

## John 19:23-30

### The Thirsting of Jesus

*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst – v. 28*

We come now in our studies of Christ's sayings from the cross to the 5<sup>th</sup> of 7 sayings and to the shortest of all His sayings. Just two words given to us in v. 28 *I thirst*. The thing that makes this saying somewhat unusual is the fact that Christ up to this point has not complained about any of His sufferings except in the saying that precedes this one which was *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* We looked at that saying in our last communion service and we considered how such a question coming as it did from Christ shows that it was this phenomenon of being forsaken by His Father that made for the crowning penal affliction of all His sufferings.

Not a word of complaint when He was flogged; Not a word of complaint when a crown of thorns was driven into His head; not a word of complaint when nails were driven into His hands and feet – but when a veil of darkness was drawn across the scene that darkness veiled something that was beyond our comprehension – the Father forsaking His Son – that did bring forth a cry – *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

But now in the words of our text there comes forth another complaint – a complaint that on the surface of it may seem incidental especially in comparison to what precedes it. And it would almost seem all the more incidental when you consider the specific reason that's given for it – *that the scripture might be fulfilled* it says in our text. The fulfillment of Scripture is, of course, an important matter and as Arthur Pink points out in his commentary on this saying there were many things taking place in the course of Savior's sufferings that fulfilled Scripture:

How marvelously complete was the prophetic foreview! No essential item was missing from it. Every important detail of the great tragedy had been written down beforehand.

- The betrayal by a familiar friend (#Ps 4)
- The forsaking of the disciples through being offended at him (#Ps 31:11)
- The false accusation (#Ps 35:11)
- The silence before his judges (#Isa 53:7)
- The being proven guiltless (#Isa 53:9)
- The numbering of him with transgressors (#Isa 53:12)
- The being crucified (#Ps 22:16)
- The mockery of the spectators (#Ps 109:25)
- The taunt of non-deliverance (#Ps 22:7, 8)
- The gambling for his garments (#Ps 22:18)
- The prayer for his enemies (#Isa 53:12)
- The being forsaken of God (#Ps 22:1)
- The thirsting (#Ps 69:2-10)

- The yielding of his spirit into the hands of the Father (#Ps 3:1-5)
- The bones not broken (#Ps 34:20)
- The burial in a rich man's tomb (#Isa 53:9)

So in one sense this saying *I thirst* was absolutely essential. Christ who had fulfilled all the Scripture can leave no detail unfulfilled. The question, however, that might naturally arise could be – *why was this statement made thousands of years earlier in Psalm 69:21 in the first place?* Is there no purpose behind it other than providing something that Christ would have to say thousands of years later? The statement certainly reveals Christ's regard for the Scripture and we should certainly follow His example and align our view of Scripture with His. But beyond that I believe there is also great significance to this saying and what I'd like to do this morning in preparation for our time around the Lord's table is to look at this saying and view it from 3 different perspectives.

*I Thirst* our Savior said. And I want you to consider this statement from a physical perspective, then from a spiritual perspective, and then from an ethical or moral perspective.

*I thirst* our Savior said.

## I. Let's see the Statement First from a Physical Perspective

We know, of course, that the night before, our Savior endured a night of deep agony in which He sweat great drops of blood. Then He was arrested and condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrin. They delivered Him to Pilate who examined Him, sent Him to Herod, who also examined Him and sent Him back to Pilate. In the midst of these examinations He was scourged and mocked and crowned with thorns.

And as Pink notes: "Then, with bleeding back, carrying his cross under the heat of the now almost midday sun, he journeyed up the rugged heights of Golgotha. Reaching the appointed place of execution, his hands and feet were nailed to the tree. For three hours he hung there with the pitiless rays of the sun beating down on his thorn-crowned head. This was followed by the three hours of darkness, now over."

It's really no wonder, is it, that He thirsted. It's a testimony to His humanity. We're called upon around this table to remember His humanity. So with the loss of blood and the heat of the day His throat would have been so parched that He probably barely had a voice left. Now we should make a distinction here that a number of commentators make. When we read in v. 29 that the soldiers filled a sponge with vinegar and put it upon hyssop and held it to His mouth and that He received it, we need to distinguish between this liquid and the vinegar and gall or vinegar mixed with myrrh referenced by Matthew and Mark. Those concoctions are believed to be a kind of stupefying potion which would have the effect of dulling the senses. That was the drink that Christ refused.

