



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

The Thirsty Fountain...

John 19:28

Our scripture reading this morning comes first from Psalm 69 and then secondly from John 19. If you have your Bibles turn then to Psalm 69. If you don't have a Bible with you, you may want to use one of the blue Pew Bibles under the seats in front of you to follow along. Psalm 69 starts on page 482 of our Pew Bible.

^{ESV} **Psalm 69:16**...Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. ¹⁷ Hide not your face from your servant; for I am in distress; make haste to answer me. ¹⁸ Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies! ¹⁹ You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you. ²⁰ Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. ²¹ They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

And then our New Testament reading and principal passage for the morning is found in John 19. We'll be focusing on John 19:28 but to give some context to the passage we'll start reading in verse 23. John 19 is found on page 905 of our Pew Bibles.

^{ESV} **John 19:23**...When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one

another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "**They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.**" So the soldiers did these things,²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "**Woman, behold, your son!**"²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "**Behold, your mother!**" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "**I thirst.**"²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "**It is finished,**" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

It was summer and it was hot...Africa hot.

When I was a boy I spent most summers at my grandfather's house in East Texas. Most of the time my cousin Buddy and I would fish and play baseball, but now and then my grandfather would make us work...sometimes like dogs. Sometimes he would make us dig fence posts or string barbed wire. Sometimes we would have pick peas or dig potatoes. Other times we would have to cut weeds or feed cows. Of course, it wasn't all bad. I mean while we were working

we also got to drive his tractor or his old beat up pickup and he let us chew tobacco. And none of those things are all that bad when you're ten, eleven, or twelve years old.

But that summer it hot. It was Africa hot...and my grandfather began to be anxious about his cows. There hadn't been any rain for quite awhile and his two tanks were looking pretty nasty. For those of you not from Texas, a tank is a small lake. Some people...people from other parts of the country...call them ponds. But in East Texas if you call a tank a pond people will look at you with suspicion just like they will if call an icebox a refrigerator. Anyway, Papa's tanks were looking pretty nasty and I think he was worried that they might actually dry up. So one morning we loaded up the pickup with shovels and posthole diggers and some gravel and an old half barrel made out of wood and drove down to the back of the farm.

There was an old dry creek bed back there and my grandfather had dammed up the western end of it and it whenever it rained the dam caught the water and it backed up and made a pretty nice tank about a half an acre in size four or five feet deep. But like I said earlier because it had been so hot for so long it had had pretty nearly dried up.

My grandfather got out of the pickup and started walking up and down the creek bed and finally waved at us to drive the pickup over to where he was and to start digging.

My cousin Buddy and I thought he was nuts. The ground he had marked was a little damp but we didn't really see what digging a hole there was going to

accomplish. Still, we did what he told us just the same. And you know each shovel full of sand we threw out of the hole got wetter and wetter. Finally, two or three feet down the sand turned to clay and suddenly the hole began to fill up with water. My grandfather took the old barrel half and knocked the end out of it with an ax and flipped it over and stuck it down in the hole...we covered the bottom of the barrel with gravel and packed the dirt down around the edges of it so that it looked kind of like a little hot tub in the middle of a dry creek bed.

Before long the barrel filled up to the brim with water...water that was both clear and cold...clear and cold in the Texas sun. My grandfather walked back over to the pickup and got an old Grapette bottle out of the back of the truck and came back over and held it under the water till it filled up and then turned it up and took a drink and turned and looked at us with a twinkle in his crystal blue eyes and laughed out loud like only he could and said, "Alright boys, that'll do."

My cousin and I began to wrestle to see who would get to sit in the barrel first.

Now I wanted to tell that story because it is the same kind of imagery that pervades much of the Gospel of John. You see the world and the land that Jesus knew was very much like the land where we live. I was mostly hot and it was mostly dry. That is why the imagery of "thirst" and "living water" and "wells of water" and "trees planted by the water" come up in the biblical text over and over again. They come up because people understood the importance of water. They knew what it meant to go thirsty. They knew water was life.

And they knew how hard it was to both get and to keep.

You see, there are very few rivers in Israel. There are not many creeks either and the creeks or wadis that do exist there are dry most of the year. Most people in biblical times relied on wells for their water. That is one of the reasons wells figure so prominently in the stories of the patriarchs. But wells, you see, involve endless toil. Sometimes wells are very deep. And because that is true oftentimes drawing water from a well it was a backbreaking task. Water, you see, weighs just a little over 8 pounds a gallon. Someone, usually that meant the woman of the house, had to walk to where the well was, draw water and then transport it back to where she lived. Very few people had access to surface springs of water but those that did considered themselves especially blessed by God because the process of drawing and collecting water had to be repeated over and over again...day after day.

It was a thankless job.

It was an endless job...but it was an essential job...essential to allay thirst in a dry and thirsty land.

Everyone in Jesus' day understood and feared the terror of "thirst".

That is one of the reasons that our Lord's fifth word from the cross is so powerful. People knew then, far better I think than we do today, the power of thirst. Still, even though we are pampered by modern conveniences and technology even we have a notion of just how dreadful thirst can be.

