

Final Words, Five "I Thirst"

John 19:28-29; Isaiah 52:14

1. Jesus' thirst is my proof.

- *John 19:28; Psalm 69:21*

2. Jesus' thirst understands my pain.

- *Hebrews 4:14-16; Isaiah 53:2; 1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 1:1-4; John 1:14*

3. Jesus' thirst shows the right priority.

- *Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1; Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:13-14, 7:37-38; Matthew 5:6; Revelation 7:16-17, 22:17*

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Final Words: When Love Spoke From the Cross¹ "I Thirst" John 19:28-29

Do you know the importance of water to the human body? 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 we need for daily living. Think about these facts:

- The human body is 2/3 water.
- By the time you are 70 years old, you will have required 1.5 million gallons of water.
- Studies show that increasing water consumption can decrease fat deposits.
- Water is a natural appetite suppressant.
- If you lose just 2% of your body's water supply, your energy will decrease by 20%. A 10% decrease and you will die.
- You can survive 40 days without food but only 3 days without water.

Keep that in mind as we look today at the fifth of seven statements that Jesus made when he was crucified. If you haven't been with us, I'd strongly encourage you to go to our website and see the other four.

This fifth statement is recorded in John's Gospel, and this is what Jesus said:

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that 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. (John 19:28-29, niv)

We've said it before and I'll say it again: last words are important, especially when they belong to Jesus. There were things that Jesus wanted to make sure we heard and understood while he died on the cross for us, so let's make sure and take the time to investigate them. I've been praying for us through this series that, if nothing else, we will realize the suffering that Jesus went through for us. But more than that, these words reveal so much about Jesus and about what God can do in our lives because of what he's done for us. I'm praying you will accept it and live fully in it.

¹ Sources:

Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005

Adam Hamilton, *Final Words from the Cross* Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2011

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997)

George Lyons and T. Scott Daniels, *John 13–21: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. George Lyons, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2020)

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY: Edinburgh, 2001)

So when it comes to this fifth statement, let me again set the stage: Jesus had been dragged back and forth throughout the night several times across town between the religious and government leaders, both groups trying to find a reason to kill him. Each time, he is mocked and horribly tortured. The next morning he is brought before the enormous crowd that was stirred into a frenzy against Jesus, he is whipped and scourged and nailed to the cross through his hands and feet.

During the first three hours on the cross from nine to noon, Jesus made his first three statements. Then the world was covered in darkness from noon to three and Jesus was silent. At 3pm he shouted out his fourth statement. That takes us to this fifth statement. By now Jesus has not had anything to drink for at least 20 hours. In addition he has experienced dehydration due to his loss of sweat and blood going clear back to the night before during his time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane – before he was arrested. There was also the loss of sweat from the intensity of his pain and the loss of blood from all his wounds. The last liquid he drank was the cup of wine that he shared with his disciples at the last supper. By this time He was wracked with pain as every fiber of every muscle in his body cramped and seized as they were depleted of the blood and water to replenish them. His kidneys were likely shut down and the flesh that wasn't torn open by the scourging was cold, clammy and blue. By now it was after 3pm and the sun had returned to its scorching afternoon Middle Eastern heat. The anguish of his fevered body was unbearable. It was as though all the pains of death itself were absorbed in that single moment; the terrible intense pain of his nerves and limbs finally was expressed in the statement, "I thirst." It is well known that thirst was a supreme cause of distress for those who were put to death by crucifixion. The need that brought this statement from Jesus' lips was bitter beyond anything we can understand.

For six hours, from nine to three he hung on the cross by the nails in his tendons through his wrists and feet. His arms and legs were cramping; his shredded back was rubbing against the rough splintered wood of the upright and cross beams of the cross and the blood from the crown of thorns was covering his face that was unrecognizable from the beatings he had received. Over 700 years before this event, the prophet Isaiah foretold this:

But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.
(Isaiah 52:14, nlt)

Every breath was an ordeal; for him to even speak at all meant sacrificing what little air he had left in his lungs as he pushed himself up against the nails in his feet, and yet he did it seven times to make sure he told us these last statements. The loss of blood, exposure, the heat, the flies, the exhaustion, and finally the dehydration had taken their toll. He was ravaged with thirst.

