

Series: The Seven Sayings of the Cross, Part 6

Title: “I Thirst”

Text: John 19:28-29

Benjamin Franklin adorns the face of the \$100 bill. Though he never served as president, the man is regarded as one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. He perhaps influenced the course of our nation more than any other individual. His accomplishments are wide ranging. One of his greatest is perhaps his role in drafting and contributing a signature to the Declaration of Independence. On top of influencing the destinies of nations, he was prolific as a writer, scientist, printer, inventor, and foreign diplomat.

Franklin served as a college president, publisher, and postmaster. He invented devices that are still in use to this day — bifocal glasses and the urinary catheter. He also invented lesser known items that were celebrated in his day — the glass harmonica and the Franklin stove. In addition to these things, he made much of the need for volunteerism amongst the new nation. Many would trace the phenomenon of the non-profit organization (a distinctly American innovation) to Franklin’s obsession with do-gooding.

Franklin is also remembered for many of his famous quotations. His “Poor Richard’s Almanack” was known for sharing many catchy sayings, many of which remain to this day. The volume popularized the saying, “Only two things in life are certain — death and taxes.” It was also the source of the quip, “A penny saved is a penny earned.”

As interesting as a study of Franklin’s life may be, his religious views are perhaps most interesting. The man was raised by devout puritan parents. He frequently sat under the preaching of great preachers like Cotton Mather and George Whitefield, giants who were used mightily by the Lord in the First Great Awakening. Interestingly, Franklin regarded one of Mather’s works as being most influential in his own life. In addition, it was reported that Franklin took great delight in hearing Whitefield preach.

Franklin himself was instrumental in the spread of revival fires that accompanied the preaching of the Great Awakening. His printing press popularized the preaching of Whitefield, making the man a household name in the colonies. Franklin also profited handsomely off of the sermons.

Sadly, the faith of his parents wasn’t fully embraced by Franklin. He gave homage to his upbringing, boasting of the way in which he learned good morals, a protestant work ethic, virtue, and thrift from it; however, he never embraced Jesus as God. He ascribed to a Deistic worldview, regarding God as a far off, transcendent being who is not intimately involved with human affairs. Franklin liked the teachings of Jesus. In fact, in his well-known list of thirteen virtues, he listed his desire to emulate the humility of Jesus. Though he offered platitudes toward Christ, he didn’t embrace Christ as Savior. He once said:

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupt changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his

divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and I think it needless to busy myself with it now...

One can imagine that Benjamin Franklin was wildly honored and celebrated at his death. His funeral took place on April 21, 1790. Around twenty-thousand people attended the event. Such a number is remarkable when one considers the population of Philadelphia was only twenty-eight thousand at the time.

The account of Franklin's death is interesting. As he was dying, family gathered around. The cause of his demise was a disease affecting his lungs. Seeing his struggle for breath, Franklin's daughter encouraged him to turn on his side so that he might breathe more easily. The Founding Father replied, "A dying man can do nothing easy." The inventor's final quip was ironic, considering the fact that many of his inventions were focused on helping people do things easier.

In his lifetime, Franklin was known to stand toe to toe with political tyrants. At death, he knew he could do nothing in the face of the greatest tyrant of all. His life and final words remind us that "...it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). What can humanity do in the face of death? How can humanity handle suffering? Jesus' words from the cross provides us with great heavenly truth and insight. John's gospel contains a record of the words:

After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said, "I'm thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it up to his mouth (John 19:28-29).

Jesus' fifth saying from the cross teaches us a number of things about Him, His work on our behalf, and the hope we have in Him.

A LESSON ABOUT GOD'S WILL

The fifth saying was uttered shortly before Jesus died. His end was near. One has said, "...the king had been crucified and He was dying."¹ John highlighted the pending nature of Jesus' death in verse 28 by saying, "...when Jesus knew that everything was now finished." The Greek word rendered "finished" referred to something being brought to its logical end. It carried connotations of completion.² It was used in Luke 2:39 to depict how Joseph and Mary fulfilled Mosaic rituals required at the birth of a newborn son.

