

Chapter Five: Jesus' Fifth Saying

"I thirst."

John 19:28

"Suffering on the Cross"

The old traditional spiritual asks a most penetrating series of questions:

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble! Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

"Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble! Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?"

"Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble! Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?"

In my hand is a blunt, rusty nail. There's nothing special about this nail. Yet this nail is a reminder to me of three other nails. Three cruel nails that punctured our Savior's hands and his overlapped feet, nails that fastened Him to the tree.

And it causes me to tremble.

What happened to Jesus on the cross? What did He suffer? Certainly, the agony the God-man experienced is beyond the comprehension of our finite minds. Yet for the past four weeks, we have listened to what Jesus Himself said from the cross.

Jesus uttered seven statements from the cross. The first three focused on others: For those who murdered Him, He prayed, "Father, forgive them." To the repentant thief, He promised, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." To Mary He spoke words of care, "Woman, behold Thy son." In His fourth saying, He asked the most heart-wrenching question in all the Bible: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?--My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Now, we come to His fifth statement. It's fitting that in 5 days we will observe what we call Good Friday. The thoughts of millions will be turned to the cross this week. His fifth cry from the tree reveals His great suffering.

John 19:28 "After this, Jesus saith, I thirst."

Arthur Pink wrote this (86), "'I thirst.' What a text for a sermon! A short one it is true, yet how comprehensive, how expressive, and how tragic! The Maker of Heaven and earth with parched lips! The Lord of Glory in need of a drink! The Beloved of the Father crying 'I thirst!' What a scene! What a word is this! Plainly, no uninspired pen drew such a picture."

"I thirst!"

Why did Jesus say that? As we consider Jesus' fifth saying from the cross, as recorded in John 19:28, we are going to learn about His suffering. I would suggest there were three reasons these solemn words came from the lips of our Lord.

Context: V 28 begins, "After this." To appreciate fully what Jesus said in His 5th saying, we must hear His

words in light of this context. After this. After what?

Jesus had been on the cross nearly 6 hours. The soldiers raised Him up at 9:00 that morning. He commissioned the care of His mother to the disciple John (26-27). The 3 hours of thick darkness were nearly over. After this, He spoke.

"I thirst." O, beloved, do you see the suffering Savior?

Why did He say that? Jesus uttered these words of suffering for three reasons. Here is the first.

I. He fulfilled prophecy.

The apostle John, who wrote this fourth gospel, gives us a clue as to why Jesus declared His 5th saying--V 28 "Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled."

Notice two factors. First, Jesus said, "I thirst," because He knew that all things were now accomplished. What things were accomplished? The events on the cross. His Redemption. His suffering.

Secondly, Jesus said, "I thirst," because of what the Old Testament predicted. Where?

Ps 69:21 "They gave me also gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Ps 69 prophecies that the Messiah will be humiliated. So does Ps 22.

Ps 22:14-15 "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint...My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."

Listen. The Old Testament did not predict that the Messiah would cry out, "I thirst." But it did predict that He would be a Suffering Messiah. (Jones, 68)

It was not liquid that Jesus wanted. It was recognition. Recognition that He was indeed the suffering Messiah. "I thirst! I am the One David predicted! I am the Messiah. I am the One God promised, and you've been waiting for! I am the fulfillment of prophecy!"

Jesus fulfilled prophecy.

Did you ever stop to think that hundreds of years earlier, God predicted the horrid details of Christ's suffering? Ps 41:9 said He would be betrayed by His own familiar friend. Ps 31:11 revealed that His disciples would forsake Him. Ps 35:11 prophesied that He would be falsely accused. Isa 53:7 said the Messiah would be silent before His judges. Isa 53:9 speaks of Him being proven guiltless. Isa 53:12 said He would be numbered with transgressors. Ps 22:16 said His hands and feet would be pierced. Ps 109:25 revealed He would be mocked by spectators. Ps 22:7 said the crowd would laugh Him to scorn. Ps 22:18 said they would gamble for His clothes. Isa 53:12 predicted He would pray for His enemies. Ps 22:1 said He would be forsaken by God. Ps 31:5 revealed He would yield His spirit into the hands of His Father. Ps 34:20 said that not one of His bones would be broken. Isa 53:9 said He would be buried in the tomb of a rich man.

Do you see the evidence, friends? When Jesus suffered, He fulfilled prophecy. His death was no accident, and certainly no afterthought. It was the very plan of God. And it was revealed in the Word of God, hundreds of years ahead of time!

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!" "The Bible stands tho the hills may tumble, it will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble; I will plant my feet on its firm foundation, for the Bible stands."

"I thirst." Why did Jesus say that? First, Jesus uttered these words in order to fulfill prophecy. There was a second reason.

II. He felt pain.

John wrote this gospel nearly 70 years after the crucifixion. By that time, the gospel had spread throughout the Roman Empire. The Church was thriving. It was also under attack. From within.

There was a system of thought known as Gnosticism that was creeping into the church. Gnosticism taught that the spirit was good, and that matter was evil. They also believed that God, who was a spirit, could never take upon himself a body. The gnostics taught that Jesus never had a real body. He was only a phantom. They suggested that when He walked, He left no prints on the ground.

They also said that since Jesus didn't have a real body, He didn't feel real pain.