Up to this moment Jesus had said nothing about his own needs – his thoughts had been for others. It was not until he had done everything else: his murderers forgiven, his loved ones provided for, a repentant criminal welcomed into paradise and the fulfillment of prophecy as he took the sins of all of us upon himself as the scapegoat (if you don't know what that is about, see last week's sermon). But it wasn't until all of that had been

completed during the six hours on the cross that our Savior thought of the agony racking his own tortured body. He was burning with pain and thirst. First, the fever, then the throbbing pain in his head, lips cracked, his tongue thick and his vocal cords swollen. Just minutes before his heart stopped beating, he lifted his head and said, "I am thirsty." Someone standing nearby who heard him took a sponge and soaked it with a sour wine that they would have had in a canteen.

But the way, it's important to know that despite his condition, Jesus was fully alert and very aware of himself and his situation. In fact he insisted it be that way. Matthew's Gospel tells us that when Jesus was first crucified, he was offered a narcotic type of drink (*Matthew 27:34*) but he refused it because he wanted to be fully conscious and present despite the intense pain. Jesus was not hallucinating. What he was doing was making sure that another of the prophecies about him would be fulfilled. And that is the first thing we realize from this statement...

1. Jesus' thirst is my proof.

There is something far more than physical thirst going on here, as bad as that was. When Jesus said, "I thirst" he was fulfilling Old Testament prophesy. Look at John 19:28 again:

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

See that? (*repeat the verse*)

Like we said earlier, a canteen or jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge on it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant and lifted it up to Jesus' lips. The prophecy being fulfilled comes from the Old Testament book of Psalms, chapter 69. This was written over a thousand years before this event, and yet it describes it precisely:

"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst." (Psalm 69:21, niv)

The proof of who Jesus is, is in the prophecies fulfilled about him.

In Jesus' lifetime, he fulfilled specifically over 350 Old Testament prophecies about his life. Things written about Jesus centuries earlier all actually came to pass in his single life.

Peter W. Stoner (a mathematician and scientist) calculated the odds of just one man fulfilling *only eight* Old Testament prophecies (I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago but let me give you more detail). The odds of only eight being fulfilled in one person are 1 in 10 to the 17th power; that is one followed by 17 zeros. That's one in 100 quadrillion.

To help us understand what those odds are for just 8 prophecies being fulfilled in one person, Mr. Stoner came up with this illustration: If you covered the entire state of Texas with 100 quadrillion silver dollars, it would cover the entire state TWO FEET DEEP! Then, take just one of those silver dollars and mark it with a big, red "X." Then, stir up all the silver dollars over the entire state. Now, take a blindfolded person and tell him or her that they can travel over the entire state of Texas, but that person has to find that one, marked silver dollar on *the very first try*. What chance would that person have in finding that one coin on the first try? 1 in 100 quadrillion. And that just illustrates the odds of only *eight*

prophecies being fulfilled in Jesus! The odds of fulfilling 48 are 1 in 10 followed by 157 zeros (they call that ten quindicillion vigintillion!) – and he fulfilled over 350! I don't know if anyone has calculated the odds of 350, but it is beyond possible. Are you seeing the point? Jesus' thirst is fulfilling prophecy and that is my proof that he is the Christ, the One and Only Son of God and his death was for you and me.

There's something else in this that is worth making note of. You might remember that I said that when John wrote his Gospel, he was a master at making sure he recorded the deeper meanings that God had implanted all throughout Jesus' life, teachings, and events. He is doing that again here when he points out what kind of stick they put the sponge on. Do you remember? It was a hyssop stick. Here's why that's important: when God gave instructions for the Temple worship over 1500 years earlier, he was very specific. He said that they were to use hyssop branches to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the altar. Hyssop branches were also used before that in the book of Exodus when they were told to spread the blood of a lamb across their doorposts so that the death angel would pass over their homes. The prophets also said that it was with hyssop that we would *all* be cleansed of our sins. John is saying that Jesus is the great Passover lamb, whose shed blood and death would save us and cleanse us from our sin.

The simple fact that Jesus was thirsty is my proof that he is the Son of God.

Second...

2. Jesus' thirst means he understands my pain.

As Jesus says, "I thirst," we really have to ask the question, "Why? Why is Jesus thirsty?" Think about it: this is the creator of the universe. With his words entire oceans came into being. This was the God who parted the Red Sea and turned the desert rocks into water fountains during the Exodus. Jesus turned water into wine. Water had no power over him; in fact he is called the Living Water. So why wouldn't Jesus just do something about his thirst?

But if we read the New Testament...especially the first four books called the Gospels which are the accounts of Jesus' life and teaching, then we must also ask questions like, "Why was Jesus hungry, and weary, and sad, and sleepy, and angry?" Why? Because Jesus entered our world and fully experienced, knew, and felt life on our level – to completely understand and relate to us.

