I thirst

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Preacher: Principal John L. Mackay

[0:00] You turn to the portion of God's Word that we read together, the 19th chapter of John's Gospel, we find in verse 28 the words of my text this morning.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.
I thirst. To get a full picture of all that happened in Jerusalem in those last days of our Lord's life on earth, we've got to take into account what's recorded in each of the four Gospels.
And those who've studied the matter and who've compared the Gospel accounts tell us that our Lord uttered seven sayings on the cross, and of these seven, this here is the fifth.
Just before this, his previous saying on the cross was Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
[1:26] And he uttered those words after the three hours of darkness that had lasted from the sixth to the ninth hour, from the middle of the day till three in the afternoon.

And it seems as if in those three hours our Lord's spiritual suffering was at its most intense.
And the cry that he uttered at the end of that period was a cry of spiritual anguish. And he gave vent to the inward dereliction that he had experienced through the felt absence of his Father's presence with him as he endured the curse of the broken law.
And now after this, when Jesus knew that all things were now accomplished, when he knew that his work was now coming to a very end, we have here the first of three statements that he uttered within a very short time of each other.
And here he utters just one word. That's all it is in the original one word. I thirst.
[2:46] And this word speaks mainly of our Lord's physical agony. If his previous word had spoken of the intense inner anguish of the Son of the Father's love no longer being aware of that love extended to him as he was identified with the curse of the broken law.

Here now we see that his sufferings were not confined to one aspect of his being. He was suffering in soul and he was also suffering in body.
And released it would seem from the intensity of his spiritual suffering, he becomes aware of his physical condition and cries out, I thirst.
For here we have the ultimate paradox. The maker of heaven and earth in need of a drink. How have things been turned upside down?
The judge of all the earth has been undergoing the punishment of the broken law. A law that he himself had observed completely.
[4:03] Here is the Lord of glory who began his earthly ministry with gnawing hunger in the desert, bringing it to a close with raging thirst on the cross.

No uninspired pen would have dared set out such incongruity. No fantasy of human imagination would ever have devised such a contradictory narrative and hoped that it would gain acceptance.
The beloved son of the father brought from Bethlehem's manger to Golgotha's cross and crying out there, I thirst.
I want briefly to consider that with you in three ways. I want to look at it firstly in its human aspect as it sets before us the suffering of Christ the man.
And then I want to look at it in terms of its prophetic aspect as it sets before us the obedience of Christ the servant.
[5:21] And then in its more spiritual aspect as the payment of Christ the substitute. Firstly then the suffering of Christ the man.

Because of all the sayings on the cross this one particularly emphasizes the reality of Christ's humanity.

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His suffering affected him in every aspect of his being and in his bodily existence. There were some early heretics who balked at the notion of the son of God's suffering.
They couldn't comprehend it and so they thought up a theory to explain it away. They supposed that at the last moment before the cross Jesus place had been taken by some phantom by some angel. Anything to get away from the thought of his sufferings. But angels or phantoms or whatever cannot thirst.
[6:36] God cannot thirst. The Lord who declared if I were hungry I would not tell you for the world is mine and all its fullness.

The everlasting God the Lord the creator of the ends of the earth. He fainteth not. He is not weary. He does not thirst.
But the man Jesus Christ did thirst. He was God manifest in the flesh.
He did not cease to be all that he had been before the incarnation. But so really did he partake of our humanity.
That all the sinless infirmities inherent in being part of the human race became his. In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.
[7:36] He was still God. He could truly say he that hath seen me hath seen the father. He did not cease to be God.

He did not lay aside any of his divine attributes. Though he did veil the glory that he had had with the father before the world was.
He ceased not to be all that he had been previously. But he really took to himself that which he had not been before.
He who was really God became really man. In many ways I have some sympathy for those early heretics who couldn't comprehend that.
Who of us can? It's useless for us to speculate about all that is involved in that. It does go beyond our understanding.
[8:38] But it is revealed to us in scripture. And we are called on not to try to evade it. Not to try to bring it down to our level. But accepting its truth to admire and adore what our Lord did for us.

