

“The Thirst of Death”—John 19:28-29

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Thirst of Death”, is John 19:28-29 → *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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Tonight we contemplate what could be considered a very strange statement of Jesus while dying on the cross: *I thirst*. Maybe it isn’t all that strange in light of the physical suffering which He was enduring the past few hours of His crucifixion. When it began the soldiers *offered Him wine to drink, mixed with gall*, maybe a protocol during crucifixion as some kind of “mercy” to help numb the suffering and pain. However, when Jesus *tasted it, He would not drink it* (cf. Matthew 27:34). Now it was time so Jesus said: *I thirst*. It was the thirst of death.

According to verse 28 of our text, John took away some of the “strangeness” of this one word in the Greek text which Jesus spoke from

the cross with this comment: *Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture) . . .* As with all of Jesus' Person & Work, this one word was in accordance with God's plan of salvation as revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. His thirst is alluded to in Psalm 22:15. As King David prayed this psalm the Holy Spirit also spoke about the crucifixion of the Christ yet to come, describing His thirst this way: *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; You lay me in the dust of death.* Sounds like he was spiritually "dried up." In another prayer, King David pleaded for Yahweh to save him from the oppression and reproaches of his enemies, again describing his struggle as being "dried up" with no thirst quenching in sight, saying, *For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink* (i.e. vinegar) (cf. Psalm 69:21).

It is strange to hear the One Who made so many promises to us about satisfying our thirst to experience such a thirst Himself. Throughout the Gospel of John & Revelation, both written by John, the accounts of Jesus inviting us to partake of "the living water of life" to quench "thirst" once and for all are extensive. Here are a few:

Speaking to a woman at a well Jesus said: *If you knew the gift of God, and Who it is that is saying to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.* (cf. John 4:10)

The picture of *living water* in Scripture has the idea of water which

constantly flows, not stale but constantly sustaining life.

Further into their discussion, Jesus told her in John 4:14 → *Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* Notice that never being *thirsty again* has something to do with your spiritual life and *eternal life*.

In John 6:35 Jesus said: *I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.*

And again, in John 7:37-38 Jesus made this statement: *If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*”

We hear the words of Jesus during John’s vision of heaven in Revelation 21:6 → *It is done!* (i.e. reminiscent of Jesus’ words from the cross—*It is finished*) *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.*

So, in light of this teaching of Jesus on thirsting and quenching that thirst with the water of life, it brings a lot of meaning and insight into Jesus’ words, *I thirst*. The thirst of which Jesus was speaking in all of these promises is the thirst of death which sin brings in a broken

relationship with God. Many times Scripture describes those struggling in their relationship with the LORD as spiritually “dried up” and “thirsty” because of their need for Him. King David expressed this in Psalm 63:1

→ *O God, You are my God; earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh faints for You, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.* You may feel all drained and dried up spiritually because of carrying the heavy burden of guilt or because of constant spiritual battles in the midst of reoccurring temptations to sin, not to mention giving into those temptations so often. Such spiritual thirst which sin creates resides in every person since we were all created for relationship with God and, at the same time, remain helpless to restore that relationship again. Still, sin leads one on an endless search to satisfy or “quench” the spiritual longing. However, it can only be quenched by repenting of your sin and trusting in the atoning work of Jesus for you. It’s a thirst which can only be satisfied at the cross of Jesus.

The thirst which Jesus expressed is this exact thirst in sin. Along with His fulfilling the Scriptures it also reflected a thirsting for union with God at this time since God had forsaken Him (cf. Matthew 27:46). The thirst of death Jesus was experiencing was the thirst of spiritual death—eternal separation in hell as a result of bearing your and my sins on the cross.

Because Jesus experienced this spiritual thirst on the cross for you He can fulfill all those promises to satisfy your hunger and quench your

thirst for forgiveness of sins, new life and eternal salvation. His promise of *rivers of living water* flowing out of the *heart* of all who place their faith in Him was a reference to the Holy Spirit Whom He gives to work faith and new life in you (cf. John 7:38-39). Paul even used this picture in 1 Corinthians 12:13 to describe believers in Christ who make up His church, His body: *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

The thirst of death for Jesus was quenched when He rose from the dead, never to die again (cf. Romans 6:9). Since He lives and reigns to all eternity, He has provided His means of grace for us so that we will not “dry up” spiritually and will be satisfied with new life, *being renewed day by day* (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16). Those means are your baptism which connects you with Christ’s death and resurrection to new life (cf. Romans 6:3-5); the Lord’s Supper where Jesus meets you with His body and blood for you to eat for the forgiveness of your sins (cf. Matthew 26:26-27); and His Word, through which the Holy Spirit brings this wonderful message of your sins forgiven to you everyday.

Because Jesus experienced the thirst of death on the cross for you, the Holy Spirit will even produce a “thirst” for God from a different perspective—the perspective of desiring to be with Him in His means of grace. He will also produce the desire to share what Jesus has done for others that you encounter in your daily vocations, relationship,

conversations and tasks. In the midst of life and death we have a constant thirst or longing for God because Jesus has satisfied God's demands for our sin and made it possible for us to experience a relationship with Him now and eternally. Amen.

Carried along by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Peter 1:21),

Isaiah described our *day* of salvation in Jesus saying:

*You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to You, O LORD,
for though You were angry with me, Your anger turned away,*

(Jesus' atonement turned away God's wrath

on you because of your sins upon Him instead of you)

that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation;

I will trust, and will not be afraid;

for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,

and He has become my salvation."

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

(Isaiah 12:1-3)

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