

istry, Jesus said to the people: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

In response, we echo the Man of Sorrows: "I thirst! Give me the water of eternal life gained for me at the cross that I may thirst no more!" The answer to this request is a picture we see in the last book of the Bible. "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore..." (Rev. 7:16).

Lord, quench our thirst with Christ's precious blood!

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<sup>1</sup> F.W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior*, 389.



The



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# PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic, Christianity  
April 2014, Issue 58

## "I THIRST!"

### JESUS' THIRST AND OUR SPIRITUAL REHYDRATION

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

If you've spent any time around small children there is one phrase you have certainly heard them say: "I'm thirsty." (And don't they say it as if they'll never drink again?) When we hear children lament their thirst we don't panic; we probably don't think much of it at all. We get them a drink and things are back to normal. But in other parts of the world—especially in earlier days—thirst is a life and death emergency.

Keep this in mind as you hear Christ cry out from the cross those pathetic words, "I thirst." Those who gathered around the cross on that dusty hill could feel Jesus' words reverberate in their own dry throats. These are the words of a man whose vitality was almost dried up to death.

Yet, in them, we witness the thoughtful tenderness of the Good Teacher as he breathes these words into Scripture for our edification (2 Tim. 3:16-17). "I Thirst"—a single onomatopoeic Greek word (dipsao)—reveals rich truths about their speaker.

### Jesus Fulfilled the Scriptures

Jesus' cry of thirst made a special impression on those who knew the Old Testament. In at least two ways "I Thirst" made good on Jesus' promise that in Jerusalem, "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31).

First, God foretold that his Messiah would thirst. Jesus had just cried out those unmistakable opening words of Psalm 22, "My



God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” As the crowds heard Jesus declare his thirst those who knew that psalm would be reminded of its fifteenth verse. “My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death” (Ps. 22:15). It is difficult to imagine a more thorough fulfillment of this prophesy.

Second, before Christ came to earth, he prophesied through David that he would drink bitterness. “They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Ps. 69:21). Earlier in that Psalm the speaker says, “My throat is dry” (v. 3). Ironically, the psalmist describes himself as drowning in a sea of water yet his throat is dry and his only drink is bitterness (vv. 1,2,15). Jesus, drowning in a sea of sorrow, with only sour wine to wet his parched tongue, fulfilled Scripture when he said, “I thirst” and when he received the sour wine.

### **Jesus Suffered in a Human Body**

Frederick Krummacher describes the thirst of our Lord in vividly human terms. “He had already hung nearly six hours on the cross. The blood vessels of His sacred body are almost dried up. A dreadful fever rages through his frame. His tongue cleaves to His jaws. His lips burn, and a drop of water seems a great refreshment to Him.” He concludes by saying, “There is scarcely a greater torment than that of insatiable thirst.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is not pretending to be thirsty in order to illustrate spiritual

truths. Jesus was thirstier than we can imagine. Our High Priest sympathizes with all the pains and discomforts that come from living in a sin-afflicted world (Heb. 4:15). If ever there were understanding ears into which we should speak our hurts and cry out for grace and mercy, it is those ears which on Calvary heard the sticky crackling of his own dry mouth (v. 16).

### **Jesus Bore Our Curse of Thirst**

The Bible uses thirst to describe the judgment of God. In the Old Testament God threatened to make Israel—his Son (Matt. 2:15)—like a “dry land, and slay her with thirst” (Hos. 2:3; Cf. Deut 28:48). Speaking of the judgment of Jerusalem Jeremiah says, “The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst; (Lam. 4:4; Cf. Amos 8:11). Similarly, the Psalmist said, “If I do not remember (Jerusalem) let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth” (Ps. 137:6). That is, “Let me be cursed with thirst!” On the cross the Mediator of the covenant of grace experienced the curse earned by covenant breakers.

You might say that, in a startling way, Jesus’ inserts himself into his parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In hell the rich man cried out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24). The rich man’s screams for relief from his thirst are denied. So, for a time, are Christ’s. Christ’s thirst indicates the hellish

agony of God’s curse that he endured on the cross.

Even when Christ’s tongue expressed the sour wines from the sponge it offered little relief. Did it not burn as the vinegar washed past his withered cells? Was it not a further portrait of the cup of God’s wrath which our Lord had consented to drink? Only hours ago, Jesus spoke of his approaching suffering as a cup which he would drink—though not without shuddering. Now as he drinks, he burns with thirst, like a man who drinks salt water to cure dehydration.

### **Jesus Thirsted for His People**

By nature, because we have forsaken God, “the fountain of living waters,” and have hewn ourselves “cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13), we are the thirsty ones. Isaiah, speaking of God’s wayward people says, “Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst” (Isaiah 5:13). We are the ones who, by nature, are cursed with thirst and yearn to be satisfied with God’s salvation.

But here, Jesus musters a cry from his dry, hoarse throat...and all he gets is sour wine. Why? Because he is under God’s curse.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

God promised that when his people became thirsty and cried

out for help he would sooth their parched souls. “The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the LORD, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them” (Is. 41:17).

Christ is the rock from which the wandering Israelites drank in the desert (1 Cor. 10:4). Now, he’s dried up. He has emptied himself to provide nourishing drink for us. Christ is the living water which he offered to the woman at the well (John 4:13-14). Now, his well has gone dry. He became thirsty accomplishing the salvation that his spiritually thirsty people desperately needed.

John says that Jesus spoke of his thirst knowing that “All things had been accomplished” (19:28). No doubt, Jesus had been thirsty for hours before he spoke up. But now he announces his thirst to declare that he has emptied himself of his glory for his people.

### **Jesus Refreshes his People**

Jesus died thirsty but he arose refreshed. In his suffering, Jesus thirsted after the full restoration of his father’s fellowship, that the smile of his Father’s face might be turned toward him and his people again (Ps. 69:16,17). In his glorification, beginning with his resurrection, his thirst was quenched. Because his thirst was quenched we know that ours will be too.

Jesus thirsted so that we might never go thirsty. Spiritual starvation and dehydration are not merely inconveniences. They are matters of life and death. Earlier in his min-