Because he did this so that he might be the mediator. He who was going to bring together God and humanity became mediator by drawing together in his own person heaven and earth.
And was real God and really man. And here in this cry we see the reality of his humanity.
He was going to give you the truth to the truth. Leading the physical aspect of the suffering he was undergoing. In Gethsemane he had sweated as it were great drops of blood.
Now he has been beaten and tortured since early morning that day. For three hours he was there hanging on the cross with the pitiless rays of the sun beating down on him. And for three hours he was there in the darkness, into which an eternity of suffering was compressed. And now he cries out, I thirst.
[10:10] Once he'd asked for a drink at Jacob's well, but now it's no ordinary thirst that affects it. It was the thirst of a body that had undergone physical and spiritual suffering of the most intense sort. It was the thirst of death and more. It was the thirst of the death of the one who had borne suffering on behalf of many. And so our Lord's thirst evidences his humanity because it arises out of his physical condition. But I think it also gives evidence of his humanity in another way.

In terms of a desire for sympathy. In terms of a longing to be understood. In terms of the need for a gesture or a word of comfort. Particularly in such overwhelming circumstances. Now I know there's those who are not sure about that. There are those who don't see in this word, I thirst, any more than a statement of our Lord's physical condition.
But I think there are quite a number of lines of evidence that lead us to interpret this word against the background of our Lord's genuine human desire for some to empathise with him in his suffering. As you read the accounts you see it earlier on. Remember how in the garden he'd gone and said to Peter, what could you not watch with me one hour? The desire at that time of mounting crisis to have others watching with him. And there's also the significant testimony of the words that we read together that we read together. Reproach has broken my heart and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity but there was none and for comforters I found none. They also gave me gall for my food and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. I looked for comforters is the prophetic testimony that relates to what our Lord was undergoing on the cross. I looked for some to console. I looked for some gesture in the part of any that they understood why I was there.

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But there was no sympathy. Even though he was given something to drink at this point, if you look at Matthew and Mark's gospels, it's clear it was given in a spirit of incomprehension, if not in a spirit of ill will. Our Lord had to bear this burden alone, for he alone could bear it.
He alone could bear it and not be utterly crushed by it. And so here we have Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that he had carried the burden. He'd carried the burden through to the bitter end. He had borne the sin of the world. He looked for some to take pity on him in his suffering but he found no comforters. He who had undergone such agony on behalf of mankind could find no one to extend pity to him. And here we see evidence of the hostility that man has toward God and his Savior.
[14:08] According to modern thought, man's a noble creature. Man's a very fine being. Man is struggling in some evolutionary way to become better and to rid himself of the dark side of his nature that unfortunately remains as a legacy of his earlier days. But that is not the testimony that scripture gives regarding mankind. And here in the way in which Jesus was treated, we see man's alienation from all that's good. Man's inner hostility and hatred of all that is right. At the first there was no room for him in the inn. And at the last he was looking for comfort and sympathy. When he thirsted, they gave him vinegar.

Left to ourselves, we too reject and crucify and mock the Christ of God. But he was there for the likes of us. Even in his agony, he is there for you. He is there for you. He is there because he knows you and he cares.
He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Even there he is pleading with us to turn to him and not to mock his suffering and not to reject what he has done in his love. The suffering then of Christ, the man. But we've also got here the obedience of Christ the servant. Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled. Other scriptures were fulfilled that day.
Those soldiers, when they dealt with our Lord's garment, his raiment, fulfilled scripture. But they did so unwittingly. They did so not realizing what they did. But Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, spoke. We're reminded here of the part that scripture played in the life of Christ. Jewish education of Jesus' day required boys to commit large portions of what we call the Old Testament to memory, if not the whole of it. Jesus, in his upbringing, would have learned it. But it wasn't just a matter of learning it by rote for him. The scriptures were not just something that he was forced to become familiar with. The scriptures were what he fed on, were what gave light to his path.
Our Lord supremely met the qualification of the man who is described as blessed in the first psalm. His delight was in the law of the Lord, and on it he meditated day and night.
[17:31] Our Lord's teaching set out the standards of God's law because it was a transcript of his father's will. When Jesus read the prophets, he saw in their words the path that he had to follow.

Or when he read the psalms, he found there the expression of his own inner feelings of every mood and desire of his soul. It was from the word of God that he obtained his defense and bulwark against the temptations and the insinuations of the evil one.
And now in his hour of most intense suffering, he does not give up on the pattern and the practice of a lifetime.
Here on the cross, having undergone such unparalleled suffering, we find him clear in mind, self-possessed.
He is in control. His memory is unimpaired. He has before him perfectly clearly the entire scope of the word of God that had been revealed.
[18:42] He reviews all that was said there about the coming Messiah. And now there is only one thing remaining to be done. He will carry through his task perfectly and completely.