But now in our text we find Him receiving this vinegar which is generally believed to be a common drink that the soldiers would have drunk. He wouldn't stupefy His senses to

dull His sufferings but now we find Him willing to receive this vinegar. One might wonder why He would seek relief from His torturous thirst. I couldn't say beyond speculating but I wonder if one of the reasons He needed that drink of vinegar or "sour wine" was that He might recover His voice enough to be physically able to make two more very important statements which would be *It is finished* and *Into thy hands I commit my spirit*.

You have undoubtedly heard it said that when Christ endured the cross He endured our hell. Certainly His endurance of torturous thirst would lend itself to that notion. You remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16? Lazarus, the beggar, who had life so rough in this world went to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man went to hell. And in the torment of hell he begged Abraham to send Lazarus to him. So we read in Lu 16:24 *And he cried and said, Father Abraham, 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.*

A thirsting Christ certainly serves to remind us that the hell we deserve will know nothing of the blessing of quenched thirst. How we do well to keep that in mind the next time you open a bottle of water and find refreshment on a hot summer day. What a blessing to be able to drink. What a blessing to be able to find refreshment for our bodies. We don't deserve the least of God's blessings and in order to pave the way for the blessings of God to flow to us, whether those blessings be physical, or spiritual, Christ must, in the process of atoning for our sins undergo the extreme pain of thirst.

So let's remember that the One who provides for our refreshment in every way and on every level must Himself be deprived of refreshment because of our sins. Because He thirsted He can say to us today *he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst* (Jn. 6:35); and *whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life* (Jn. 4:14).

In these verses, however, we face a different kind of thirst. Christ is making reference to the thirsting of the soul. And that leads to my next point of consideration. We've considered the statement *I thirst* from a physical perspective –

## II. Let's Consider the Statement from a Spiritual Perspective

Under this heading we need to consider this statement as it relates to the one that preceded it. Remember that Christ cried with a loud voice *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* We'll never plumb the depths of that statement. It goes beyond us. Who can fathom how God the Father could forsake God the Son and yet there was a mysterious way in which that truly did happen.

So with that in mind when we hear Christ say next *I thirst* we can hear more in those words than just a cry for physical relief. We can hear in them a cry for spiritual relief as well. The words of Psalm 63:1 come to mind *O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.*

Or the words of Psalm 42: *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. 2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?* These words seem incredible for the Psalmist to say. Some take David to be the author of the Psalm even though he's not specified as the author in the title of the Psalm. We've been noting throughout our studies of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel that David was in some respects a wretched sinner. Why would a man like David be anxious to appear before God? Certainly he wouldn't be that anxious without knowing Christ and without knowing that his sins were imputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness to Him. Apart from that knowledge and faith in gospel truth we would be searching for ways to avoid appearing before God.

On the other hand it's not hard to picture Christ with such an anxious desire to appear before God. I can easily hear Christ say: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?* Here is One, after all, who knew no sin and did no sin even though sin was imputed to Him. Can we not view Him most anxious to accomplish redemption and make atonement for sin? Most anxious to make that announcement that He will make in His next statement *It is finished!* The price that needed to be paid would be paid and how He would thirst for His fellowship to be renewed with His Father and for the benefits of His accomplished work to be applied.

Listen to Pink's remarks on the suffering behind the words *I thirst*:

This was more than ordinary thirst. There was something deeper than physical sufferings behind it. We all know the internal trials of the soul react upon the body, rending its nerves and affecting its strength — "A broken spirit drieth the bones" (#Pr 17:22); "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (#Ps 32:3,4). The body and the soul sympathize with each other. Let us remember that the Saviour had just emerged from the three hours of darkness, during which God's face had been turned away from him as he endured the fierceness of his out-poured wrath. This cry of bodily suffering tells us, then, of the severity of the spiritual conflict through which he had just passed! Speaking anticipatively by the mouth of Jeremiah of this very hour, he said, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done upon me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint" (#La 1:12, 13). His "thirst" was the effect of the agony of his soul in the fierce heat of God's wrath. It told of the drought of the land where the living God is not. But more: it plainly expressed his yearning for communion with God again, from whom for three hours he had been separated.