That having been said, look with me for a moment at John 19:28.

^{ESV} **John 19:28**...After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), **"I thirst."**

Now the question, the real question of the text, is what Jesus meant when he said, **"I thirst."**

Now I am not trying to be dramatic here. I know Jesus meant he was physically thirsty...really and truly dying of thirst. And the thirst that Jesus felt was not like the thirst one knows when they exercise or work too long...it was not a **"I'm hot and would like something to drink kind of thirst."**

It was an, **"I am at death's door and my mouth has no spit in it all kind of thirst."**

It was a, **"My tongue is swollen and stuck to the roof of my mouth kind of thirst."**

It was an **"I would give all I own for a cup of water kind of thirst."**

You see during the night before his crucifixion Jesus had been scourged. His precious back had been lacerated with strips of leather embedded with bits of bone and metal and not just once but over and over. He had been kept up all night. He had been denied food and water and had been mocked and abused. It was then after a dreadful night on inhuman torture and abuse that he was crucified. That next morning His precious feet and hands were pierced with nails and when they were he lost more and more of his precious blood. He hung on

the cross in the morning heat of the Judean countryside and as he did he sweated and he bled and he began to suffer the devastating effects of dehydration.

You see he was thirsty. He was really thirsty...truly thirsty...terribly thirsty. There's no question about that. Still there is a question about whether he meant more than that when he said, "**I thirst.**" The reason that question comes up is because every other time the word "**thirst**" is used in John it is used a metaphorical or spiritual way.

You can that most clearly in the very familiar passage found in John 4. Turn there for a moment...John 4:7. It is the familiar story of the woman at the well

^{ESV} **John 4:7**...A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "**Give me a drink.**" ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "**How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?**" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "**If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.**" ¹¹ The woman said to him, "**Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?**" ¹² **Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.**" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "**Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,**" ¹⁴ **but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**" ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "**Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.**"

You can see that here in John 4. When Jesus uses the word "thirst" he means it to be understood as something more than just physical thirst. In fact, Jesus takes the woman's concern about physical thirst and the drudgery of drawing water and quickly turns it to make a greater point about spiritual thirst. And notice too how

our Lord focuses on the idea of the superiority of living water or a spring of water welling up in the soul of those to whom he gives eternal life. He compares the spiritual spring of water he offers to well water and says the spring, the spring that he gives, is far superior. And you can see, I think, that Jesus is making the point that this spring of water...this spring of water that wells up into eternal life...is connected to him...is sourced in him and is in fact entirely dependent upon him. He is the fountain out of which salvation flows.

And if that is not clear in John 4 it is certainly clear in John 6 the next place the word **"thirst"** is used in John. Look at it with me starting in verse 30.

^{ESV} **John 6:30...So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."**

In this section, Jesus contrasts the bread that he gives with the manna or bread Moses provided in the wilderness. Of course in reality the bread Moses supplied was supplied by God but people had come to speak of it as being provided by Moses. So the Lord Jesus contrasts the manna given in the wilderness wanderings to his own body given on behalf of sinners and what he says is something like this, **"Moses gave you bread that sustained you ancestors for a day. But the bread that I give you will sustain you for an eternity. I am the bread of life. If you believe in me I will quench your spiritual hunger and satisfy your spiritual thirst."**

Now obviously, Jesus is using the idea of hunger and thirst here in John six figuratively.

Now the word thirst occurs one more time in John before the scene in John 19 where Jesus utters it from the cross. It occurs in John 7:37.

^{ESV} **John 7:37**...On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ **Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'**" ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The feast that is talked about here is the Feast of the Tabernacles...sometimes called the Feast of Booths. Now the Feast of Tabernacles was the feast of the year. It was a joyous celebration of the creation of the nation of Israel. It was a public remembrance of God's deliverance of the nation from Egypt. And the Feast of Tabernacles had a wonderful ceremony that involved water. Each day of the feasts one of the temple priests would lead a procession of thousands out of the temple down through crowded streets to the steps of the Pool of Siloam.

The Pool of Siloam had been built by King Hezekiah hundreds of years earlier. Essentially, it was a large pool that connected the city with a spring on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The spring was channeled under the wall to the Pool of Siloam through a tunnel carved out of solid rock. The Pool was inside the wall of the city and the idea was that having the pool connected to a spring outside the city would mean that they would never have to worry about being cut off from a fresh supply of water during a siege.

Anyway, the priest led the multitude down to the Pool of Siloam where he dipped a golden pitcher into the pool and withdrew two or three pints of water. He would then lead the procession back to the temple and he and the crowd would march around the altar once and then he would climb the steps of the altar and pour the water into a silver funnel that ran out at the base of the altar. At the same time another priest would pour a pitcher of wine into another funnel on top of the altar that also ran out at the base of the altar.