John was strategic in his word usage. He intended to emphasize the way in which Jesus completed the work the Father had for Him. John wanted to portray our Lord as having fully fulfilled the Lord's will. The moment was drawing near in which Jesus would cry "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Jesus had faithfully submitted Himself to the will of the Heavenly Father. Because of his submission, the end was near.

¹ Borchert, Gerald L. *John 12-21. Vol. 25B. The New American Commentary.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), [CD-Rom].

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 224.

Jesus' thirstiness proved that physical death was imminent. His bodily resources were low and the end was near. Scripture is quick to highlight Jesus' voluntary subjection to His cruel fate. Paul said, "...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). The author of Hebrews said, "Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said: You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for me. You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings. Then I said, 'See— it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, God'" (Hebrews 10:5-7). Luke's gospel told of the way in which Jesus went to Jerusalem with determination (Luke 9:51). Though He knew the crucifixion was coming, He faithfully submitted Himself to God's will.

John highlighted all of these realities with his use of the word "finished" in John 19:28. Our Lord was faithful to fully fulfill God's will for his life. He drank every last drop of the suffering required for sin, draining the dregs of God's wrath. If it wasn't for His resolute suffering, we would be cut off from God. We would have no stake in peace, comfort, joy, and righteousness. Our lives would still be marred by sin and brokenness. Eternity separate from God would be our lot in life.

Christ's submission to God's will is instructive for us. The New Testament summons us to follow His faithfulness. The book of Hebrews says, "For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4-5). The fallen world system around us will often beckon us to turn away from our Creator's designs for our lives. Turning our eyes to the cross trains us concerning the high value of pursuing His will.

Christ's dedication summons us to similar dedication. While some make the concept of God's will into a mysterious and hard-to-understand subject matter, the concept is rather simple. Knowing God through Jesus is the first step in fulfilling God's will (1 Timothy 2:4). Afterwards, one fulfills God's will by living a holy life and following the Lord's internal leadership (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). Are you devoted to the Lord in such areas? Perhaps Christ's commitment at the cross could serve as a catalyst for furthered commitment.

A LESSON IN PROPHECY

The subject of prophecy is one that distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. No other volume of holy writ can boast of the accomplishments of which the Bible can boast. One has said:

There are no prophecies foretelling details about the birth of other religious leaders. No prophecies alerted the world to the coming of Muhammad (Islam), Joseph Smith (Mormonism), David Koresh (Branch Davidians), Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses), Siddhartha Gautama (Buddhism), or any other founder of the world's religions. Yet the Old Testament pinpointed numerous details about the life of the Son of God and Savior of the world.³

³ <https://answersingenesis.org/jesus-christ/birth/fulfilled-prophecies-at-the-birth-of-christ/>

In Scripture, we find foretelling of the birth of nations, the downfalls of kingdoms, and the reign of emperors. We also discover fulfilled prophecies concerning the birth, life and death of Jesus. Interestingly, our Lord's fifth saying from the cross gives witness to such things. In saying, "I thirst," Jesus fulfilled various passages of Scripture. Consider the following Psalms:

My strength is dried up like baked clay; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You put me into the dust of death (Psalm 22:15).

I am weary from my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God (Psalm 69:3).

John was intentional in depicting Jesus as having fulfilled such prophecies. Before making reference to the Savior's cry concerning thirst, the apostle said, "... that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He said...". The word translated "that" denoted purpose or result. John portrayed Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. He upheld Jesus as being the Anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah of whom the Hebrew Scriptures spoke.

Jesus was the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 — "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." He was the promised seed of David — "When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Samuel 7:12). Jesus was the one of whom Isaiah said, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him" (Isaiah 53:3). Search all the religious tomes and traditions of mankind. You will never find one who fulfilled prophecy in the way that Jesus did!

