

The Fifth Word From The Cross.

Text: John 19:28

1) I Thirst

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Lessons Learned

82 Pt. 5, 77, 362, 85, 602

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 19:28, ²⁸ *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Many years ago in Paris there was formed a society of whom the most distinguished unbelievers of the time used to meet together. They met weekly in order, as they expressed it, to "*discover the absurdities of the Bible*" and make them the object of their ridicule.

One evening when the members were busy at this work and for their devilish purpose had read some portions of the Passion-story, the well-known philosopher *Diderot*, who had previously said little in their gatherings, arose and said with a gravity which was customary with him;

"However it may be with this book, gentlemen, I freely confess on behalf of the truth that I know no one either in France or in the whole world who is able to write with more tact and talent than the fishermen and tax-collectors who have written these narratives.

And I venture to assert that not one of us is capable of writing even approximately a tale which is so simple and at the same time so sublime, and which has such powerful influence on the mind and possesses such continued effect after the lapse of centuries, as each individual account of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ in the book before us."

He ceased, and at once, instead of the laughter which shortly before had rung through the hall, a general and profound silence ensued. The truth of the speech

was felt. The group solemnly broke up, and it was not long before the entire society of scoffers was dissolved.

Truly, the men who wrote the biography of Christ are unequalled writers. If one of the celebrated historians or journalists of today was to give us an account of our Lord's Passion, how far behind anything that is penned on these pages it would be!

This proves that these chapters were divinely inspired, and that the men who wrote them were moved by the Holy Spirit. And no one, not even an unbeliever, if he is honest and honourable enough to sit down to read or to hear them, will feel this truth in his conscience.

Today let us consider the Fifth Word from the Cross which our Lord spoke when nailed to the accursed tree. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. I Thirst

Our text says, ²⁸ *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"*

The Apostle St. John is the only one who recorded these words. He is the only one of the eleven disciples who dared to stand near his Lord in His last agony. He watched with tenderest care every expression of His hallowed face and heard every utterance of His expiring voice.

"I thirst," said the divine Sufferer. It is the shortest of the seven words of the cross. In fact, in the original Greek it consists of just one single word of four letters. It indicates the intense agony of His body. Let us explain it first in the physical sense.

Pathologists say that there is no bodily suffering so distressing as thirst; whether it arises from scarcity of water, as is the case with those who travel over dry and burning deserts, or whether it is the result of disease and suffering.

Those of us who passed through the ordeal of a surgical operation know, at least in a measure, something of the excruciating pain there is in the denial of a sip of refreshing water.

Travellers crossing expansive deserts, sailors shipwrecked at sea, have left themselves on record as becoming frenzied by thirst. The Bible informs us that a

brief period of intense thirst brought Samson,¹ the most vigorous hero and the mightiest man, to weep and wail like a little child.

When enduring its agony, the burning throat, the tongue cleaving to the roof of the mouth, every nerve becomes, as it were, a red-hot wire, vibrating with pain through every part of the body. It is on this principle that our Lord Himself has represented the torment of the condemned in hell as thirst. They cry out for a drop of water to cool their burning tongues.

In the parable, the rich man's request was that Lazarus² might but dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue. While the pain of crucifixion is in every particular most excruciating, after a time the agonies gather into one central thought and desire, that of devouring thirst. And it was that which drew forth from our Lord the only cry of physical pain.

Nor do we wonder when we consider the length of time He had been deprived of something to eat and drink. It was the ninth hour, 3 o'clock in the afternoon. For almost twenty hours not a drop of water nor a morsel of food had passed over His lips.

He had been dragged before Annas, then over to Caiaphas, before the Great Council of the nation, where He was questioned and accused. Then He was dragged before the Roman governor. After that He was taken to the palace of King Herod, who, exasperated by His quiet and patient bearing, clothed Him in a mock purple robe and sent Him back to Pilate amidst the shouts and laughter of the crowd that followed Him.

