

## Words of Humanity

Part 5 - When Love Speaks: Words from the Cross

John 19:28-29

Rev. Jean Smith

The fifth statement Jesus made while hanging on the cross is a very simple statement. Jesus says, "***I am thirsty.***" That's all, just, "***I am thirsty.***" We've all said those words before. We've all experienced thirst before, but nothing like this. Jesus had been hanging on the cross for about six hours at this point. Here's what John tells us in chapter 19, of his account of the gospel, "***After this, Jesus knew that everything had been completed. So that the Scripture would come true, he said, 'I am thirsty.' There was a jar full of vinegar there, so the soldiers soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a branch of a hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' mouth.***" (John 19:28-29)

The soldiers had offered Jesus something to drink six hours earlier when they were about to nail him to the cross, but he had refused what they offered then. In Mark's account of the crucifixions, chapter 15, we read, "***The soldiers tried to give Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but he refused it.***" (Mark 15:23) Why did Jesus refuse their earlier offer of a drink? Why did he refuse wine mixed with myrrh? What's myrrh anyway?

Myrrh was one of the gifts brought by the wise men. Myrrh is a narcotic. Myrrh is a pain killer. It's used for a lot of other things too, but its primary purpose is to relieve pain. Long before there were all the sophisticated means of relieving pain that we have today, people used myrrh. It was very effective, especially if you mixed it with alcohol and drank it. The soldiers who were executing Jesus offered him this pain killer before they nailed him to the cross, but Jesus had refused it. He wasn't ready to let go of his ability to think clearly.

He still had work to do. He still had to experience the full impact of God's judgment for the sin. He needed to stay mentally alert and aware of what was happening. He couldn't allow himself to be anesthetized while taking on himself the sins of the world. So he refused the pain killer.

Those soldiers didn't offer Jesus the myrrh out of the kindness of their hearts. They weren't acting out of humanitarian motives. They offered the myrrh before they crucified him because they didn't want to hear him screaming in pain and agony until he died. Crucifixion was a long, drawn out process. It involved hours and hours of suffering, and sometimes days of suffering and writhing in pain. People would often scream all the way through it. If you were a Roman soldier assigned to carry out the execution, you'd be there at least a day and often longer and it wasn't much fun listening to all the screaming. So the soldiers would give them wine mixed with myrrh just to keep them quiet. That made it a lot more enjoyable for them as they passed the time playing games and telling each other stories.

After six hours of suffering the Bible says, ***"Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'"*** (John 19:28) He had experience the full weight of God's judgment. He had done all that he could and now he was ready to die. In the Apostles' Creed it says, Jesus ***"...was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell..."*** I want you to know, He didn't have to go through hell to experience the judgment and separation from God; it happened there on the cross in those six hours. He experienced hell while on the cross. When God removed his favor from Jesus, when God turned away, in that moment every sin, every evil thing done was paid for, by the perfect, willing, un-anesthetized Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

When Jesus said, "***I am thirsty***," that was his cry from hell. Did you know there is no water in hell? The Bible says that people are eternally thirsty in hell. By the way, there's no party going on in hell either because there's no one to party with. You're all alone in hell. You are completely and utterly separated from God and anyone else. You don't see anyone. It's total darkness. You're all alone and separated from others for eternity. The Bible tells us there's a river in heaven but there's no water in hell. If you go there you will be eternally thirsty and eternally alone in your suffering.

***"Knowing that all was now completed..."*** Jesus said, ***"...I am thirsty."*** He had experienced unimaginable pain, not only on the cross, but even in the hours leading up to the cross, and yet he said nothing about his own suffering. Through all that time of being beaten, having to carry his own cross, being nailed to the cross, having his joints dislocated as they dropped the cross into place, hanging there in agony, unable to breath unless he pushed himself up with his feet, writhing in pain, he said nothing until all was accomplished and then he asks for a drink. Jesus said, ***"I am thirsty."*** What's that all about? **What does the thirst of Jesus show us?**

**FIRST, IT SHOWS US JESUS WAS HUMAN.** He wasn't just half God and half man. He was 100% God and 100% man. He experienced pain while on the cross just like any other human being. He wasn't protected from the pain. The Bible says, ***"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"*** (Philippians 2:5-8) His thirst shows us He was human.

