

Foundations: From the Cross 4
I'm Thirsty
John 19:28-29 (AFBC 3/4/18)

We come this morning to Jesus' fourth word from the cross. I don't have any research to back this up, but my assumption would be that, of the seven statements Jesus made while on the cross, this one likely receives the least amount of attention. I think you'll understand why when we read it.

Wouldn't you agree, though, that anything that Jesus spoke in those final moments before His death must have some meaning for us?

There must be a reason that each of these statements from the cross has been recorded by the Gospel writers and passed down to us in God's word.

Which means, there must be more to this statement than the obvious. We'll assume that to be the case; and it will be that "something more" that we'll be looking for today.

So with that, let's go to our text. It's found in **John 19:28-29:**

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

That's it—that's all we have to work with today--Jesus' fourth word from the cross: "I am thirsty." In the King James Version of the Bible, the statement is even shorter: "I thirst."

These words don't grab hold of us in the same way as when we hear "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing"--Jesus' first word from the cross; or "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"--His final word.

What can we do, then, with this brief statement--one that all of us have made at times, and beginning very early in life--"I'm thirsty." Anything come to mind for you when you hear this?

One thing that impresses me as I reflect on this fourth statement is what a privilege it was for somebody to be there at the foot of Jesus' cross, to hear him express His need, and then to respond to that need. I have to wonder who this might have been.

Perhaps it was one of his followers, one of the very few who had not deserted him. Most had; so there were only a handful of His followers still there, with him... at the cross.

It might have been one of them, although, more likely, I suppose, one of the soldiers. After all, they had offered him a drink earlier, a mixture of wine and myrr which was an intoxicating drink... one that was sometimes given to those in great pain.

But Jesus refused this drugged wine—remember?—choosing instead to keep his senses about him. Had he chosen to drink it, I don't know if we would have these final words from the cross.

But Jesus remained sober and alert the whole time as he slowly, and very painfully, died. When he expressed his need of drink, someone was kind enough to soak a sponge in some wine vinegar--which had not been drugged—and they placed the sponge on the stalk of a hyssop plant, and put it to Jesus' lips.

What a privilege it was for somebody to have the opportunity to minister to Jesus—to meet his need--in this way. Surely all of us who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord would cherish the opportunity to do this deed of mercy and kindness for Him.

Wouldn't you count it a privilege? But then, maybe Jesus does give us this opportunity. Remember what He said: **"Whenever you do this for one of the least of these, you do it unto me."**

"I'm thirsty," Jesus said. He might also have said "I'm in pain," or "I'm getting weak"—which was surely true--but Jesus reveals his need in this moment by simply saying, "I'm thirsty."

It's amazing, isn't it, that throughout this whole painful ordeal, this is the only time Jesus mentions his physical suffering—it's the only instance of this that we have recorded. Just the one expression of his own personal discomfort: "I'm thirsty."

But again—it must be here for a reason. Maybe it’s recorded here because it’s important for us to realize that Jesus really did suffer. He made himself completely vulnerable to those who were demanding His death—and He was willing to let us know His need.

What does this say to us? It tells us that Jesus was not ashamed to speak of his weakness in this moment.

He didn’t feel it necessary to keep His guard up. He was willing to let us know He was human--not just human, of course—but if you understand the meaning of incarnation—Jesus was fully human, as well as fully Divine.

As I gave this some thought—this matter of Jesus telling us about His need—I couldn’t help but think about the two extremes I sometimes encounter when people are hurting—whether the source of their pain is physical or emotional... or both.

There is the one extreme of the person who tells of their suffering in great detail... and, if given the opportunity, with much repetition. They want you to know every detail about every pain, and what they might experience in the future given a worst-case scenario--which is, of course, exactly what they expect to happen.

Perhaps they really do want us to “feel their pain,” as the saying goes. They’re quick to tell you that life is unfair. They’ve been wronged. And what’s more, they’re often quite sure that nobody really cares, including... me and you.

Sometime in the distant past, I know I’ve shared this story with you—because it’s one of my favorites--but here goes anyway. This occurred over forty years ago when Pam and I were dating—not yet married--but things were “kinda’ getting serious.”

She had left Furman for a few days to go home to Atlanta during “spring break.” While there, she got sick—probably because she left me to go home!

Anyway, a few days later she called to let me know that she would be delayed in getting back to Greenville; but I was not home, so she left word with my little sister.

Now, I love my sister--so please don't tell her I told you this--but she didn't quite get the message right. When I returned home, Jean immediately told me that Pam had called. She said that Pam would not be returning to school as planned because she was sick with (and I quote) "a terminal virus."

Well, I was concerned—very much so--and headed straight for the phone to call Pam. But then, fortunately, I got to thinking about what little sister had said. It occurred to me that Jean had not seemed particularly concerned about this awful news; and really, I had never even heard of a terminal virus.

With that, I questioned my sister: "Are you sure she said 'a terminal virus?' Could it have been an 'intestinal virus' instead?"

"Yes, that's it," she answered. So, somehow—miraculously—Pam managed to recover!

The point of this is that some people seem to be gifted at turning "intestinal viruses" into "terminal viruses." Know what I mean?

They'll share their symptoms with anyone and everyone who will lend an ear—and as with other items--once your ears are loaned, it's hard to get them back! You know what I mean?

There is, however, that person on the opposite extreme—and some of us may well fit into this category. We keep every problem, every pain, and every instance of suffering strictly to ourselves, refusing to tell anyone... anything.

Folks like this may pride themselves in being tough enough to suffer alone. They prefer that no one knows they have any problems, and they may even resent any gestures of sympathy or concern or kindness from others.

If this doesn't describe you, then you've at least encountered this person. They're not nearly so obvious as the other extreme, which makes these silent sufferers harder to recognize--and frankly, they're much better accepted and tolerated than those who are always anxious and ready to share their whole story!