Is that true? John combatted that heresy by including Jesus' fifth saying (the only gospel writer to include it). "I thirst!" Jesus did feel pain! He is both "very God of very God," and "very man of very man."

His thirst reveals two types of pain.

A. Physical pain

Death by crucifixion is perhaps the most atrocious means of execution ever conjured up in the minds of mad men. The soldier grabbed Jesus left arm, and felt for the depression at the front of His wrist. He drove a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through His wrist and deep into the wood. The same was repeated on His right arm. Roman soldiers had it down to a cruel science. They allowed the arms to have some flex. Some victims would hang for as long as a week.

Jesus was then lifted up and attached to the vertical pole. The Roman pressed Jesus' left foot tight against His right, toes pointed down, and knees flexed. A nail was driven through the arches and into the wood.

Someone described the horror of what happened next as follows (Davis): "The Victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain--the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

"At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward...Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen..."

O beloved. As our Savior pulled and pushed against those nails, He tore the openings in His flesh even larger. He felt pain that dried His mouth, and made it like an oven (Spurgeon). He cried, "I thirst!"

Thirst is one of our last needs to go. I have stood by the bedsides of dying patients in the hospital. They no longer can eat. But they long for liquid--a chip of ice, a sip of water.

Jesus felt real pain! Isaac Watts described that pain: "When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. / See, from His

head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down; Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

"I thirst." This was more than ordinary thirst. Yes, Jesus felt real pain--physical pain. But there was a worse pain.

B. Spiritual pain

Let me ask you something. When did Jesus say, "I thirst"? It's difficult to see the timeline from John's account alone. But if you splice Matthew's account in, you'll see that Jesus uttered this 5th saying at the close of the 3 hours of darkness. Right after He shouted, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Then He said, "I thirst!"

O beloved, do you realize that Jesus had just felt the torment of hell's fire?! What a paradox! He Who is the water of life experienced the thirst of spiritual death, the death we deserved, on the cross!

Jesus was our Substitute. In order to pay the debt of our sin, the Lord of the Universe humbled Himself, and passed through the fires of judgment. He felt the fierce heat of God's wrath! (Pink, 91)

Russell Jones said (66), "There is pathos in the fact that the Water of Life had drained Himself dry in the fires of hell. It was no synthetic conflict. The fight was so bitter, the fire was so hot, the contest was so severe, that He had to give His all. Not even His mutilated body could survive. Death was the price of His victory."

Never forget this. There on the cross, Jesus endured the punishment of hell for us.

III. He finished the plan.

Ponder that statement again. "After this Jesus, knowing that ALL THINGS were now accomplished." When Jesus voiced, "I thirst," He was saying, "I have finished the plan!"

What plan? The Father's plan. The plan of redemption. The plan of the cross. It was all accomplished. In just a moment, as we'll see next week, Jesus would shout, "It is finished! (30)"

God became man. He identified with us in every way. Jesus, in head to head combat, took on our ancient foe, the devil. Jesus did battle with the forces of hell itself. And He won! He finished the plan! Hebrews 2:9 says that "He tasted death for every man."

"I thirst." Why did Jesus say that? First, to fulfill prophecy. Second, because He felt pain. And third, because He finished the plan.

Challenge:

How should we respond to Jesus' words? What effect should they have on us?

Notice this. How did the crowd respond to Jesus' cry? When the crowd heard His cry, "I thirst," someone grabbed a sponge. V 29 "Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put...it to His mouth."

Notice something. When Jesus said, "I thirst," it was not a request, but a statement of condition. He did not ask for a drink. He stated how He felt.

There are two important lessons we must see in Jesus' words today.

1. He thirsted so we might never thirst.

Lehman Strauss wrote this (83), "Thank God that Jesus thirsted. Had He not thirsted, every one of us would have thirsted forever in hell..."

Listen. He Who caused water to flow from the rock in the wilderness, and He who turned water into wine, could have easily spoken the word, and quenched His thirst. But Jesus never performed a miracle for His own comfort.

He thirsted so that we might never thirst!

Jesus said this in Jn 7:37, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on Me...out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."

2. In a sense, He still thirsts.

I can't be dogmatic on this. But I think there was a symbolic meaning involved in Jesus' words. Yes, He thirsted due to the physical and spiritual pain. But I think His words indicate a thirst for something else. There on the cross, He thirsted for the lives of thirsty men and women. He thirsted for the lost. He longed to restore a broken, sin-cursed world to His Father.

In that sense, Jesus still thirsts. He thirsts for the souls of men. Listen to what Jesus said to the lukewarm church-members at Laodicea. We read in Rev 3:20 "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Do you know what it truly tragic? After all Jesus endured to quench our thirst, we ignore Him, and try to satisfy our thirst with other things.

Even today, there is a longing in the heart of our Sovereign God for souls. II Pet 3:9 "The Lord is not slack...longsuffering toward usward."

Jesus sees our brokenness. He knows us. He loves us. He suffered for us. He thirsts for lost men. And He bids us thirst for lost men, too.

Meditate on the hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," by Paul Gerhardt, and based on Medieval Latin poem ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux:

"O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns
Thine only crown: How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn,
how does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!

"What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered Was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior; Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, Assist me with Thy grace.

"What language shall I borrow to thank Thee dearest Friend,
for this, Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee."

Think about what our Lord endured. Thank Him. Tell others about Him. Worship Him.