**SECOND, IT SHOWS US JESUS WAS THE PROMISED SAVIOR.**

Jesus says, "*I am thirsty.*" "*So that the Scriptures would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'*" What Scriptures? What are they talking about here?

For hundreds and hundreds of years, actually thousands of years, God kept telling His people about the Messiah. Over and over again God kept telling them about Jesus. The whole sacrificial system in the Old Testament was God telling them to look for the One who would make the real sacrifice for their sins, once and for all. God gave them over three hundred eighty prophecies about Jesus so they would recognize Him when He came. God says, "You'll know it's really Him by the way He fulfills all the things I told you about Him." Jesus did just that - He fulfilled every single thing God foretold about Him. Things like where He would be born, what He would do, how others would treat Him, how He would die, and what would happen to Him after He died. All these things were foretold to the Hebrew people so they would recognize Jesus as the Messiah, God's chosen One, when He came. The mathematical probability of one person fulfilling all three hundred eighty prophecies, every one of them perfectly, is astronomical and yet He did. It actually takes more faith to believe that Jesus wasn't the Messiah than it does to believe that He was.

Jesus is hanging on the cross and there is one last prophecy He must fulfill. That prophecy was given in Psalm 69, verse 21, where it says, "*When I was thirsty they offered me vinegar.*" What in the world was a jar of vinegar doing at an execution site? Who gives someone vinegar to drink? Let me tell you what that was. What the soldiers offered Jesus was called pasca. Pasca was the standard issue drink for Roman soldiers. It was also the most popular drink among the lower class in Greece and in Rome for about three hundred years. It hadn't even been invented when David penned that prophecy. Pasca was a poor man's drink. What

they would do is take wine that had spoiled, that had turned to vinegar, and they added water to it and some herbs and this made an inexpensive but tasty drink.

When Jesus said he was thirsty, the soldiers soaked a sponge with pasca and placed it on the end of a **hyssop branch** and raised it up to Jesus' bloody lips. Every Jew would have known the significance of the **hyssop branch**. It goes all the way back to the time when the Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt. God commissioned Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. So Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, "God sent me to tell you, 'let my people go!'" And Pharaoh says, "No way." So God sends ten plagues to bring Pharaoh around. Every single one of the plagues God sent poked fun at the Egyptians for worshiping other gods. For instance, the Egyptians worshiped frogs, so God says, "You like frogs? I'll give you frogs until you loathe them." And the place was overrun with frogs. The Egyptians worshiped cows so God sent boils and all the cows got sick. The Egyptians worshiped the Nile River so God turned it red with blood. Every one of the ten plagues made fun of the different gods the Egyptians worshiped.

Pharaoh didn't realize it but God let him choose the final plague. Pharaoh said, "I'm going to kill all the first born male children of the Hebrew people as punishment for their rebellion." That decision sealed the fate of Pharaoh's own son. Before Pharaoh could carry out his plan, God executed his own plan. God instructed the Hebrews to mark the door frames of their houses with the blood of a lamb because he was going to send a spirit through the land to kill all the first born males. Their sons would be spared if they obeyed his command to paint blood on the door frames of their houses. So when the angel of death passed over the land, the Hebrew children were spared but Pharaoh's oldest son died, along with all the first born sons of the Egyptians.

That's where we get the word Passover. The angel of death passed over the land bringing death, but the children of those who obeyed God's specific command were spared. God said, *"Take a branch from a hyssop plant, dip it in the bowl filled with blood, then wipe the blood on the sides and tops of the door posts."* (Exodus 12:22)

The soldiers at the foot of the cross took the branch of a hyssop plant, placed a sponge on it and held it up to Jesus, who was being sacrificed for the sins of the world. The first Passover was but a foreshadowing of this final sacrifice. All that other stuff was just symbolism. God was proclaiming: here is the true Savior of the world, the One who saves His people from their sins. The angel of death cannot harm those who are covered by the blood of Jesus. He is the ultimate sacrifice. By His blood we are saved.