In all of this, it is important to note that prophecies concerning Jesus weren't just fulfilled by Jesus Himself. Others had a hand in bringing prophetic things to fulfillment. Even His most ardent enemies were unwittingly used to accomplish God's purposes. This is important to note, since some could accuse Jesus and His disciples as simply staking claim on fulfilled prophecy. Such an argument could maintain that the Twelve made fabricated claims about their leader. Skeptics might say the disciples simply created the gospel message and pulled proof-texts to support their claims.

John's gospel ruled this possibility out. It depicted Roman soldiers as unknowingly fulfilling Hebrew prophesy. John 19:29 said, "A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it up to his mouth." Jesus didn't simply claim Messianic status for Himself. Others had a hand in confirming His anointed status. The Roman soldiers fulfilled Psalm 69:2, a passage that said, "Instead, they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21).

All of this informs us that something supernatural took place at Golgotha. Jesus satisfied Old Testament prophecies. He proved He was the Son of God, the long-anticipated Messiah. Through His birth, life, and death, He fulfilled a remarkable amount of Hebrew prophesy. Consider Matthew's account in Matthew 1:18-3:3 for a

small smattering of examples. When preaching the gospel, the early church was quick to point to these things. Consider Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40). One has remarked on the way the early church was vocal on this very point:

Throughout the New Testament the apostles appealed to two areas of the life of Jesus of Nazareth to establish His messiahship. One was the resurrection and the other was fulfilled prophecy. The Old Testament, written over a one-thousand-year period, contains nearly three hundred references to the coming Messiah. All of these are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and they establish a solid confirmation of His credentials as the Messiah.⁴

Our Lord's role in fulfilling details of Scriptures written years before His birth proved that He was more than a good teacher, moral example, or religious leader. He was God! His fulfillment of prophecy confirmed His divine status. The apostle Peter commented on this. He said, "We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19).

Through His prophecy-fulfilling life and death, Christ "strongly confirmed" the Word of God. As a result, it would do us well to "pay attention to it." All too often, we see Christ with small eyes. The things of the world dim our perspective. When we reflect on the way He fulfilled prophecy, our reverence for Him should grow.

A LESSON REGARDING THE ATONEMENT

Christ's admission of thirst demonstrated the human aspect of His nature. It seems this was one of the purposes of His cry. He wanted to show His humanity. On the cross, He was the God-Man dying for the sins of mankind. He was fully God, but He was also fully man.

Earlier in John's gospel, the gospel writer portrayed Jesus' humanity with the very same issue. John told of the way Jesus travelled to Samaria. After a long, arduous journey, our Lord took a seat in the town center, near a well. The location was a popular gathering spot for locals. Tired and weary, Jesus desired something to drink. The Bible says, "Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, worn out from His journey, sat down at the well. It was about six in the evening. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. 'Give Me a drink,' Jesus said to her" (John 4:6-7).

Jesus' request for water from the woman at the well may seem like a non-consequential detail in a bigger narrative. Indeed, the overall point of the story from Samaria was of a much larger scope; however, the fact that Jesus thirsted should not be lost on us. His desire for a drink proved that He had a real human body. He was God, but He was also man. He experienced certain limitations of humanity. In submitting Himself to the Father's will, he embraced physical restrictions.

All of this is of utmost importance to our understanding of His work on the cross. Jesus had to be a man to fully pay for the sins of men and women. God could not simply give Himself up, nor could He merely choose to overlook sin. A suitable

⁴ McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 164.

sacrifice was needed. It was necessary that Jesus become human to save humans. He had to become acquainted with our estate. To be an effectual sacrifice on our behalf, He had to become like us. Scripture tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Theologians often refer to the dual nature of Jesus’ constitution as the “Hypostatic Union.” The high-sounding term comes from a Greek word *hypostasis*, one that referred to the nature of “being.”⁵ Together with the word “union,” it refers to the way in which two natures — a divine nature and a human nature — were mysteriously melded together in the person of Jesus. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 created the term to provide a label for a marvelous mystery we see in Scripture. The intent was to uphold the simultaneous realities that Jesus was one-hundred percent God and one-hundred percent man.⁶ Though human minds can never fully understand these realities, both aspects of Jesus’ nature must be affirmed.