That's what Jesus' thirst tells us he was doing – this is another of the deeper meanings: Jesus was fully god and at the same time, fully human. Over the centuries some have tried to explain this away by saying that Jesus was fully God, but he was not fully human. Or that Jesus was a spirit and not fully a physical body. There is a word for those ideas: heresy. They are outright lies and are actually blasphemy against God. Because the Bible makes it very, very clear: somehow, someday, Jesus is fully God and fully human. Not 50/50; he is 100% God and 100% human at the same time. I don't know how. But to say anything less than that is to deny the entire Bible.

You know what is interesting to me? People who are not Christians – even atheists – have no problem believing that Jesus was a human. But they don't believe he is God. And yet

there are sometimes those inside the church who are guilty of the opposite: they have no problem believing he is God; they just don't believe he is fully human. *He is both.* Jesus is fully God and fully human.

The Bible says:

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. (Hebrews 4:14-16, nlt)

The Bible says plainly that Jesus was a normal guy, but without sin. In fact, you would not have been able to pick him out of a lineup of possible suspects for the Son of God. One prophecy said:

My servant grew up in the Lord's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. (Isaiah 53:2, nlt)

You see, Jesus was perfectly God and at the same time perfectly human. I know it's hard to understand; the Bible calls it a "mystery." A good friend of mine has his PhD specializing in DNA research. When we get to heaven, I'm going to ask Jesus if he would let my friend Geoff put His blood under an electron microscope to see how the God/human DNA works. It might still be a mystery then, too, but either way it was important enough for the Bible to make it clear:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5, niv)

Listen to how the Apostle Paul started his letter to the church in Rome:

This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:1-4, nlt)

There's nothing unclear about that. At the beginning of John's Gospel he introduced Jesus this way:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14, niv)

If Jesus wasn't God, he wouldn't have risen from the dead. If he wasn't one of us, He wouldn't be able to represent us or understand what we go through.

Author and Pastor Max Lucado says this: "Because (Jesus) understands, we can come to him. He knew you would be weary, disturbed, and angry. He knew you'd be sleepy, grief-stricken, and hungry. He knew you'd face pain. If not the pain of the body, the pain of the

soul...pain too sharp for any drug. He knew you'd face thirst. If not a thirst for water, at least a thirst for truth, and the truth we glean from the image of a thirsty Christ is - - he understands." In fact, Max Lucado wrote about Jesus being a teenager and feeling awkward and having pimples. After writing that, he got a letter from an irate woman who said she would never again buy one of his books. She summed up her anger when she said, "My Savior did not have pimples!" Let me tell you: if your Prince of Peace didn't have pimples, then he is no savior! His thirst means he understands my pain. A God who enters into our suffering to understand, feel, and give solution to our pain and death.

But there's more...

3. Jesus' thirst shows he had the right priority.

Jesus was thirsty, but it wasn't just for water. There was something he thirsted for more than that. Remember last week we talked about how Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" These were desperate words because Jesus no longer had the nearness of God the Father. Remember, the sins of all people in all times were piled onto Jesus, which caused him to be separated from the Father for the first and only time in all eternity.

After experiencing this separation...this taste of Hell...Jesus said, "I thirst." This went deeper than a physical thirst to a spiritual one. Jesus is thirsting for God - for living water. He can go no longer without it. He can no longer stand being separated from his Heavenly Father. He longed for the Father just as King David did a thousand years earlier when King David wrote in Psalm 42:

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. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2, niv)

Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 63, which describes how Jesus felt:

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1, niv)

Jesus' thirst was for God himself - whom Jesus was alienated from because Jesus had taken on our sin. Jesus' thirst was the priority - for God.

This is a thirsty world. We humans will try anything to satisfy that thirst. We run after the mirages of money, alcohol, drugs, sex, power, relationships, and a thousand other cheap imitations. Time and time again we've heard the rich and famous testify that, for all their accomplishments and all they've gained and achieved, they are still thirsty for something more. I read that the outspoken atheist and billionaire Ted Turner once said, "I would give away every dollar I have for a good night's sleep." There is a hole in every human heart that we pour everything into to fill it, but it runs through like water through a sieve. The great 17th-century philosopher, Blaise Pascal once said that there is an infinite abyss in every person that can only be filled by an infinite God.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote about this condition and our attempt to fill it with everything except the only One who can satisfy our thirst. Look at what God spoke through Jeremiah:

They (*people*) have forsaken me, the Fountain of living waters; and they have built for themselves broken cisterns that can't hold water! (Jeremiah 2:13, tlb, *italics added*)

The only water that we can draw to satisfy our thirst is the Water of Life. That is the right priority for us. Nothing else holds water.