**What else does the thirst of Jesus show us?**

**THIRD, IT SHOWS US HOW MUCH HE LOVES US.** Jesus was willing to suffer, to thirst for you and for me, that we might have eternal life. His suffering was redemptive suffering. He wasn't suffering for His own sins, but for our sins. He had done nothing wrong. He suffered and was thirsty for us. The Bible says, *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:6-8) That's how much God loves us. He sent his only Son into the world to pay our penalty and die our death that we might have eternal life.

You've all heard of Mother Teresa, who founded the Sisters of Charity and Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying, which is not just in Calcutta, India, but literally all around the world. Not too many people know that *"I thirst"* was the

life verse and theme of Mother Teresa. In every one of these homes, where they take in the poorest of the poor, there is a picture on the wall of Jesus hanging on the cross. Underneath the picture are the words **"I thirst"**. It is a reminder of our duty to quench the thirst of Christ by helping those who are in need. We can't go back in time to help Jesus on the cross, but we quench the thirst of Christ when we help others who are suffering and in need.

There are one billion people in the world who don't have clean water. That means twenty point two million people will die this year just from bad water. It means that every single day four thousand five hundred children will die because they drank water that was filthy, polluted, bacteria infested, had worms in it or something.

**WE QUENCH THE THIRST OF CHRIST BY HELPING ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS.** In Jesus' parable about the sheep and the goats, the King says to those on his right, *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."* But they reply to him, *"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"* The King replied, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:34-40)

Jesus also said, *"If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded."* (Matthew 10:42) He says even just giving a cup of cold water to someone who's thirsty, that's ministry. Ministry isn't just telling people about Jesus, its alleviating suffering.

I want to share with you a letter from a man by the name of Doug Nichols. Doug is a missionary who was living in India when he came down with tuberculosis. He writes, "I was forced to stay in a sanitarium for several months. I didn't speak the language but I tried to give Christian literature in their language to the patients and to the doctors and to the nurses. But everybody politely refused. Nobody wanted the literature. The first few nights I woke up around two a.m. coughing. During one of my coughing spells I noticed an older man, sicker with TB, a patient across the room trying to get out of bed. This old man would sit up on the edge of his bed. But when he tried to stand, in weakness he'd fall back into the bed. And he did it over and over. I didn't understand what he was trying to do. He finally gave up, exhausted. But I could hear him crying softly in bed. The next morning I realized that he'd been trying to get up to go to the bathroom. The stench in our ward was awful. Other patients yelled insults at the man. Angry nurses moved him roughly as they cleaned up the mess. One nurse even slapped him. The old man curled into a ball and wept. The next night I woke up again coughing and I noticed the same man trying to get out of bed again. Like the night before he fell back whimpering unable to get up. So I got out of my bed and I went over to him to help him. When I touched his shoulder his eyes opened wide with fear. But I smiled, put my arms under him, said nothing and picked him up. He was very light due to old age and advanced TB, and I carried him to the toilet which was just a filthy small room with a hole in the floor. I stood

behind him with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. After he finished I carried him back to his bed. As I laid him down he kissed me on the cheek and smiled and said something in Indian I couldn't understand. The next morning I was awakened by another patient who handed me a steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hands that he wanted a gospel track. As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted the booklets that no one else was interested in before. Throughout the day nurses and interns and doctors asked for my booklet about Jesus. Weeks later a pastor who spoke the language visited me and told me that several in the hospital had put their trust in Christ as a result of reading the booklets. So what did it take to teach these dear people with the God news? Not my ability to speak their language. Or even give a persuasive presentation. I simply helped a man to the bathroom."

Anybody going to be in heaven because of you? You don't have to be a preacher, you don't have to be a teacher, you don't have to be a theologian, you don't have to have the Bible memorized, but you **do** have to be willing to serve others. That's what being a Christian is all about. It's about helping people in need when they're thirsty - physically, emotionally, relationally, financially, spiritually and in any other way. It's about doing for them what they cannot do for themselves so they can know the God who loves them,