It was impossible, according to the constitution of the human body, that after such a length of time He should not have felt painful thirst. Nor do we wonder that He thirsted when we think of the sufferings which He endured and the treatment He had received at the hands of His tormentors.

In the Garden of Gethsemane His sweat, like drops of blood, flowed to the ground, produced by an inner mysterious struggle. He was scourged by Pontius Pilate, made to carry His cross, and nailed upon it, and then He was left suspended for hours, pinioned in a most unnatural position, His muscles strained, His joints cramped, the burning rays of the sun shining for hours upon His half-naked body, while the burning wounds in His hands and feet were every moment tearing afresh.

Little imagination, then, does it require to picture to ourselves how this caused an infernal fire to be kindled in every artery, evoking this cry of physical agony.

To one particular consideration the evangelist calls attention. It is stated that He cried, *“I thirst,”* in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled. In the 69th Psalm it is said: *“They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,”*³ meaning that the Messiah would endure an agony of thirst and that no kind hand would be found to present Him with anything better than vinegar.

It was that passage which required fulfilment. Not the slightest detail that He, that Man upon the cross, was the promised great Deliverer of whom God in the Old Testament Scripture testified would be forgotten or omitted, and so we read that He cried, *“I thirst,”* in order to fulfil this prophecy.

Truly, how can any one, on comparing the New Testament with the Old, but be convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah? Every detail is perfected, and meets its fulfilment in Him.

2. The Lessons Learned

Let us now heed some of the lessons learned from this wonderful utterance. In the first place, we have here an evidence of the reality of Christ’s human nature, that He was a real man, substance of our substance, flesh of our flesh.

His body was not, as some have conceived and taught, a make-believe, a phantom, an unreal, ethereal form, only resembling that of a mortal man, but His was a real body of flesh and blood, subject to the same infirmities, pains, and sensations as ours.

It was necessary that, as our Substitute, Jesus would be a true man and that in all things — with the exception of sin — He would become as we are; for man had sinned with his body as well as with his spirit. And the cry of our text plainly tells us that He was true man, having a true body; for constitutionally He actually, painfully, thirsted.

Secondly, this exclamation shows that our Saviour acknowledged the reality of His suffering. So intense was this suffering that Jesus asked that something be given Him to alleviate His distress, thus teaching us by His act upon the cross

that in sickness and affliction we are entitled to use the means ordained by God to remove pain and refresh our failing body.

Thirdly, viewed in another light, this cry of our Lord rebukes our softness and intolerance of pain! How peevish and ill-tempered we become under slight physical annoyances! A headache, a cold, or some other trivial affliction is regarded as sufficient justification for losing self-control and making a whole household uncomfortable.

When suffering would sour our tempers and make us irritable, selfish, and critical, let us think of Jesus, the divine Sufferer and like Him, amid the most excruciating pain, learn to exercise patience.

Jesus did not indulge in all sorts of murmurings and complaining. He did not pour forth a constant flow of groanings and moanings. One brief word He uttered in giving vent to His dreadful agony; an example that we, too, should bear our sufferings with patience.

Fourthly, that cry implies that our blessed Saviour, in making atonement for sin, endured in His body the same kind of physical sufferings which the condemned suffer.

When Jesus uttered that fourth word on the cross: ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** His sinless nature felt the crushing weight of sin which He had taken upon Himself. He truly underwent abandonment by God.

Now, in this cry, under the burning agony of thirst, trembling in His every fibre and nerve, He expressed what His bodily organisation underwent, indicative of the torments of hell.

In other words, since He was forsaken, we are not forsaken. Since He endured those physical sufferings for us which shall be the lot of the condemned, we shall not have to suffer them to satisfy divine justice.

Let us from today’s Passion meditation impress once and for all upon our minds this one great and vital thought: *All the blessings we enjoy and hope hereafter to possess have been procured for us by the sufferings and death of our Saviour.*

His atoning death was not only necessary to open a way for pardon and reconciliation with God, but also to obtain for us all the blessings that we need.