Some people even admire this ability to “keep it all inside” and never reveal any pain. The truth of the matter is, though, neither extreme is healthy. Both approaches can actually hinder the healing process.

Here’s what I want you to see. Jesus seems to provide a kind of corrective against either extreme. I’ll try to explain.

As He hung there on the cross, Jesus didn’t dwell on his pain. He didn’t plead for recognition of His suffering or for any pity; but He did state His need simply, clearly, in a way in which somebody could respond to it. He simply said, “I’m thirsty.”

There was not the kind of neediness or self-centeredness or whatever in Jesus that continuously pointed to his own need; but neither was there that kind of pride that constantly maintains a façade. I think we can learn something about overcoming these extremes through what we see in Jesus.

To put this another way: some folks are so transparent in their suffering that those who would otherwise care begin to see right through them; while others are so opaque—so guarded and protected--we cannot see their need enough to care for them at all.

We find a good balance in the way Jesus suffered, stating very openly and honestly his need so that others could then respond in appropriate ways. We do well to maintain a similar balance.

Something else that seems important for us here as we listen to Jesus acknowledge his suffering, and state His need, is that Jesus did this only after He had first both noticed, and sought to meet, the needs of others.

“I’m thirsty” was Jesus’ fourth word from the cross. But think about the three statements which preceded this one.

The first was, “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**” Here Jesus demonstrates His concern for those who had demanded that He be crucified and for those who carried out the sentence.

Then, in response to the repentant thief, Jesus spoke his second word saying, **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** Again, Jesus' focus was on someone else—as in attempting to meet their need first.

The third word, if you recall from last week, was intended to provide care for his mother: **"Dear woman, here is your son. John, here is your mother."**

It was only then, after seeking to minister to everyone else's needs, that Jesus mentions his own. How consistent this was, though, with the rest of His life.

Jesus was always demonstrating that unselfish kind of love that places the needs of others above one's own life. Their needs—which really means *our* needs--came first.

Now if this makes you feel a little uncomfortable or guilty, well... I'm glad I've got some company. I feel guilty about this, too.

Sometimes, I put "me" first. Sometimes I place my needs and wants above those of my family, my friends, and my Lord. And I bet you do too--sometimes.

Jesus never did that. The Heavenly Father always came first with Jesus. He loved God with all his heart and served Him faithfully and completely.

Then, after the Father, His fellowman came next. Even while He was dying on a cross, Jesus sought to meet their needs before He gave any real thought to His own.

As a person committed to Jesus Christ, I try to live that way. I really want to; but sometimes I fail—miserably! And I'm inclined to believe that you do, too.

If you think I'm wrong about this, then I encourage you to take a closer look at the life of Jesus. If you can't find the discrepancies between your life and His, then ask someone who knows you well... to help. I doubt that they'll have any problem identifying a few shortcomings in your life.

This, friends, is why Jesus came to planet earth—to show us the better way--God's way. It's why He took all our sin and guilt to Calvary's cross—to make that better way possible for us.

The physical agony of crucifixion caused Jesus to cry out: "I'm thirsty." But the reason he suffered on the cross in the first place was his thirst—a thirst that was as deep and wide as the heart of God—a thirst for our forgiveness and our reconciliation with the Father.

This was Jesus' real thirst—a thirst brought about, not by physical pain, but by spiritual pain; not by the heat of the day as Jesus hung on the cross, but by the warmth of His divine love for each one of us.

Christina Rossetti captured this so well with these words:

"I lift mine eyes, and see
Thee, tender Lord, in pain upon the tree,
Athirst for my sake, and athirst for me."

We weren't there to respond to Jesus' cry by holding the vinegar-soaked sponge to his lips. But we do have the opportunity and holy privilege of responding to His thirst for us:

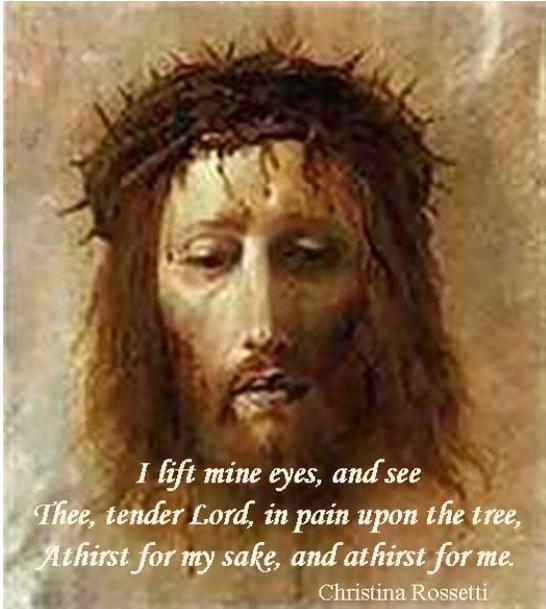
Jesus' thirst for our lives and our love,
for our salvation from sin and death,
His thirst... to share with us the blessing of eternal life.

I invite you to respond to Him now—today, if you've not done so-- by receiving Christ Jesus as your personal Savior, and by committing your life to Him as your Lord.

When we do this, friends, something amazing takes place. We realize that it's our own thirst that's been quenched--for as we follow Christ, he gives us the "living water" of Himself--which quenches forever the thirstiness of our souls.

There are millions in this world who are craving
The pleasures earthly things afford;
But none can match the wondrous treasure
That I find in Jesus Christ my Lord.

Fill my cup Lord, I lift it up, Lord!
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;
Bread of heaven, Feed me till I want no more--
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole!



*I lift mine eyes, and see
Thee, tender Lord, in pain upon the tree,
Athirst for my sake, and athirst for me.*

Christina Rossetti