

Good Friday

April 14, 2017

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It was the hottest day of the year. I thought I was prepared, except the problem was it was 80 degrees in early April. I had spent most of the winter training with my friends. We had prepared for this one race all winter. The race was in upstate New York, really upstate, on the border with Vermont. We had prepared for everything except for the fact that it was going to be 80 degrees. And so we began to prepare our concoctions—the right mixture of the right carbohydrates, a little bit of protein—so that we could be prepared for what was going to be the most difficult race we would likely face all year: 65 miles over dirt and gravel roads, surrounded by farms—truly some of the most beautiful parts of upstate New York. We had prepared, but not for the heat. What we also had not prepared for was the fact that one of the reasons why it was so hot is it had been a particularly dry winter. So not only was it hot, it was also extremely dusty. And I remember halfway through that race, I was begging to stop. But at this point, I was 35 miles from the start, which meant I at least needed to go another 30 miles, and I was not going to be humiliated to stop the race at that point. And so at every drink station—which there were only two, and there was no one from our team stationed at the drink stations, because we had not prepared—I was begging for water. By the finish of that race I had for the first time in my life tasted Red Bull. I had never tasted that before in my life. There was a Red Bull truck; they were giving out free cans. I promise you, I tell you no lie, it was one of the last two cans available. I cracked it open, and it was the best thing I've ever tasted in my life. I've tasted Red Bull afterwards; it is horrible. But in that moment, in that moment of distress and finality, it was the best thing.

I had never thirsted like that before. I had never tasted that much dust. But in that moment I began to get a picture of just how important having the right thing in your body means. It gives you a whole new perspective on thirst. Now, I'm not the only one in this room who's ever been thirsty like that before. But when you do get to what feels like the end of yourself, you begin to get a picture of what thirst is like. And then, if you are really thinking—and I'll confess that's one of the things that I do as a pastor—I began to think more deeply about thirst. It is far more than taking on fluids in your body. And I began to think about thirst in new ways. Not that I hadn't before thought about it in sort of abstract ways, or analogous way, but it began to take on new meaning. What I began to think about. . .Wow, you can have all the water you need on board and still be extremely thirsty. We express our thirst in so many ways. We have more water than we would need. We can buy it for prices that are obscene. And yet we thirst. We thirst for achievement. We thirst for pleasure. We thirst for peace. We thirst for escape. We thirst for quiet. We thirst for countless things. Our thirst—be it physical, be it spiritual—is meant to be a road sign, that our thirst teaches us something.

The same is the case, beyond multiplication, in the case of Jesus. Robbie will be reading in just a moment the passage from which I will be sharing the reflection tonight: John Chapter 19. I'll just read these opening verses, verses 28-29.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the

sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
[ESV, John 19:28-30]

This is the Word of God. (Thanks be to God.) May the Lord grant me grace as we reflect on his word tonight.

Jesus, in these last moments of his life, and as increasingly he got closer to Jerusalem, more and more of his teaching was doubling back on the words of Scripture, creating, if you will, a beautiful perfect circle. Jesus was in these words, first and foremost, giving the fulfillment of Scripture. What was the fulfillment to which Jesus was referring when the passage tells us, "to fulfill the Scripture"? This drink of Jesus, this cry of his thirst, is drawn directly from Psalm 69, from which we hear these words:

I am weary with my crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God. [ESV, Psalm 69:3]

Then in verse 19 and following:

You know my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.
Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, I found none.
They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. [ESV, Psalm 69:19-21]

Jesus, in this moment of his crying out in thirst, was not just expressing his physical need, a physical condition, he was, at the last, speaking about the fulfillment of Scripture. It was to be a lesson to all who would hear, particularly those who knew the Old Testament—that all the Psalms point ultimately to the great King, who is Christ. But particularly, we find on the words of Jesus quoting the Psalms especially. I am thirsty. My voice cries out to the point my throat is parched. And here: I look for comforters; there were none, except for they gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. This was the Scripture to be fulfilled. What an amazing reality that Jesus, both man and God, at the last wasn't just dying for us, he was bleeding Scripture.

Dr. Timothy Keller says this: When you pricked Jesus Christ, when you stabbed Jesus Christ, he literally bled Scripture. He knew the Scriptures so well, he thought about Scripture so pervasively, it so saturated and permeated his whole being and his imagination and his feelings and his will and his knowledge, that it shaped him instinctively. The Scripture shaped every part of him. His nobility, his courage, his peace, his faith all happened because he was saturated with Scripture.

