



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“I Thirst” John 19:28-29

Listen for God’s Voice again in His Word from John 19:28-29. I’m reading from the New Revised Standard Version.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

It’s close to the end for Jesus. He has a raging thirst. Why?

Well of course, he has lost a lot of fluid. In the Garden of Gethsemane his stress was so great that capillaries in his forehead broke, and his blood-tinged sweat fell to the ground. This stress also made his skin especially fragile and sensitive to pain. Dr. Alexander Metherell goes on to describe the beating Jesus received—I’ll summarize. The scourging whips of the Roman soldier were leather strips extending beyond the end of a short pole. At the loose end of those leather strips were metal balls, pieces of bone, nail scraps and sharp rock. When in the hands of a beefy soldier, the metal balls would cause deep bruises that would burst open with further blows. The sharp edges of the other parts would cut into the flesh of the victim. “The back would be... so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed, all the way from the shoulders down to the back, the buttocks, and the backs of the legs.” A Roman writer some years later would write, “ ‘The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.’ We know that many people would die from this

kind of beating even before they could be crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain, and go into hypovolemic shock [in which the person suffers] the effects of losing a large amount of blood.... This does four things. First, the heart races to pump blood that isn't there. Second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse. Third, the kidneys stop producing urine, to maintain what volume is left; and fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume. . . . Because of the terrible effects of this beating, there's no question that Jesus was already in serious to critical condition even before the nails were driven through his hands and feet." (pp. 260-262 of *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998.)

And Jesus said, "I thirst."

At the cross, it's sometimes hard to know who is a good guy and who is a bad guy. When Jesus cries, "I am thirsty," someone runs and gets a sponge, fills it with the cheap wine the soldiers drank (turned to vinegar in the heat by now), and lifts it on a stick the couple of feet that Jesus is off the ground, so Jesus can touch his lips to it. In Matthew and here in John's gospels, this would seem to have been a kind thing for someone to do.

But in Matthew's account, after this act of kindness, others in the crowd tell this kind one to step back, so they can see if indeed Elijah will come, as they think Jesus has asked. They believe this Jesus from Nazareth is delusional; he has such a "Messiah Complex" that he really thinks Elijah is going to show up--to either prove him to be the Messiah (everyone expected Elijah to point to God's Messiah), or to save Jesus just before he dies. The effect of the sour wine vinegar would have been like smelling salts to the man on the cross, shocking his system awake for a moment, to give one more chance for Elijah to make his appearance.

Our writer John began his gospel with his famous prelude, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . [Then he says,] [the Word] came

to his own people, and his own people didn't get him . . ."--right up to, and right through the very end. (See John 1:10-14)

This sour wine vinegar is Jesus' last taste of earth. How ironic—the one who gave Living Water and still gives Living Water today was dying of thirst.

What is God saying to us, tonight? First, Jesus was a real human being. He put aside his “godness” (as Paul tells us in Philippians, chapter 2) to become a human, and to live with all our limitations. He was no pretender, acting out some play to announces our salvation.

Second, when we get thirsty, the human thing we do is to try to slake our thirst ourselves, employing all kinds of unhelpful things. Some of our ways work—for a time. But by God's grace, sooner rather than later we run out of our own resources, and we discover that what we've really been seeking all along is God. The thing is, we cannot “make” God come to us; it's not in our power. We need help. We call out, “I thirst.”

Jesus said, “I thirst.” How about you? Are you thirsty—for God??

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn's gathered Christians, Auburn, California
In the Good Friday Community Service, First Baptist Church, March 20, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]