I believe there is within every fallen child of Adam a thirsting – a thirsting that can only be satisfied by God through Christ yet a thirsting that the inhabitants of this world seek to

satisfy with anything but Christ. And it's because Christ in His atoning death thirsted for God that He can say to you today: *He that believeth on me shall never thirst* (Jn. 6:35). He can also extend the invitation of Jn. 7:37 *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*

I hope you've come to church this morning thirsting for God and thirsting for Christ. It is certainly around this communion table that we, to use the words of Isa. 12:3 *draw water out of the wells of salvation.* There's a statement in that chapter that is quite remarkable when compared with an oft repeating refrain in the earlier chapters of Isaiah.

5x's in the chapters that precede Isa 12 we have vivid descriptions given of various manifestations of judgment and following each description you read this refrain: *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* In chp. 5:25; 9:12,17,21 and in 10:4 you read that phrase *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* I can picture that statement being written in flames in the caverns of hell. After many hundreds and thousands of years the truth of it will still hold true: *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.*

With that in mind look again at Isa. 12 and draw this truth from the well of salvation and drink it. Let me read the first 3 verses of Isa 12 (and remember the refrain we've just referenced that occurs 5 times) *And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. 2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. 3 Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

God whose anger was not turned away and whose hand was stretched out still now can move Isaiah to write: *though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away.* Could anything be more refreshing to the soul than to drink in the water of that glorious truth. And reason we can drink in that truth from such a well of salvation leads us to our final consideration before communion. We've seen the statement *I thirst* from a physical and from a spiritual perspective.

### III. Let's See it Now From an Ethical or Moral Perspective

In the early days of His earthly ministry Christ had preached the words of Mt. 5:6 *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* From the vantage point of a regenerated sinner you can understand Christ's words. By the grace of God you became poor in spirit and you mourned over your sins. You saw yourself as barren and desolate where righteousness was concerned and you longed (or hungered and thirsted) for something you didn't have but that God graciously provided – you hungered and thirsted after righteousness.

And today we hunger and thirst after righteousness. We long for greater progress in our sanctification and we long for the flood tide of iniquity to be turned back and for righteousness to prevail in the land. Amos 5:24 becomes our prayer: *But let judgment run*

*down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.* And around this communion table we are glad to affirm the words of Ho 2:19. We hear them as God speaking to us directly when He says: *And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.*

And the reason we can be betrothed to God in righteousness and in judgment and in lovingkindness and mercies is because Christ Himself hungered and thirsted for righteousness – thirsted for righteousness, not in the sense that He thirsted for something He lacked but He thirsted for God’s righteous justice to be vindicated. Sin must be judged and judgment must be executed – that was the longing of His heart as the Son of God. He was in perfect accord with His Father and with the Holy Spirit in longing for judgment and righteousness to run down as a mighty stream.

And here’s the wonder and glory of Christ’s thirsting after righteousness – at the very time He was thirsting for it He was also accomplishing it. That’s the meaning of Christ being the propitiation for our sins. Listen to the words of Paul when he begins the positive exposition of the gospel in Romans 3:21. This follows his establishing that all the world is guilty before God and that all the world, Jew and Gentile alike, is desolate where righteousness is concerned:

*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

Here then is the glory of the cross – what Christ thirsted after He is able now to provide. He thirsted for communion with His Father – He provides the way for you and I to commune with God through Him. He thirsted for righteousness and accomplished a righteous atonement that enables Him now to provide righteousness for you and me who have no righteousness of our own. And He’s made this provision at a very high price – even the torments of hell – the torment of punishment which included a torturous physical thirst.

*I thirst* He said – He thirsted in physical torment and as a result you and I need never thirst. Let’s come to His table, then, this morning and spiritually eat His body and drink His blood as we affectionately meditate on His sufferings and what His sufferings have gained for us. What a wonderful Savior we worship and serve who has provided so great salvation for us. Joh 4:14 *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.* May we know the refreshment that is here promised as we remember Christ this day.