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, he met a woman while traveling through the region of Samaria. He began a conversation with her that would change everything for her, and it was about the Living Water that would fill her life. Listen to how one Bible translation puts it:

Jesus said (*to her*), "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life." (John 4:13-14, tm, *parenthetical italics added*)

Are you thirsty?

We're told that Jesus stood up at the Festival of Tabernacles. The feast commemorated God's provision in the wilderness during the Exodus. On the last and greatest day of the feast it focused on how God provided water for them in the desert. That was the day that Jesus stood up:

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38, niv)

Are you thirsty?

When Jesus gave the greatest sermon ever given – the Sermon on the Mount – Jesus said:

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

Are you thirsty?

John the author of the Gospel had a vision of Heaven and wrote it down in the book of Revelation, and he described heaven this way:

'Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat down on them,
nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;
'he will lead them to springs of living water.' (Revelation 7:16-17, niv)

Are you thirsty?

As if to put the exclamation point on all of this, in the very last words of the entire Bible, it says this:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. (Revelation 22:17, niv)

My friend, are you thirsty? Have you been drinking out of broken cisterns, trying to satisfy your ultimate thirst with anything but God? Living water is available to us for free because Jesus paid for it all with his own life. Come to him and quench what you are thirsty for.

Listen: the thirst that drove Jesus to allow himself to be crucified – to go through the torture and death on the cross – was his thirst for you to be saved, set free from a life of sin and frustration and dysfunction, and to be able to live life to the full in a relationship with God now and forever. That can be yours through what Jesus did for you.

A person will do just about anything to quench their thirst, depending on how thirsty they are. Jesus went through everything and died for *you*. That should tell you how thirsty he is for you and me to have new life.

In a moment we are going to share together in communion. By eating the bread and drinking the juice, we are recognizing and accepting what Jesus did for us. But in a very real way, we are also declaring how hungry and thirsty we are for him.

Let this be your opportunity to declare who Jesus is (you have the proof), that he understands everything you are going through (his body was broken and blood shed for you), and that he placed God first *for you* – so you can place him first in your life.

Prayer

Lead the liturgy of communion....

Benediction:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Life Group Questions

Final Words: When Love Spoke from the Cross

"I thirst"

Week of March 29, 2026

- 1) **Read John 19:28-29. What stands out to you most about Jesus saying, "I thirst"?**
Why do you think he waited to think about his thirst until this moment?
- 2) **How does understanding the physical suffering of Jesus on the cross affect your view of His love for you?**
Does it change the way you respond to Him?
- 3) **The sermon emphasizes that Jesus' thirst fulfills prophecy as "proof."**
How does fulfilled prophecy strengthen (or challenge) your faith?
- 4) **Why is it important that Jesus was both fully God and fully human?**
How does this truth impact the way you relate to Him in your own struggles?
- 5) **In what areas of your life do you need to remember that Jesus truly understands your pain?**
How might that change the way you pray or seek help?
- 6) **The sermon talks about "spiritual thirst" and how people try to fill it with things that don't satisfy.**
What are some modern "broken cisterns" people turn to today?
Have you experienced any of these personally?
- 7) **Jesus prioritized His relationship with the Father even in His suffering.**
What does it look like for you to make God your highest priority in daily life?
What practical steps can you take this week to "drink" from the living water?
- 8) **Close in prayer. If you want to, you can lead them through a guided prayer time:**
 - a) Take a moment to thank Jesus for what He endured on the cross.
 - b) Ask God to reveal areas where you feel empty, dry, or unsatisfied.
 - c) Invite Jesus to fill the empty places in your heart.
 - d) Bring your pain, struggles, and burdens to Him, knowing that he understands your pain.
 - e) Commit to putting God first, just as Jesus did.
 - f) Pray for people who are spiritually thirsty but don't yet know Jesus.

Or, you can close with this prayer:

"Jesus, You said, 'I thirst,' and through those words You showed us Your suffering, Your humanity, and Your deep love for us. Thank You for being the One who satisfies every longing in our souls. Help us to turn away from anything that cannot fill us and to come to You, the source of living water. Teach us to trust You, to follow You, and to make You our highest priority. And as we go from here, use us to lead others to You. Amen."