Jesus had been hanging on the cross for nearly three hours at this point. His thirst makes every thirst seem smaller. Because Jesus, it is told to us, is the fountain. He is the river of life. He is the giver of drink that is free. But to fulfill Scripture, Jesus also had to get to the point where even he was dried up. It was to fulfill Scripture, but at the very same moment that it was to fulfill Scripture, it was also a fact. Not just to fulfill Scripture, but to demonstrate Scripture's truthfulness.

For what does the Scripture say about this very moment in the life of Jesus? Another psalm, Psalm 22 says this:

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots. [ESV, Psalm 22:14-18]

It wasn't just a fulfillment of Scripture, it was pointing to what had to happen to Jesus. So his thirst is a demonstration that Scripture was pointing to, that God in Christ would have to die to the very point that his body was dried up.

But further, in the great prophet Isaiah:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,

so he opened not his mouth. [ESV, Isaiah 53:4-7]

The fact is that Scripture would point to Christ in this very hour. This had to happen because of the fact of our sin. Our sin, so great, the brokenness of our relationship with our Heavenly Father so monumental, that the only thing that could bring payment, satisfaction, peace, is the fact of Christ's suffering.

But in the very same chapters that proclaim the fact of Christ's suffering, the Scriptures also say something else. Chapter 55 of Isaiah.

Come, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
 hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David. [ESV, Isaiah 55:1-3]

So the fulfillment of Scripture leads to the fact that Scripture pointed to the necessity of Christ's suffering because of our sin. But praise be to God, that in the same moment that God points to the judgment that would fall upon his Son, is the same word that points to—that through that same suffering servant will come the invitation to come and buy without money. Why? Because upon Christ all the wrath and all the justice, all the payment for our sin, is paid in full.

Which then leaves open this question: Why do we thirst for anything else? Why do we hunger for food that does not satisfy? Why do we thirst for drink that will never truly quench our deepest and most profound thirsts, a desire to be known fully, nakedly—but lovingly with grace and truth. He says come and buy without money. So just as I felt that thirst that day and began to reflect more deeply on the reality that thirst is far more than physical, the question is for us tonight: If our thirsting, suffering, Jesus emptied himself out to the point of utter thirst for our behalf, why do we thirst for anything but him? May we see in our suffering Savior, not just the fact of his need for suffering on our behalf, but the fact that our thirst will never be quenched aside from him.

It isn't just fulfillment, though. It isn't just fact. It is also, it tells us, 'finally.' In these words, we see, when Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Jesus took this drink as his last. I don't know if you've ever had bad wine. I've had it accidentally a few times when it's sour and horrible and the best thing you can do is spit it out. Jesus willingly, as a final act, took the worst wine, that would have been common only among the poorest of the poor. The Lord, who deserves the best, as a final act took the worst—at his worst. He had already rejected an offer for drink earlier. But now, as a

last act, he takes the dregs, the bottom, the most sour—at his worst moment. Why? It is so he could say, “It is finished.” What is finished? The payment for sin is finished. There is now no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No sin too great, no one too prodigal, no one too self-righteous, that grace cannot cover. It is finished.

So I finish with the words of a far better writer than myself. And this will lead us to our final acts this evening. He says: My life is a witness to vulgar grace. A grace that amazes, as it also offends. A grace that pays the eager beaver who works all day long the same wages as the grinning drunk who shows up at ten till five. A grace that hikes up the robe and runs breakneck toward the prodigal reeking of sin, and wraps him up and decides to throw a party—no ifs, ands, or buts. A grace that raises bloodshot eyes to the dying thief’s request—Please, remember me!—and assures him, you bet. A grace that is the pleasure of the Father fleshed out in the carpenter Messiah, Jesus Christ, who left his Father's side not just for heaven's sake, but for our sake and for yours and for mine. This vulgar grace is indiscriminate compassion. It works with us without us asking for it. But it is not cheap, it is free. And as such, it will always be a banana peel for those who are orthodox and think themselves too orthodox. But it is also a fairy tale to a grown-up sensibility. Grace is sufficient, even though we huff and puff with all our might to try to find something or someone it cannot cover. Grace is enough. He is enough. Jesus is enough. It is finished.

Let's pray. Our thirsty hearts, our hungry souls, need to hear again, oh lord, from your Word, that Jesus Christ was stricken and suffered and cried out in thirst. The Lord of lords and the King of kings cried out, saying I am thirsty, and took the dregs of your wrath, that we might receive grace. Awaken us in any place where we are seeking to satisfy our thirst in any other place other than you. And may, Lord, through your Son, through whom salvation is accomplished, may we hear the invitation to come. And may you satisfy our deepest thirst. And may you, with the beauty of vulgar grace, cover our shame, cover our sin, and make us clean that we might rejoice, that we might dance, that we might trust. Because it is finished. Jesus is enough. In his glorious name we pray. Amen.