

Seven Words: Word of Suffering

John 19:28-29

Introduction

In the early portion of the ministry of Jesus, just as He was beginning to draw attention to Himself (and away from John the Baptist), the religious leaders started asking some questions. As a result, Jesus thought it would be wise to relocate Himself from the region of Judea and head back to the region of Galilee. In order to lose the crowd that were now always present with Him Jesus decided to take the direct route – a route that would lead Him through Samaritan territory. Jews ordinarily didn't travel that route. Those religious leaders definitely didn't travel that route. Just putting your foot on Samaritan soil would render you as "unclean."

Along the way Jesus and His disciples decide to take a lunch break. The disciples go into a nearby village while Jesus sits on the side of the well that is located outside the city limits. It is there He meets a Samaritan woman, a woman with of questionable character. She has come to the well to draw water in the heat of the day in order to avoid contact with the other people in the village.

Jesus engages her in conversation that goes like this:

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

⁹ She replied, "Why would a Jewish man ask a Samaritan woman for a drink of water?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "If you only knew who I am and the gift that God wants to give you, you'd ask me for a drink, and I would give you living water."

¹¹ The woman replied, "But sir, you don't even have a bucket, and the well is very deep. So where do you find this 'living water'? ¹² Do you really think that you are greater than our ancestor Jacob who dug this well and drank from it himself, along with his children and livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "If you drink from Jacob's well, you'll be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but if anyone drinks the living water I give them, they will never be thirsty again. For when you drink the water I give you, it becomes a gushing fountain of *the Holy Spirit*, flooding you with endless life!"

Tonight, as we return to the foot of the cross so that we might listen to the words of Jesus, we hear the source of that living water cry out:

"I thirst." (John 19:28)

Jesus cried out for the very thing He offered that woman at the well. Do you suppose Jesus remembered that story as His life was slipping away? If so, His cry from the cross was not so much about meeting a physiological need but a cry to His Heavenly Father for the Living Water – the gushing fountain of the Holy Spirit – that would flood Him with endless life.

Perhaps He even recalled the words this woman spoke to Him when He told her about this water:

The woman replied, "Let me drink that water so I'll never be thirsty again." (John 4:15)

I like that understanding because of how the Gospel text frames the moment:

Knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." (John 19:28)

At that moment in time Jesus had completed the work God sent Him to do ... with one exception. There was one more prophecy that needed to come to pass. It is recorded in Psalm 69:21:

They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. (Psalm 69:12)

In response to the cry of Jesus, John's Gospel records:

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. (John 19:29)

The last prophecy was now fulfilled. The next verse, which is actually a part of the text for next week, tells us:

When he had received the drink, ... he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

In addition to fulfilling the prophecy, it is important for Jesus to have expressed his thirst for another key reason. When John was writing his gospel – somewhere around 100 A.D. – a certain false teaching was beginning to gain some traction among Christians. It was called:

GNOSTICISM

One of its primary tenets was that the spirit of a person was good but the flesh was evil. One of the conclusions that flowed from that teaching was that God – who is spirit and therefore good – could never take on human flesh, for that would make Him evil. Therefore, they taught,

- Jesus never had a real human body. He was a phantom or a hologram.
- That when Jesus walked He never left a footprint.
- And since suffering is experienced in the flesh part of a person, Jesus never really suffered on the cross. It just looked like He was suffering.

That teaching was eventually declared to be a heresy. The church stood firm that if Jesus was to redeem us, He had to be one of us. Completely one of us. As one writer put it:

Jesus had to become what we are so that we could become what He is.

By recording the words "I thirst" John makes it clear that Jesus was experiencing a flesh-and-blood feeling. He was human, and He was thirsty.

The concept of "thirst" is central to two themes for followers of Jesus.

THEME #1: THE THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The fourth Beatitude says it most clearly:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
(Matthew 5:6)

Psalms 42 offers another clear picture of that thirst:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (Psalm 42:1-2)

By contrast, King Solomon in all of his wisdom observed:

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.
(Proverbs 17:22)

With all that He had experienced in these six hours on the cross, Jesus must have been as thirsty for a restored relationship with the Father as He was thirsty for a glass of water.

THEME #2: THE CUP OF COLD WATER

The second theme is seen in this passage:

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.
(Matthew 10:42)

We teach that passage in the context of doing practical ministry that meets the needs of other people.

- In this instance it is THEY who thirst, and WE who provide the living refreshing water that they need.
- In the first instance it is WE who thirst, and GOD who provides the water for our souls.

In our interpretation of that passage, though, let us not lose sight of the spiritual dimension of this living water. The text describes the thirsty one as a "little one" who is a "disciple." Our responsibility is far more than meeting the physical needs of the people we help. We are called on to meet their spiritual needs as well.

THEY thirst like WE thirst. And WE thirst as CHRIST thirsted on the cross.

APPLICATION

You and I have been told over and over again to keep our bodies hydrated because of how important water is to our well-being. When our bodies fail to retain the right amount of water, dehydration sets in. It is the water in our body that determines the vitality, strength, and energy associated with daily living. Think about these facts associated with our body and water:

- The human body is $\frac{2}{3}$ water.
- The body absorbs cold water faster than hot water.
- By the time you are 70-years-old, you will have required 1½ million gallons of water.
- Studies show that increasing water consumption can decrease fat deposits.
- Water is a natural appetite suppressant.
- If you lose 2% of your body's water supply, your energy will decrease by 20%. A 10% decrease in water, you will be unable to walk, and with a 20% decrease, you will die.

What is true of the physical is also true of the spiritual. In addition to creating you with a body that requires water, God created your soul the same way. If you fail to satisfy your spiritual thirst, you will become spiritually dehydrated, and ultimately spiritually dead.

During the liberation of Palestine in WWI, a combined force of British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers was closely pursuing the Turks as they retreated from the desert. As the allied troops moved northward past Beersheba they began to outdistance their water-carrying camel train.

When the water ran out, their mouths got dry, their heads ached, and they became dizzy and faint. Eyes became bloodshot, lips swelled and turned purple, and mirages became common. They knew that if they did not make the wells of Sheriah by nightfall, thousands of them would die – as hundreds already had done. Literally fighting for their lives, they managed to drive the Turks from Sheriah.

As water was distributed from the great stone cisterns, the more able-bodied soldiers were required to stand at attention and wait for the wounded and those who would take guard duty to drink first. It was four hours before the last man had his drink.

During that time the men stood no more than twenty feet from thousands of gallons of water, waiting to drink what had been their consuming passion for many agonizing days.

It is said that one of the officers who was present reported, "I believe that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on the march from Beersheba to Sheriah Wells. If such were our thirst for God, for righteousness and for His will in our lives, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich would our Christ lives be?"

Indeed. Amen.