The human part of Jesus was necessary so that He might provide deliverance for the rest of humanity. If He wasn’t fully human, He wouldn’t have been an effective sacrifice. William Barclay has rightly noted, “If he was ever to redeem man, he must become man. He had to become what we are in order to make us what He is.”

One Greek scholar has noted that John’s language seems to have been intentional in stressing the human part of Jesus’ nature.⁷ The apostle’s point was clear. It was necessary for Jesus to experience thirst. In order to serve as a substitute for us, He had to become like us to a degree. If he hadn’t experienced thirst, He would have been unable to pay the price for our transgressions. He experienced the full weight of humanity at the cross. Because He thirsted, our spiritual thirst can be quenched.

Scripture consistently emphasizes the role of Jesus’ humanity in the atonement. Hebrews 10:5, says: “Therefore, as He was coming into the world, He said: You did not want sacrifice and offering, but You prepared a body for Me.” By suffering in a body, Christ provided salvation. Hebrews 2:10 says, “For in bringing many sons to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God—all things exist for Him and through Him—should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The author of Hebrews also said:

During His earthly life, He offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the One who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Though He was God’s Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. After He was perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, and He was declared by God a high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:7-10).

⁵ Grudem, 1244.

⁶ McKim, 135.

⁷ Barclay, William, ed. *The Gospel of John. Vol. 2. The Daily Study Bible Series.* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), [CD-Rom].

I love Matthew Henry's take on these things. He said, "...[to] everlasting thirst we had been condemned, had not Christ suffered for us." Don't miss the meaning of Jesus' thirst. At the cross, our Lord embraced humanity on our behalf, dying for our sins. Because He gave His body for ours, we have hope of everlasting life. One day, we will receive resurrected bodies. Forever and ever, we will no longer know the blight of physical or spiritual thirst.

A LESSON FOR SUFFERING

In response to His cry, Jesus was given a drink. John said, "A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it up to his mouth" (John 19:29). Mark's gospel reveals Jesus had refused a drink moments earlier (Mark 15:23). Now, He took one in order to fulfill prophecy (Psalm 69:21).

Most likely, the beverage was a cheap wine, one that was commonly consumed by lower class people. It was normally supplied to victims of crucifixion in order to alleviate their pain. However, the watered-down wine probably didn't help much. The presence of the cheap, bitter drink highlighted Jesus' role as the Suffering Servant who died for ones poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).

When the soldiers gave Jesus a drink, they held it up to His mouth. Contrary to popular belief, Christ was not suspended high in the air. A Roman cross was usually elevated to a minimal height for the convenience of executioners. It was normally just high enough to ensure a victim's feet couldn't touch the ground.

It is important to note that the drink probably didn't benefit Jesus at all. He was dehydrated beyond the point of replenishing. Death was near. Some propose He asked for the drink so that He might wet His mouth to utter His final two statements (Luke 23:46; John 19:30). What does this teach us? Jesus wasn't necessarily concerned with hydration. He was focused on finishing His work on our behalf.

Thirst was often used in Scripture as a metaphor for both physical and spiritual need (Psalm 42:12; Amos 8:13, John 4:15; 1 Corinthians 4:11; Revelation 7:16). Though we deserve suffering because of our sins, Jesus suffered for us. He was parched and He endured pain on our behalf. In doing so, He earned our eternal salvation. Isaiah said, "...he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds" (Isaiah 53:5).

Jesus' suffering secured our salvation, but it did something else as well. From the cross, He provided an example for those who encounter hardship. None need to lose heart when the trials and tragedies of life press in. Because Jesus endured, God's people can too. The early church gained courage from the Lord's hardships. The author of Hebrews said, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The cross has purchased eternal salvation, but it is also a source of comfort. Because our Savior suffered, we have a model and means of perseverance. His example should encourage. His presence can empower. Even those who face the most difficult hardships in life can find comfort in the cross.

