

Session 5

I THIRST

John 19:28-30; John 4:7-15; John 7:37-39

Memory Verse

After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said, "I'm thirsty."

– JOHN 19:28, CSB



I Thirst

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The salvation made available through Jesus' sacrifice quenches the eternal thirst of humanity.

Everyone from fitness experts to survival enthusiasts tout the body's need for water. Even resources that coach others on the spiritual discipline of fasting are careful to point out that, while the body can go without food for a prolonged period of time, it cannot survive without water. How long a person can live without water depends on many factors like age, activity level, overall health, and average daily consumption of water. However, medical outlets typically agree that on average, a person will only make it three days.

Aside from the physical need for water, though, we have a greater need for spiritual water, as Jesus points out throughout the Gospels. For one's physical body, the absence of water quickly has physical consequences like cognitive deficiency or severe muscular cramping. On a spiritual level, however, the consequences are much more tragic. Jesus' earthly ministry took place in the arid region of Galilee, where He frequently described His ministry as being the source of water that eternally quenches thirst. This makes Jesus' cry of thirst from the cross all the more striking. As Jesus poured Himself out as a sacrifice for humanity, He, the very source of living water, became thirsty. "I thirst" was His fifth saying from the cross.



What is the most thirsty you can remember being? What took place to get you to that level of thirst?

? What episodes in the Bible involve God using water to demonstrate His love and provision for His people? As a group, try to come up with as many examples as you can and record them on a whiteboard or tear sheet of paper.

? Who in your life has most consistently demonstrated dependence on Jesus? How does that person's relationship with Jesus inspire you?

Session Summary

Jesus' fifth saying from the cross highlighted His being poured out as a sacrificial atonement for the sins of humanity. The imagery of thirst was widely employed by biblical writers to indicate spiritual need and point to the source of that need's fulfillment. Jesus repeatedly identified Himself as the source of the living water that meets the eternal need shared by all of humanity.

1. The Thirst that Fulfilled Prophecy (John 19:28-30)

At a glance, Jesus' fifth saying from the cross, "I'm thirsty," might seem like little more than a statement on His physical condition. By this point in His crucifixion, Jesus was mercilessly beaten and scourged multiple times, forced to carry His own cross to Golgotha, and tortuously left hanging in the heat of the Middle East. His dehydration from loss of blood and sweat alone would have bordered on lethal levels. Of course He was thirsty!

When read in the greater context of Scripture, however, Jesus' statement of thirst was much more prophetically significant. In verse 28, John recorded that Jesus knew "everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled." In fact, everything had not happened; most obviously, Jesus had not yet died and been resurrected. D.A. Carson puts it this way, "Jesus' knowledge that all was now completed is the awareness that all the

steps that had brought Him to this point of pain and impending death were in the design of His heavenly Father, and death itself was imminent.”¹ So, what did John mean? John wanted readers to understand that Jesus’ death fulfilled prophecy about the Messiah and God’s redemptive plan. Even as He died, Jesus drew the attention to God’s master plan for salvation.

While scholars disagree as to the precise Old Testament prophecy Jesus’ fifth saying fulfills, due to the many possibilities, the most likely text is Psalm 69:21: “Instead, they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Comparatively, this prophetic fulfillment may seem minor compared to passages like Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant. However, “John wants to make his readers understand that every part of Jesus’ Passion was not only in the Father’s plan of redemption but a consequence of the Son’s direct obedience to it.”²

? How does it shape your understanding of God’s sovereignty to know that even Jesus’ “I’m thirsty” was a fulfillment of prophecy written hundreds of years earlier?

? Application: Who are you praying for currently who needs to know the lengths to which Jesus went to offer salvation to them? What specifically will you pray for related to your next gospel conversation with that person?

