

John 19:28-29
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“The Seven Last Words of Christ Series”

“I Am Thirsty”

The first three statements from the cross were related to other persons; the fourth was spoken directly to God. Today’s focus is a statement that Jesus uttered about *himself*. The shortest of all the statements, “I am thirsty” is one Greek word with only four letters. I find it interesting, in light of his physical pain, that the words “I am thirsty,” are Jesus’ only reference to his agonizing suffering.

For Jesus, the needs of others came first. But since that is the essence of Christ-likeness, we who call ourselves Christians are to do likewise. If we are to behave like Jesus, in answering the famous question, “WWJD, what would Jesus do?” we are to do for *others* before we do for ourselves. We show our *love* for God by how we *treat* others. We tangibly express our devotion to God by loving others with our deeds, *along* with our words. As a human, even in his death, Jesus taught us a lesson of priorities.

If Jesus was ever to redeem humanity, he had to become a human being. That is another reason that John recorded our focal statement for the morning. Jesus felt thirst. John was intentional in reminding his readers that Jesus was really human and underwent human agony. (William Barclay. Gospel of John, vol. 2. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1975. p. 258)

John has the distinction of being the only gospel writer who was also an eyewitness of the crucifixion. Neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke give a first-hand account; their reporting was all second-hand. But John’s recollection was an original account. Let’s take a closer look at the context of John’s words.

He wrote, “After this”; some translations simply read “Later.” In the preceding verses, John had recorded Jesus’ care for his mother. Three hours had passed since that time; an unexplainable darkness had covered the land. John does not mention the three hours of darkness; instead he just writes, “After this.” Jesus had hung on the cross for almost six hours. His last four statements came within minutes of his death; they were truly his last words. Jesus knew that the mission was accomplished.

John wrote, “When Jesus knew that all was now finished.” He had done what he had set out to do. Jesus had come to earth to show us more fully the character of God. Jesus had come to seek and to save those who were lost. Jesus had come to do the will of the One who sent him.

But John recorded that one more Scripture had to be fulfilled. As read earlier, Psalm 69:21 reads “They gave me poison for my food, and for my thirst, they gave me vinegar.” This verse depicted the righteous sufferer who was given only cheap sour wine to quench his thirst.

From the cross, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” Almost six hours had passed since Jesus had been nailed to the cross. The first three hours, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, the sun was shining onto the three who were being crucified. There’s no telling when Jesus had had a drink of water or anything else. He had been arrested in the middle of the night, with trials in the wee hours of the morning. His floggings and beatings had been early that morning. Besides, someone being crucified suffered from dehydration. It is no wonder that Jesus was thirsty.

Early in his ministry, while teaching a group of people on a Galilean hillside, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.” On the cross, Jesus was not thirsty for righteousness. As a sinless man, he was more righteous than any person who ever lived. At Jacob’s well at Sychar of Samaria, Jesus told a woman, “I will give you living water and you’ll never thirst again.” In both cases, Jesus was referring to spiritual thirst, to an innate desire to have communion with God, to a longing for a relationship with God. While on the cross, Jesus was

referencing his *physical* thirst. He was a human who was in desperate need of physical refreshment. He needed to have some moisture in his mouth and throat to utter his last two statements. His mouth was parched. He was literally dying, and he asked for someone to help him.

Do you find it easy to ask for help? I know some men, including me, who have difficulty in asking for directions. We'd rather drive around looking for something familiar or following our nose like Toucan Sam on the Froot Loops commercial, trusting our sense of direction to steer us to our destination. I wonder why anyone has trouble asking for help? Do we see our requests for aid as a sign of weakness? "I just don't want to bother somebody," or "I don't want to be any trouble." Stubbornness plays a major role in this line of thinking. Our you-can-do-it-all world and our American society communicate a strong message that we don't need anyone; individualism has been the rule. Being dependent upon another person is seen as ineffectual. Yet Jesus shared his physical need from the cross in hopes that someone would help him.

Give that some thought. The people surrounding the cross were the ones who nailed him there, who hurled insults at him and who were gambling for his clothes. Off on the side were four women and one man who were sympathetic to his pain. Yet they would not be allowed to assist this perceived criminal; their mere *presence* was dangerous enough. For Jesus to share of his need in this context, he was not only realizing that his mission was almost accomplished, he was not only seeking to fulfill Scripture, he was not only expressing a need, he was allowing a *detractor* to offer help. Remember, John was the only eyewitness. He wrote that a jar of wine vinegar was there; John had seen it. Biblical commentators mention that soldiers drank the cheap sour wine while on duty. Jesus was giving a soldier an opportunity to make amends.

When I'm really thirsty, the kind of parched that breathes cotton kind-of-thirsty, I want water to drink. Neither ice-tea, coke nor anything else can quench my thirst like water. When I think of thirst-quenchers, vinegar is not a beverage that comes to mind. My dad thinks that vinegar is a cure-all. Growing up, we had a running joke with my dad that vinegar could cure anything. If someone got sun-burned, he would suggest that we rub some vinegar on it to remove the sting; the same was true with an insect bite. Drink a little vinegar for stomach-ache or rub some vinegar on a sore muscle. Vinegar was considered a cure-all. But not even my dad would call vinegar a thirst-quencher.

Yet someone, probably a soldier, soaked a sponge in vinegar and held it up to Jesus. Because he was suspended between heaven and earth, someone could not give him a glass from which to drink. The only possibility was to gain some hydration from a sponge. And Jesus took what was offered. He needed just enough to moisten his mouth so he could utter his last cry. He wanted to fulfill the Scripture from Psalm 69. He wanted to give someone a chance to do something good in spite of the evil that had seemingly reigned that day.

As I have mentioned previously in this sermon series, we learn much about Jesus from his seven last words. A person's character is exhibited in the way that person dies. Today what we can learn of Jesus? The essence of Christ-likeness is thinking of others. On the cross he thought of others before he considered his own needs. Almost six hours passed before he asked for someone to help him.

Jesus Christ was truly a man. Although he was the Son of God, Jesus suffered in every manner that we suffer. He was fully human, but also fully divine. He knows how we feel.

Jesus gave his detractors another chance. Thankfully we serve a God of the second chance. No matter what we have done, Christ will still love us and give us opportunities to unite with him.

Today is one of those opportunities. We all have been given another chance to restore our relationship with God. Every day is another opportunity to reconcile ourselves to God. Jesus suffered and died for you. What is your response?