He will fulfill scripture because he delights to do his father's will. He has given himself over to carry out his father's will no matter what the cost.
And so Jesus as the servant, Jesus as the one who is pledged to obedience to God, says, I thirst. Oh, that word servant points to subordination. It says, here is someone who is under authority to another.
Very often the word servant is used in a mean, in a derogatory, in a humiliating and demeaning way. But here is the servant of God.
[19:44] And that is no mean title. That is no disparaging reference. He here is the one who has devoted himself to serve the supreme being.

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His every action is motivated by his desire to serve and to please his father. And so he acts here. It's not just a matter of seeing the completeness of the obedience of Christ.
If we would be those who would term ourselves the servants and followers of Christ, then we have there the pattern for our action. And we see here that the path of obedience is not promised to be an easy path.
It wasn't easy for Christ to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It wasn't easy and there's no promise that the path of obedience will be easy for us.
But we have one thing. It isn't the case that we will call out for comforters and find there is none. If we are on the path of obedience and we are looking for the comforter, we will find him in the Holy Spirit whom the Lord himself sends.
[21:07] We will find that there is one who sticketh closer than any brother. There is one who has been with it. The path gets most constricted where the way is hardest.

And as we remember his death, we are called on to renew our obedience. To renew it with our eyes open.
Jesus always insisted that following him was something that had to be undertaken with our eyes open. He didn't promise an easy path.
But he does promise a path that he will walk along with us. He has already been there and he knows how to sympathize no matter where the path of obedience takes us.
With a sympathy that goes beyond words, his hand is outstretched to help all those who do the will of his Father who is in heaven.
[22:09] In the obedience of Christ the servant, we see our Lord's devotedness to his God and Father. Translated into obedience to all that his Father's word had said and laid down.

We are both to admire and to copy that example of our Lord. We have also here the payment of Christ the substitute.
I don't think it's arbitrary that our Lord says, I thirst. It is in fact a vivid presentation of what his sufferings achieved.
Because he was there as the sinner's substitute. He was there suffering the infliction of the penalty of our sin on our behalf.
And thirst and physical suffering are part of the eternal result of sin.
[23:32] What lies beyond the grave is very largely hidden from our view. But we get glimpses in scripture.

One of them you find in what our Lord says about the rich man and Lazarus. Remember how the rich man said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me.
And send Lazarus. He still thought Lazarus was someone to do his bidding. Send Lazarus. That he may dip the tip of his finger in water.
And cool my tongue. For I am tormented in this flame. It is a picture of the one who died impenitent. Suffering the infliction of the judge's penalty. Suffering the condemnation that was rightly his.
[24:35] Suffering the thirst. There is a physical thirst that arises when the heat of the sun beats down on us. There comes an intense craving for water.

And it can begin to dominate all our thinking. But oh, how little does our knowledge of earthly thirst convey to us the impact of that thirst that will never be quenched.
Convey to us the impact of that thirst from which there will never be any relief. There is an everlasting thirst in hell that cannot be assuaged.
And that is the rightful portion of all those who have rebelled against God. That is the penalty. That is the ultimate outcome.
It is not arbitrary. It is the logical outcome of those who have despised God's benefits and God's way. It is the punishment due to sin. And we could expect no other destiny.
[25:38] There is Jesus thirsting in our place. His agony was not to save himself, but to save others.

He is there as the substitute. Undergoing the full outpouring of God's wrath against sin. Can you see him there and see that it was for you?
That the thirst that bore in upon him then was the thirst that was overhanging you because of what we are? And he bore it.
Can you see why Jesus thirsted? He was paying the penalty as the sinner's substitute. He was thirsting so that our eternal destiny would not be with him who was tormented in the flame and

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craved even a single drop of water for his burning tongue.
Why was Jesus there thirsting on the cross? It was that we might receive from him the gift of the water of life, which shall cause us never to thirst anymore.
[26:52] Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. Why was Jesus thirsting on the cross?

