

I Thirst

DAVE BAST

Many Christians seem to ignore, or at least to downplay, Jesus' real humanity. We tend to focus so much on his divinity that we minimize the authenticity of Jesus' human nature. This can happen even when we read about Jesus' death on the cross. There is almost a tendency to think that because Jesus was God he could sort of breeze through the crucifixion; that it must have been easier for him; but listening closely to Jesus' words from the cross should put that idea to rest. What Jesus suffered there he felt in his body as well as his soul, and he suffered that to save us. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and we are now past the midpoint of our series on Jesus' words from the cross. There are seven of them if you take all of the different gospels and put them together. We have often pointed out that they record different ones. Nobody records all seven; but by creating a kind of mosaic of these words from the four gospels, we get the full range of Jesus' experience.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He may even have said more than the seven that we have recorded, so it is not too surprising that no one gospel has all the same ones. He probably even said more than this, but these were the leading ones that the gospel writers recorded because they teach us something really, really important about the nature of Jesus' death and crucifixion and what it accomplished.

DAVE BAST

Right; we have pointed out, I think, at the outset that the Christian message really is about the cross—about Jesus' death. Not just his life, his good example, and his wonderful teaching, and even the miracles and the wonders that he performed, but it all comes down to these last agonizing hours as he was crucified and suffered and died, as the creed says, under Pontius Pilate.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so now we are...this is the fifth program in this series, and we are going to go to John's gospel, the 19th chapter, and let's listen to what John has to say here, beginning at verse 28; John writes:

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of hyssop plant and lifted it to Jesus' lips.³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished!" And with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

DAVE BAST

Now John goes on to say:³¹ It was the day of preparation, and then next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other,³³ but when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side

with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵The man who saw it has given testimony and his testimony is true; he knows that he tells the truth and he testifies so that you may also believe. ³⁶These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled, “Not one of his bones will be broken,” ³⁷and as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, now actually, if you were listening to that, you also heard another word from the cross, the seventh word: It is finished; and we will be taking that up, not in the next program, but the final and seventh program in this series; but for this one, we are going to look at that most human of all things Jesus spoke: I am thirsty. Crucifixion was an agonizing way to die. Naturally, you know, there is dehydration going on, extra-heavy breathing, which dries you out; so very, very simply, he is thirsty, and expresses that wish, and someone lifts a sponge on a hyssop branch to his lips with some sour wine—maybe some cheap wine—and Jesus receives that.

DAVE BAST

Right; I’ve sometimes wondered, as you really pore over the details, again from the different gospels; but in some of the other gospels there is this little business before Jesus is crucified, where he is offered a drink of wine mixed with hyssop, as they say, and Jesus refuses that. So, it seems almost odd that on the one hand he would say no thanks, when they want to give him a drink of wine; and on the other, here in John, toward the end, he asks for it and is offered it. So, sometimes that might be puzzling; but I think in the first case there was evidently an element of narcotic in that wine; that it was perhaps intended to lessen the pain or the suffering...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or prolong it also, right? If you could numb the person, the show might go on a little longer because these were public spectacles...

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is true, too; right, good point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But in this case Jesus does receive it. Jesus makes a request, a soldier nearby fulfills that request; and again, as we have said, Dave, this is such a very human moment in this particular saying, that Jesus as a real human being...and we are going to talk a little bit more about that in a minute...but of course he was thirsty; and one of the things we are going to want to wonder about in this program is: Well, we said a few minutes ago, Jesus maybe said even more than just the seven words we have recorded in the four gospels; so they maybe made a selection of the ones they thought were the most important to convey the meaning of the cross and to tie in with the Old Testament. Well, if that was true, then why include this one?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This one just seems mundane, like: I’m thirsty.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, that doesn’t seem to have a whole lot of biblical punch.

DAVE BAST

When you think about the other words, as we have been considering them and going through them, Jesus forgives his executioners and offers us the most compelling example...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Beautiful example of grace.

DAVE BAST

Of how to be forgiving ourselves; and the terrible fourth word, as we saw in our last program: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me—why have you forsaken me?

SCOTT HOEZEE

So much theological oomph to that one!

