

The Words of Humanity

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips." (John 19:28)

On the surface, that statement doesn't mean anything to us. It's exactly what you'd expect from a dying man who's parched and dehydrated after six hours on a cross. "I'm thirsty." Sure, that's what he's going to say. But I think he says much more. I would suggest to you that this was a claim of completion.

Perhaps you remember that there were two drinks that were mentioned at the cross. It's helpful to know which is which. In Matthew 27:34 as Jesus was being put on the cross, the Bible tells us that he was offered a drink that's called, "wine mixed with gall." The gall was a narcotic agent, a numbing agent. Even the cruel Romans had a touch of mercy in them. Before they would put a man up on the cross, they gave him something to just blur his mind and to allow him to withstand the pain. When Jesus was offered that, he refused. He said, "No."

"Why would he refuse it?" One reason is surely Jesus would choose no escapes or shortcuts. He was determined to endure the full brunt and the full wrath of the cross. Jesus wanted his full mental faculties while he hung there so that he could summarize his whole life and ministry in these seven statements made from the cross.

But six hours later another drink is offered. It's identified to us as wine mixed with vinegar. It was different. It was a cheap wine, hardly fermented, if fermented at all; it was wine mixed with vinegar. The scholars usually say, "One part wine, two parts vinegar." It had no gall, it had no numbing effect. If anything, it would stimulate his senses. And Jesus said, "I am thirsty," and they gave that to him.

So why did he drink the second drink?" Look at verse 28. "Later, knowing that all was now completed and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'" Folks, there is another evidence that is God hanging on the cross. You see I'm convinced that only God could know what Jesus knew at that moment. After six hours of excruciating, mind-blurring pain, and just moments before he was going to die, that man hanging on the cross reflected on the 700-plus prophecies about his life to see if they were all fulfilled. The following are prophecies just about Jesus' death.

The betrayal by a familiar friend. (Psalm 41:9)

The forsaking of the disciples. (Psalm 31:11)

The false accusations. (Psalm 35:11)
The silence before his judges (Isaiah 53:7)
Being found guiltless (Isaiah 53:9)
The numbering of him with the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)
Being crucified. (Psalm 22:16)
The mocking of the spectators. (Psalm 109:25)
The taunt of non-deliverance. (Psalm 22:7,8)
The gambling for his very garments. (Psalm 22:18)
The prayer for his enemies. (Isaiah 53:12)
Being forsaken of God. (Psalm 22:1)
The yielding of his spirit into the hands of the Father. (Psalm 31:5)
The bones not being broken. (Psalm 34:20)
The burial in a rich man's tomb. (Isaiah 53:9)
They gave me vinegar for my thirst (Psalm 69:21)

Did you know there were that many prophecies just about the death? Was this man just a man? As he was thinking through all of those, one came to his mind not yet fulfilled, one last prophecy. Psalm 69:20 prophesied that vinegar would be offered and it would be consumed, and Jesus, knowing that he would and that he must fulfill all prophecy, said something to cause that fulfillment. He said, "I am thirsty." They gave him the vinegar. It was a claim of completion. But even more important than that, it was a claim of incarnation.

There could have been two reasons Jesus made this statement from the cross. One, it was to complete prophecy; and second, because the man was thirsty. The first reason shows us that he was God while the second reason shows that he was man. Together, they validate again the greatest claim in all history, the claim of incarnation. Incarnation just means that this man, Jesus, was God come packaged in the flesh. There are claims to that all the way through the Bible. John began his gospel with "In the beginning was the Word" (that was a metaphor for Jesus). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) And then 14 verses later, he said, "And the Word became flesh and dwelled right here among us."

Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form," Or, 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul says to Timothy, "He appeared in a body and was vindicated by the Spirit," and the list goes on

and on. I can't stress this enough. The claim of incarnation is the Continental Divide of faith, it flows one way or the other. You see the world loves Jesus. Ninety percent of America even claims to be Christian, everybody likes Jesus because he was loving and nice and warm and fuzzy and the world is anxious to talk about him being a good teacher, a great philosopher and a kind man. But unless you accept him as God come in the flesh, then the Bible makes no rhyme or reason. It is the crucial claim in all humanity. If you believe he is God come in the flesh, everything else fits. He walked on water? Sure, the one who made the water can walk on it, can't he? That he came out of the grave? The one who altered life, is it any surprise that death couldn't hold him? The fact that he could say, "Your sins are forgiven," hanging on the cross. If he's God on that cross, it's no surprise that his death would have a saving significance.

The critical decision of our lives is: Was this man really God? Or, was God really this man? That's it. And the claim, "I AM thirsty," says, "Yes." Yes, he was. He was God come in the flesh.