The jar full of sour wine should not be confused with the wine mixed with myrrh that Jesus was offered as He carried His cross. The two liquids had diametrically opposite effects. The myrrh was an additive that dulled the agony of the physical torture of crucifixion. The sour wine soldiers offered Jesus on the cross actually prolonged life and, thereby, prolonged suffering. The wine was a cheap wine that the soldiers used for that purpose, and it was not considered potable in social settings. It was more like drinking straight vinegar than the wine described in other sections of the Gospels.

2. Thirst: An Invitation to Living Water (John 4:7-15)

This passage from John is part of a greater conversation Jesus had with a woman whom He met at a well in Samaria. This conversation is one of the most well-known and remarkable episodes recorded in John's Gospel due to the number of shattered social and religious norms within it. Not only did Jesus initiate a conversation with a woman, but she was a Samaritan. The enmity between the Jews and Samaritans was tremendously bitter, so any sort of interaction between representatives of the two groups was incredibly scandalous. How did Jesus begin the delicate conversation with this woman? "Give me a drink."

Startled and very much aware of the scandalous nature of their conversation, the Samaritan woman reminded Jesus that He was a Jew and was not supposed to talk to her. Jesus wasted no time in coming to the heart of the matter. She came to the well to get water to quench her physical thirst. What she did not know was that Jesus could offer her something much greater than temporary physical replenishment. Carson notes, "The 'gift of God' that she does not recognize is probably the eternal life that only Jesus can bestow."³

The woman came to the well in the heat of the day because she knew she would be the only one there. The typical time for getting water was early in the morning, so going in the heat of the day reflected the shame and disdain the woman experienced if she appeared with the rest of the community. Therefore, when Jesus explained that the one who drinks of His living water would never thirst again, the woman heard that no longer would she be forced to go to the well.



If you were to explain the scandal of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman to someone, what contemporary metaphors would you use to help them understand? Why did you pick those?




Application: Jesus began by telling the woman that if she knew who was speaking to her, she would ask for living water. This was an assessment of her not knowing the Torah. How does Bible engagement help prepare you to enter into Gospel conversations and answer the questions that come up in those conversations?


Though the woman focused her thoughts on her physical needs, Jesus continued to explain the riches of His living water. The person who drank of it would never thirst again because the greatest need would be eternally met. Jesus promised that the water would become “a well of water springing up in him for eternal life” (v. 14). This was likely a reference to the coming indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is Jesus’ abiding presence in the lives of His followers.

3. Streams of Living Water (John 7:37-39)

Jesus continued to utilize the metaphor of living water in His preaching ministry. In John 7, we read about a time when Jesus secretly attended the Festival of Shelters. As He attended the festival, the religious leaders actively searched for Him to arrest Him. Though He deliberately stayed out of sight for most of the festival, Jesus finally began teaching in the temple. Before long, the religious leaders tried to apprehend Him but were unable to do so because “His hour had not yet come.” (v. 30). On the last day of the festival, Jesus taught: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” Once again, Jesus connected Himself metaphorically with living water.

Jesus’ use of the living water metaphor at the Feast of Shelters was tied to the water pouring ritual that occurred on the final day of the festival’s celebration. The pouring of the water reminded people of God’s provision in the wilderness, which the Festival of Shelters commemorated. Carson helps readers understand this significance: “In general terms, then, Jesus’ pronouncement is clear: He is the fulfillment of all that the Feast of Tabernacles anticipated. If Isaiah could invite the thirsty to drink from the waters (Isa. 55:1), Jesus announces that He is the one who can provide the waters.”²⁴ Indeed, the greatest provision humanity was in need of was exactly what Jesus came to provide through His death, burial, and resurrection.

 Recognizing one's spiritual thirst is a key part of coming to Christ. Who in your life helped you realize you were thirsty?

 Application: How would you explain the “streams of living water” imagery to someone else? What key thoughts would you be sure to communicate? Why is it important to think through the specifics of Gospel conversations in advance?