Have we bread to eat? He purchased it by the hunger that He endured. Have we water to drink? He procured it at the cost of indescribable thirst.

Have we houses furnished for our health and comfort? He laid the foundation of this when, homeless and friendless, He could say, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*"⁴

Are we able to journey from land to land with safety and speed? This blessing was secured when He walked our earth and made it hallowed ground.

Does the sun shine upon us to light up our world and gladden our day? It was shrouded from Him even at midday for three hours as He hung upon the cross. Have we friends, relatives, and fellow-labourers true and faithful, gladdening us with words of love and alleviating our burdens and sorrows in various ways? This is through His treading the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with Him.

Is the guilt of sin mercifully removed from our consciences? It is because our sins were imputed to Him. Have we close communion with God? It is because He was forsaken by God.

Can we look to the grave with calmness and regard it as a resting-place for our bodies after the toil of the day of life? It is because Christ went down to its cold chambers, and by His glorious presence lighted its terrible darkness, and broke its bars of strength, and rose victorious from its silent ruins.

Have we a title to heaven? He voluntarily gave up His own and left the realms of glory and wandered for years in poverty and want in our world. Will these hands ever grasp the palms of victory and the sceptres of gold? It will be because His hands have endured the rough nails.

Shall we be allowed to drink from the river that makes glad the city of God and be led to living fountains of water in that celestial paradise? This He procured for us when He cried out, "*I thirst.*"

Let us learn to connect our all and every blessing, temporal and spiritual, with Christ's sacrifice upon Mount Calvary.

So much as to the physical feature of the Saviour's cry, the expression of His natural thirst.

As referred to, the spirit of it is deeper than the letter. The meaning of this word is not exhausted when interpreted as referring only to His bodily suffering.

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God,” is the language in which the psalmist⁵ expresses the longing of an immortal soul after its God. In similar language the Saviour expressed His longing for immortal souls.

Sitting at Jacob’s Well, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman, *“Give Me a drink.”*⁶ But it was not only material, natural, water to alleviate His bodily thirst that He requested. The subsequent conversion of the woman shows that He was yearning for her poor soul. It was this thirst for souls that brought Him down from heaven above, upon His glorious mission.

And understood in this sense and knowing that the words spoken on Calvary are for all times and for all people, how imploringly and sorrowful does that fifth word still sound in our ears! The Saviour is still being lifted up before our eyes. He is the same today, yesterday, and forever. His wounds are still eloquent for the salvation of men.

He still thirsts for prayer, for service, and for holiness. Whenever the heart of any human being turns to Him in repentance, affection, consecration, His thirst is satisfied. Alas, that too often people give Him in answer the sponge of indifference, the bitter draught of a corrupt heart and a corrupt life!

In conclusion one more thought. Our Lord was thirsty, and they gave Him drink. If given that same opportunity, what single soul would not render Him such service and regard it the most glorious privilege, the supreme delight of his life? And is not such opportunity still given to us?

In the address which Jesus will make on the Last Day to the believers, *“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me,”*⁷ does He not specifically mention: *“I was thirsty and you gave Me drink”*?

There are those who are still sitting in lonely rooms, lying on couches of pain, longing for some one to come to ease their pillow and to reach a cup to their thirsty lips; to alleviate the suffering distress of body and distress of mind and soul, to comfort them with a refreshing word, a kind act of helpful service. And such service is ministering to the Saviour. As He says so we should do.

Let us thus give to Jesus what He so intensely longs for — our souls and our service. Then we are responding to that last request of the dying Saviour, “***I thirst.***” Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Judges 15:18

² Luke 16:24

³ Psalm 69:21

⁴ Matthew 8:20

⁵ Psalm 42:1-2

⁶ John 4:7

⁷ Matthew 25:40