I want to suggest to you that's there's a very practical day-to-day way that the incarnation of Jesus, God come in the flesh, means everything to us. The God who put the stars in the sky, who spoke the world into existence and who gave you life in your mother's womb, that God came, lived and died on a cross so that he could feel what you feel, sweat like you sweat, hurt like you hurt and cry like you cry. The sad reality is that most people acknowledge Jesus and I'm even talking about Christian folks now, but they have precious little understanding of how he really wants to impact their day-to-day living.

Most people see Jesus as a man who came to set up a religion, Christianity, an institution, the church, a code of conduct, the Bible and they think that's it. No! Jesus didn't come to this earth and hang on that cross to establish religion. He came to re-establish relationships.

You may have heard that before but still not understand. You believe Jesus came in the flesh, he's been here, done that, gone back to heaven and what he did was important, case closed. How do you have relationship with somebody who's not here? You can't see him, touch him, feel him or hear him. We're like the little six-year-old girl who had a bad dream. Her mother went in to her bedroom while she was crying and trying to give her courage and get her independence growing, she stroked her and said, "Now honey, go back to bed, Jesus is here with you." The little girl looked back and said, "Well good, you stay here with Jesus, I'm going in there with daddy."

Now we laugh at that, but that's the way most people I know really operate about Jesus. A lot of folks believe that Jesus is around somewhere, but we need something flesh and blood to snuggle up with. We need somebody we can get a hold of, somebody who can touch us, somebody who can really understand us. If there is ever a passage that answers the question: Does Jesus care? Can he touch us?

Can we touch him? Can he really meet my needs today? It's the scripture we're studying now. Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

One of the most fascinating things in all the Bible is when Jesus was about to begin his ministry, he went into the desert without food for 40 days and the Bible has one of the greatest understatement in all scripture, it says "And he was hungry." Forty days without food and he was hungry. Then now in the last few minutes of his life as he's hanging on the cross, we find him thirsty.

It's intriguing to me that at the bookends of his ministry, we see Jesus struggling with the most basic human needs: hunger and thirst. Have you ever wondered why we're told that? Why over here in Matthew 4 in the desert when Jesus is going *one on one* with Satan when they're trying to figure out who's going to rule the world. We're talking about the spiritual battle of all eternity. Then we're told "and he was very hungry." Why over here in the blackest day that's ever been where Jesus was experiencing the same blackness as all of our sin was being heaped on him, and he's looking for the Father and can't find him, crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We're also told: And he was thirsty.

Have you ever wondered why we're told those things? It's so that the words of Hebrews 4:15-16 would ring absolutely true in our ears: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace." Look at this, "to help us in our time of need."

The beautiful song says, "Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth or song? As the burdens press and the cares distress and the way grows weary and long? Oh yes, he cares, I know he cares." But better than the song, Peter said "Cast all your anxiety on him for he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Jesus is not here today in the flesh to put his arms around me, to hold on to my hand physically in the dark nights and the frightening times. I'm glad he's not here in the flesh now. Because he's done what he needed to do and our sin is taken away. If he were still here, it would be for the purpose of needing to abstain and absolve our sin. I'm also glad he's not here in the flesh because he's back in heaven's throne room interceding for us before the Father. I'm glad, because now he's no longer packaged in flesh confined by time, location and space. He can know and deal with all of our pain, suffering and needs at the same time. We don't have to be like a leper or blind Bartimaeus or the blind man, we don't have to try and find out: Is Jesus in Nazareth? Is Jesus in Capernaum? Is Jesus in Jerusalem? I want to see him. He's right there, right there where we can touch him any time.

I'm glad he's not here physically because he left behind a "Comforter," the Holy Spirit of God, not just to be with us, but to live in us when we're raised a new creation from being baptized into Christ. The Holy Spirit living in us is making intercession in our prayers. Romans 8:26 says, he's offering groanings for us that we don't even know how to offer. He's talking to the Father about our needs that we don't even know how to ask for. Therefore, when any of us come to God in prayer, Jesus in heaven can identify with and meet any need we have. If that doesn't make any sense to you it's because you've either never met the "man" Jesus, or because you've never seen prayer as the opportunity to talk with him face to face. Don't just pray, live in prayer. That's a claim of care. One author said that the cradle in Bethlehem proves that God came. The cross on Calvary proves that God cares.

They lifted the hyssop stalk with the vinegar and wine to his lips and "When he received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that he bowed and gave up his spirit." (John 19:30) Jesus had to have the needs of humanity met before he could make the claim of divinity. He couldn't call out the words, "It is finished," until his human thirst was met, and abated. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. Amazing Grace Lesson # 1255, Steve Flatt March 24, 1996