DAVE BAST

Right. We tried to plumb the depths of that as Jesus experiences somehow separation from God on the cross. He goes to hell for us. Even the promise to the penitent thief: Today you will be with me in paradise; the third word from the cross; this wonderful hope of heaven and of salvation that he gives. So, yes, why now? Why record this little, sort of ordinary, off-the-shelf kind of human thing? I think, as we hope to show, there is great significance here, and we will try to explore that and unpack it in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this fifth program in our seven-part series on those last words that Jesus spoke from the cross; and here is the one, Dave, that we are looking at today from John 19. Again, we read it earlier, but we will repeat it.

²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said, in order to fulfill the scripture, "I am thirsty." ²⁹A 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.

DAVE BAST

So, it is an ordinary kind of human request and an ordinary...maybe extraordinary act of mercy...act of compassion. Who is the *they* there? Who did this? One of the soldiers, perhaps. They would have been most obviously the ones to have a jug of wine standing by. Crucifixion was thirsty business; but the great 19th Century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, said of this word from the cross that it is the word of a man, not the word of God. God never has to say: I'm thirsty. So, Jesus clearly is speaking out of his humanity—out of his real, human physiology.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and you know, throughout the course of Church history, there have been any number...who knows how many now...any number of heresies. These are false teachings; and curiously, one of the very, very, very earliest heresies that beset the early, early Church was something called *Docetism*, which was the belief that Jesus was only divine and only pretended to be human, right? He was sort of like Superman, you know...he's not really a mild-mannered reporter, he's the Man of Steel underneath his suit coat.

DAVE BAST

Right; all he has to do is rip off his shirt and you see his Superman costume.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, there was this teaching that, indeed, Jesus was not really human. It was an act. He was only divine. There was a reverse heresy which did not have as much traction...I think it was called *Ebionitism*...that he

was only human and pretended to be divine...and then there was a middle one...*Adoptionism*...that he was only human, but then God adopted him as a son.

DAVE BAST

God sort of bestowed divinity on him, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But all of those were heresies because the Orthodox Christian position all along has been that Jesus was truly human and truly divine, one hundred percent both; and that the skin that he had, the body that he had, his hair, his teeth, his eyes, was not a disguise, it wasn't a costume, it wasn't fake; it was the real deal; and here, maybe among the reasons why John took care to record this otherwise seemingly kind of a dull word from the cross: I'm thirsty; here we see, indeed, Jesus is taking our place, and that has always been the key, right? In atonement theory, it is so important that we see that Jesus takes our place as a true human being...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because only a true human being can take the punishment for sin that we deserve.

DAVE BAST

It has to be done by a man...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

By a human...and yet, at the same time, unless God is involved in this as well, it cannot suffice, really, to cover the sins of the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But there has always been something about the crucifixion that has turned people off. In the ancient world, crucifixion was so horrifying that polite people did not talk about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

They sort of averted their gaze, as it were. Roman law forbade Roman citizens from being subjected to crucifixion, that is how bad...and it was almost embarrassing to people; it was disgusting. So, there was this sense that, no, maybe it didn't really happen to Jesus. In fact, interestingly, today the whole world of Islam rejects the idea that Jesus suffered on the cross because it is such a degrading thing; so they suggest other alternatives for what happened. Somebody who only looked like Jesus was crucified; but the Bible's witness to us is Jesus accepted it in his humanity; he endured it; he went all the way to the end; and he reacted exactly as you or I would have done. He felt the pain that we would have. His throat clenched up and he had trouble even articulating; and so, in a very human and natural way he asked for something to drink.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that all makes perfect sense, and that is fine; but then, our listeners maybe noticed when we read this passage twice now, John goes out of his way to say: Oh, this was to fulfill scripture...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you want to say: Jesus getting thirsty fulfilled some part of the Bible? How in the world does this tie in with fulfilling scripture when he was merely thirsty? But John goes out of his way to say: No, no; this fulfilled scripture; and so I think we should think about that a minute.