John helped readers connect Jesus' metaphor of living water to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Even though the Holy Spirit would not be sent to Jesus' followers until Pentecost (Acts 2), Carson points out, “What the Evangelist means is that the Spirit of the dawning kingdom comes as the result – indeed the entailment – of the Son's completed work, and up to that point the Holy Spirit was not given in the full, Christian sense of the term.”⁵ Once received, however, Jesus likened the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with streams of living water that flow from deep within. The Spirit is the constant presence of Christ in Christians, guiding them into His truth, convicting them of sin, and drawing them toward a gradual conformity to the likeness of Jesus.


Conclusion

The fifth saying of Jesus on the cross is unlike the others in that Jesus' statement was one of need. However, even in His physically weakest moment, His missional awareness never wavered. Jesus knew the purpose for His physical ministry and how it would end. Even in the midst of His greatest torment, because of His love for humanity, Jesus carried out the redemptive plan of God to the last detail. During His time on earth, He demonstrated that love with every conversation and every encounter, constantly drawing the lost to Himself. In light of this fifth saying, here are some important points of consideration.

First, Jesus loved the lost and, therefore, so must His church. If the church understands itself correctly and biblically, it exists in the world to continue the work of Christ that He modeled during His earthly ministry. Jesus sacrificed everything so that the lost could be saved. The church today has the incredible opportunity to demonstrate a similar fervor for seeking and inviting the lost. Several texts in the New Testament refer to what Jesus could have done in order to take a short cut to redemption. That was actually at the heart of the temptations Satan lobbed at Him during His time in the wilderness. During His trials, Jesus reminded His accusers that He could call down legions of angels to deliver Him if He desired. However, He never gave in to any of those temptations because He came to seek and save sinners. The church, then, must continually strive to be a conduit of His hope and grace.

Second, Jesus' gospel message is for everyone. The Samaritan woman was off-limits to everyone; that is why she was at the well alone. But she was not off-limits to Jesus. He engaged her with His gospel and even revealed to her that He is the Messiah. If the church of Jesus is going to be like Jesus, that means no one is off-limits to the love of Jesus we share.

Third, coming to Christ is a life-changing, lifelong experience. When Jesus described the streams of living water flowing from deep within the Christian, the picture is of a constantly active and moving current. The water never stops or runs out. It is self-sustaining and self-renewing. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is not limited to an awareness of Christ, but also unites the Christian with the ongoing work of Christ in the world. The presence of the Spirit in the life of the disciple both rejuvenates the disciple's spiritual fervor and directs him or her on where to follow Jesus next. In doing so, the living water inside the believer fuels us to take the gospel to the lost, just as Jesus modeled.

 How do you personally fight the war of selflessness in a culture that is defined by self-absorption? What practices have you placed in your life to help you remain focused on the lost? Who can hold you accountable in this?

? What are some reasons a person might be considered off-limits in our community? Social norms? Political background? Geographic barriers? Financial barriers? How difficult have you found crossing those barriers to be?

? How are you currently sharing the load with others to move the mission of Jesus forward in your group? What about in the church as a whole? How have you found your service impacting your spiritual fervor?

CHRIST CONNECTION: When Jesus uttered, “I am thirsty,” it highlighted the manner in which He was poured out through His sacrificial death to offer salvation to the world.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: When we as a church understand that Jesus’ death on the cross was the greatest example of God’s love for humanity, we can be the dispenser of hope to our thirsty world.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit

Main Passages

- Luke 23:46; Psalm 31

Session Outline

1. God is Trustworthy and Faithful (Luke 23:46; Ps. 31:5)
2. God is Present in Hardship (Ps. 31:7-8)
3. God Gives Courage to Those Who Trust Him (Ps. 31:23-24)

Memorize

After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said, "I'm thirsty."

- John 19:28, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 John 5:14-15
- Tuesday - Romans 8:26
- Wednesday - John 14:12-14
- Thursday - Philippians 4:6
- Friday - 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- Saturday - Matthew 6:5-8

References

¹Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.