jesus was struck on the cross. But after that, Christ never needs to be struck again! Now we but simply have to ask of him, and he will freely give us this water. This is the victory that Christ won on the cross. It was the victory that was signaled three days later when he rose again. Death and damnation had no hold on him. He conquered sin and death in our place. Now he freely gives of this living water to all who ask him for it.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Jesus' cry of "I thirst," becomes tonight a call to you for faith. Listen to how his cry of thirst has now become a cry of victory and a call for faith.

Revelation 21:6 God says, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."

Revelation 22:17 The Spirit and Jesus say, "Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

If you are sitting there today and have never come to Jesus in faith, then I urge you to do so today. Give your life to him. Come to him who thirsted for us, so that we'll never have to thirst again. He knows you. He knows what you really thirst for, even if you don't. He alone can really satisfy your inner thirst.

I have one last application for us this evening. If you are one who has found this living water in Christ, then I would call you to recognize what you have. Jesus' cry of thirst becomes now for us a call to contentment. You see, if we are a Christian, we now have this living water. We have had our thirst ultimately satisfied. How we think and act should reflect this. We deserved a cup of wrath, but instead we've been given springs of eternal water. But the struggle sometimes for us as Christians is that often we still physically thirst. We physically thirst and encounter all sorts of ways that we lack different material things. The result can be that we can end up complaining and grumbling instead of realizing the real satisfaction that we confess to have in Christ.

In fact, our perspective should be quite different when we experience lacking in this life. I think of the Apostle Paul. He talks in 1 Corinthians 4 about all the ways he suffers lack in this life for the sake of Christ. He includes in his list that he hungers and thirsts. He sees this as a way that he's been called to share in the sufferings of Christ. And then in verse 16 of that chapter he calls us to imitate this same lifestyle. In other words, Paul tells us that Christians shouldn't lament physical suffering and physical thirst in this life, if received for Christ's sake. Rather, we should find joy and contentment in Christ, even when we physically suffer. If even we physically thirst, or go lacking in any way. We

can do that because we have a firm conviction that in Christ, we have all that we really need. It's an act of faith that says it is well with my soul; that I have all that I need, even when faced with physical hunger and thirst.

What colors all of this for us as Christians, of course, is that this suffering for Christ is but for a short while. Christ suffered thirst on the cross, knowing that in three days victory would be proclaimed in the resurrection. We suffer now for a time, knowing that the final victory is not that far off. We now experience spiritual satisfaction of thirst in Christ. We look forward to his return when that satisfaction will find its culmination in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Then we'll dwell with our Lord for eternity. And there, even our physical thirst will be eternally quenched. As it says in Revelation 7:16 of that time for God's people, "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is our certain hope. Christ thirsted so we will never have to thirst again. May this grant us contentment beyond understanding now and for eternity; even as we find our soul's satisfaction in Christ who suffered for us. Amen.

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