DAVE BAST

Well, in fact, he says it again and again, too, with the side piercing and that spear and the blood and water...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; John is always doing that...this fulfills scripture.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we will talk a little bit more about that in the last segment here, but it is as though John wants us to see that everything that Jesus did and that was done to him, both, were written ahead of time—all there in prophetic form in the Old Testament. So, there is a verse from the psalms—Psalm 69:21 that says: For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink; and John specifies even that is the kind of wine they gave him. Here are a few more; I won't give all the references, but these are all quotes from the Old Testament: They have pierced my hands and feet [Psalm 22:16]; they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing [Psalm 22:18]; he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors [Isaiah 53:12]; they must not break any of its bones (speaking of the Passover lamb) [Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12]; they will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn [Zechariah 12:10]; and so it goes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, although he had done no violence [Isaiah 53:9]. There are...in other words, John wants to make clear by throwing out all of those references to scripture being fulfilled is that this was not an accident. This did not blindside God. This was not just a terrible thing that wasn't supposed to happen to Jesus, and isn't it awful; which the disciples were thinking at the time...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, no; this is the end of everything. We have lost all hope, you know, the Emmaus Road travelers, you know, later on Easter. We had hoped that he was going to redeem Israel, but he died. But John wants to say: No, this was not a terrible accident. This is not something that, oh, that just kind of got away from God, and now what? No; this is all part of a plan that has been laid in place...in other parts of the New Testament we are told "before the foundation of the world" even...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, this fulfillment of scripture, even on, again, something as simple as just being thirsty is John's way of saying God's got this. God's in control. All along we have been told a suffering servant would come who

would suffer horribly for the sins of humanity, and that is exactly what is happening.

DAVE BAST

This is another, I guess I would say, of the deep mysteries of the cross. The fact that God had it all planned ahead of time; and yet, every human being involved was equally responsible...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right...it is both/and.

DAVE BAST

For their own actions. They were not automatons. They were not robots who could only do what God had programmed into them to do. Pilate was responsible for condemning an innocent man. He could have set him free. The chief priests and leaders of the people were responsible for their envy and their desire to get rid of Jesus. The disciples were responsible for abandoning him and running away. But in the deep mystery of the providence of God, the way things worked, God had it all in mind and designed for the salvation of the world: You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, as Joseph said to his brothers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in Acts 2, the Pentecost Day sermon. Peter says that Christ was handed over to death, and Peter says: By God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and there is another thing of course, when we talk about fulfilling scripture through this otherwise seemingly dull word about thirst...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the branch that is used to lift the sponge, and it shouldn't be lost on us. John doesn't say: Oh, some guy picked up a stick and put a sponge on it. No, he makes a note that it is a hyssop stick, which puts you right back in Passover mode in the book of Exodus when the people used the hyssop, right, as part of that whole ceremony that points forward to the ultimate sacrifice of the lamb.

DAVE BAST

Hyssop isn't exactly like a yardstick. It is kind of a scraggly bush from the desert with twisted branches, but it was a hyssop branch that the Children of Israel used to dab the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts, if you remember that story...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So that the angel of death would pass over them and spare them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus died at Passover, which we might remind everyone.

DAVE BAST

Yes, so what we have here in this little word is first of all a testimony to Jesus' real humanity. He truly was our representative. It is a testimony to the plan of God, which was not some last-minute, thrown-together, improvised "now what do I do? They're going to crucify my son...Oh, dear," but something that he had intended from all eternity as the means of salvation; and finally, the symbolism of it as Jesus our Passover lamb is sacrificed for us, and through his blood...there it comes, out of his side, blood and water...that cleanses us, that purifies us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there is a lot of heavy-duty biblical, theological meaning here, but there is a lot of personal meaning for even our own lives as we think about this particular word from the cross, and we are going to pick that up next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are, in this program, Dave, looking at one of the words—it is the fifth in our series—the fifth word from the cross. A seemingly simple request: I am thirsty, Jesus says; but we saw just in the last segment that John wants us to know that he included that because it has something to do with fulfilling all scripture. That this is the plan of God from the beginning to bring salvation in this way; and so, that seemingly simple, “I thirst,” “I’m thirsty,” has deep, deep meaning biblically and theologically; but we also want to think about personally and pastorally as well.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; and you know, there is one maybe very simple way we can use this word, I think, to our benefit, and Jesus’ experience on the cross, and that is moments maybe when we are thirsty...literally, physically, or maybe we are in some kind of pain or suffering. I remember talking once to a very mature, very wise old saint, as we might call him, who had experienced a lot of physical pain and illness in his life; and I was just chatting with him and asked him: What do you do? How do you handle that? And he said: One of the things I sometimes do is I think about the pain that Jesus suffered for me, and now I can identify with him. I can feel a little bit of what he must have felt in going through... You know, maybe that is not everybody’s cup of tea, or easy to do, but that is certainly one thing that we can do; as we suffer, we think how he suffered for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, conversely, that he identifies with us, too, and is near to us; and not as somebody who doesn’t know. I mean, the people who come to you when you are hurting, whose words or sometimes just presence and lack of words mean the most, are the people who know what you are going through...