So that he might bring many sons and daughters into glory. Where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.
Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.
And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. He was there that he might purchase. That for us.
He was there thirsting that we might have the promise of no thirst forevermore. And we remember this day all that he did on our behalf.
[27:55] And that's where I would leave it. Were it not that there is one other picture of Scripture that I think we need to bring in to our thinking to get a full idea of all that's involved so that we remember matters in a fuller way.

Because it's not enough to remember our Lord in his suffering. It's not enough to read the account of the cross and to meditate on it and come to the end of this chapter, say, of John's Gospel and leave Jesus dead in the tomb.
If we are to remember him, we must also have in our minds the fact that he is now risen and he is now in glory. And particularly we have to bear in mind the fact that he is the one who is coming again.
And when he comes again, he will not be pleading with his enemies for pity, for comfort. He will not be coming as the one who is going to suffer, as the sinner's substitute.
When he comes again, he is going to come as the messianic priest-king, waging the final war against sin and evil.
[29:32] And the picture I want you to have in your minds, as well as this picture of our Lord crying out on the cross, I thirst. It's the picture that you find at the end of Psalm 110, which I trust we'll be singing shortly.

The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen. He shall fill the places with the dead bodies.
He shall wound the heads over many countries. And then there follows words that can be difficult to grasp. Indeed, I think it's often the case that we perhaps avoid singing them because they seem to be a bit of an anticlimax.
He shall drink of the brook in the way. What has that got to do with this picture of God's judgment being poured out on those throughout many lands?
What is it that he shall drink of the brook in the way? What is it telling us? It's telling us of this difference. This difference between the task facing the Lord at his first coming and the way in which the Lord is going to come again.
[30:47] When he came the first time, it was with a burden that none of us could bear, a burden that pressed in upon him, a burden that would have crushed him completely had he not been the son of God as well as the son of man.

But when he comes again, he will come with ease. He will accomplish his purposes victoriously, triumphantly. This picture of drinking by the brook at the wayside is the picture of the warrior king who's taking all before him, whose enemies are constituting no obstacle, who can so easily refresh himself that he dips his hand in the water of us, burned by the wayside, and is sufficiently refreshed to go on with the task that is his and the day of his coming in judgment.
It is the other side of the Messiah that is presented there. Oh, there once was the day when he cried out, I thirst, but there is the day when he will come again and it will be a day of victory, a day of triumph, a day in which the fullness of his power and the ease of his victory will be evident on all sides.
All it will take on that day is a sip from a brook by the wayside to refresh him when he has carried out his task. How different from the thirst that came on him as he gave his life for his people cries out, I thirst.

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And in one concluding act of submissiveness, in the substitute's humiliation, in the cruel mockery he had to undergo, he drinks the sour wine that the soldiers would have had with them.
[32:39] And the pain-ranked body of our Lord is nerved, not for the moan of defeat, not for the sigh of the resigned, but for one final cry in a loud voice, one triumphant shout, it is finished.

And then the suffering was over, the work completely done, the one perfect and all availing sacrifice had been offered.
When he was reviled, he reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.
And as we remember all that he did for us, as we remember the intensity of what he underwent, we come with glad submission.
He did it for us, that we might not have to suffer that thirst that is our eternal portion, if we continue defiant in rebelling against him.
[33:48] And we also come glad that that is no longer his portion, that though he did once thirst, though he did once suffer, he is now triumphant at the right hand of the Father in glory.

And when he comes again, it will not be to suffer, it will not be to undergo this work, it is completed once for all. He will come again as the triumphant victor, whom just a sip from the brook by the wayside will refresh in the completeness of the task that is his.
Let us remember all that he has done. And oh, let us remember each one of us individually. He did it for me.
Let us pray. O Lord, our God, as we think of what was done on our behalf, how unworthy we are, how contrary we are to think so little and to wonder so far and so often to be so thoughtless.
We give thee thanks for this opportunity of especially remembering our Lord's death. And we pray that that remembrance would not be a mere formality.
[35:14] Grant to us that we would have some sense of all that occurred for us on our behalf. And grant that we would also have some sense of all that our Lord achieves and now enjoys.

Hasten the day when he will come again and his glory shall be seen in its fullness and the ease of his triumph shall be abundant to all.
Stir us up, encourage us and take us on our way, relying not on ourselves but on him who has won the victory on our behalf.
In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Actually, Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. kami phenomenal

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