DAVE BAST

Yes. They’ve been through it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who say: I know what you are going through; not just because they want to try to empathize with you even though they really don’t; no, they lost a child once, too; or her husband died once, too; or she was fired once, too. So, Jesus comes to us in deep empathy, and this thirst image ties in with that; but of course, we should also note, Dave, the image of both hungering and thirsting, but the image of thirst is all through the Bible, now in a spiritual sense of thirsting after the things of God; and I don’t think it is too much of a stretch biblically speaking to kind of see this also as a metaphor for thirsting for God—thirsting for the things of Christ, and wanting to have our thirst quenched by the Spirit of God and the knowledge of God.

DAVE BAST

Yes, well, think of Isaiah 55, the famous passage: ¹Come all you who are thirsty; come to the waters, and you who have no money come buy and eat; come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ²Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?

You just think of all the things that people are living for to kind of quench their thirst for meaning, for love, for relationships, for purpose in life. All the things that they spend their money on...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

To find happiness or satisfaction; and as St. Augustine said long ago, our hearts are restless until they rest in you. God, you have made us for yourself, and all those appetites and desires are really, deep down, only able to be met by God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we even use some of that imagery today. I mean, sometimes when we see somebody trying to find life's meaning or trying to make themselves happy by earning lots of money or by engaging in a lot of sexuality or by doing all kinds of things, people say: He is drinking at all the wrong taps. He has a deep-down thirst and he thinks money is going to quench it, and it won't. He thinks that sexuality is going to quench it; fame will quench it; it won't. Deep down, we finally have this thirst for God. Psalm 42 comes to mind: ¹As a deer pants for streams of water so my soul pants for you, my God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? That famous psalm expresses the longing of so many of us.

DAVE BAST

You know, you also think of Jesus' thirst... I think of the story in John 4, where he was in conversation with the Samaritan woman...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, at a well...

DAVE BAST

Yes; at a well, and he uses the image of water metaphorically. First, he asks her for a drink, and then, as she is offering him water, he says to her: If you knew who it was who is speaking to you, you would ask me for a drink and I would give it to you, and what I would give you would be a well of water, a fountain bubbling up within you. He is offering himself in response to *her* thirst for forgiveness and for meaning in life and for healing; and the irony is that he who is the water of life now on the cross is dry and thirsty.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; in terms of John saying this was to fulfill scripture, he probably didn't have a single verse in mind. I think he had a panoply—a multiplicity of verses in mind—that this Jesus who was thirsty for you, on your behalf by dying on the cross, is...also again, as you just said, to use the John 4 image from this same gospel...he is himself the wellspring of eternal life—the water that will leave you so that you will never, never really be thirsty again; and so, it fulfills scripture, not just a verse here or there; but it fulfills lots of trajectories and arcs of scripture that this one who died is the ultimate answer to your every hunger, your every thirst. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled, and Jesus is our righteousness.

DAVE BAST

You know, Scott, as I worked with Words of Hope for many years I got an opportunity to travel to many places in the world, and really, one of the most moving and powerful experiences I ever had was on my first trip to India, where I visited Mother Teresa's hospice, and I learned there that in the Houses of Charity, the order that Mother Teresa founded, there are two signs—two sayings of Jesus—that are posted. One of them says: I thirst; and the other says: I quench. Jesus is still thirsty for us to come to him, and he is the one who quenches our eternal thirst.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God. Thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we want to know how we can help you to dig deeper into scripture. So, visit groundworkonline.com to tell us topics and passages to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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