When they finished the people would sing Psalms 113-118 responsively. The priest would sing out the first line of each of the six psalms and the people would repeat it. After every other line they would shout out as a group "**Hallelujah.**" They repeated this for seven days. On the last day of the feast, the great day of the feast, they did one thing different. They marched around the altar seven times before the priest went up the steps of the altar to pour out his golden pitcher. The crowd seeing the burnt offering and the water exuding from the base of the altar waved their *palm fronds* and answered back responsively as the priests led them through the Great Hallel.

It was right then during that pause that most scholars think it happened. Right then as the joyous crowd looked toward the altar, right then there rose up behind them a strong and noble voice like the sound of many waters, like the roar of young lion saying,

^{ESV} **John 7:37**...On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "**If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'**"

And you see brothers and sisters, He would have been saying in that, **“Now in Me is all this that you love so dearly is fulfilled. It is true that a rock followed your fathers around in the desert. I am that rock. Come to Me and I will give you water that lasts.”**

Alfred Edersheim, the great Jewish Christian and commentator writes this:

It was then, immediately after the symbolic rite of water-pouring, immediately after the people had responded by repeating the lines from Psalm 118, immediately after they had given thanks, and prayed that Jehovah would send salvation and prosperity, that the Voice of Jesus rose behind them, so loud as to be heard throughout the whole Temple. **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”¹**

Of course, they knew that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit. The whole ceremony was geared to illustrate the glorious coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now here is the great irony of John 19:28.

All the other times Jesus speaks about thirst in John’s gospel he says, **“Come to me and I will quench your thirst. Come to me and I will give you living water. Come to me and I will give you the Holy Spirit so that out of your inner most being living water will flow and you will never thirst again.”** But here in John 19:28 Jesus says, **“I thirst.”**

Now the question is how is that possible and what did he mean? How is it that the fountain of life can be thirsty? How is it that the one that has promised ever

to allay our thirst needs someone to give him a drink? Does he mean something more than just literal thirst?

To answer those questions again at John 19:28.

^{ESV} **John 19:28**...After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "**I thirst.**" ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "**It is finished,**" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

One thing that seems transparently clear is that one of the reasons Jesus said the words "I thirst" was to fulfill Scripture. Now he may have had in mind Psalm 22.

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:14**...I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

But it is more likely that had in mind Psalm 69 the passage I read earlier. If that is the passage he had in mind, it is most likely that he was thinking of verse twenty-one.

^{ESV} **Psalm 69:21**...They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

You see Jesus' life was infused with Scripture. That tells us, I think, that even as he hung on the cross in waning moments of his life, he was concerned to accomplish all the work that God has given him. And realizing that he was only moments from death, our Lord Jesus wanted to complete all that Scripture said he would complete. Earlier he had refused wine laced with myrrh because he

had wanted to stay fully conscious and alert. But know he was willing to accept sour wine to fulfill the word of God. Now I don't want you to think that Jesus was ticking things off a list. He was rather consumed to complete the work the Father had given him and by that I mean he intended to complete every single detail.

Secondly, I think there is a sense in which Jesus was signifying by the phrase "**I thirst**" that he had indeed actually accomplished all that he had intended to do. Like a man at the end of a long hard day, Jesus was signifying that he had accomplished the great work of redemption. He had been emptied by his work...wrung out like a washrag...and because he had he was thirsty.

J. Vernon McGee used to say, "**You want to see the great power and strength of God don't look to creation. As vast and wonderful as it is, don't look there. Creation was finger work for God...mere doodling. It is in the salvation of sinners that the bare arm of the Lord is revealed.**"

I think Dr. McGee was right. I think Jesus had come to the end of his great redemptive work and wanted to express that.

Thirdly, I think the Holy Spirit wanted us to see that Jesus was indeed the great Passover lamb. The use of the word hyssop to lift up the sponge filled with sour wine would have reminded any first century reader of the hyssop used to daub blood on the lintels of Jewish doorways during the Passover.

Fourthly, I think Jesus was saying that he wanted the fellowship he had with the Father to be restored. Remember that his fellowship with the Father had been

broken as he took our place as a substitute for sin. Jesus longed for restoration with the Father like a man dying in the desert longs for a cool drink of water. When he said, "I thirst" he not only meant that he thirsted physically but that he thirsted spiritually for restoration of fellowship with the Father as well.

Now brothers and sisters because all of those things are true, we need never thirst again. Christ has supplied all that God has required. It is a truth of which we ever need to remind ourselves.

Two centuries ago there was an English clergyman named Robert Robinson. In addition to his gifts as a pastor and preacher, he was an accomplished poet and hymn writer. After many years in the ministry he began to drift in his spiritual life. He left the ministry and traveled to France where he sank further into sin and lost his assurance. One night he was riding in a carriage with a Parisian socialite who had recently become a believer. She was reading some poetry to him to help pass the time and asked, "**And what do you think of this one?**"

Come thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace.
Streams of mercy never failing
Call for hymns of loudest praise.

When she looked over at him she noticed that he was crying. "**What do I think of it?**" she asked. He paused for a moment and then in a broken voice he answered, "**I...I wrote it; but now I've drifted away from Him and can't find my way back.**"

"Ah" said the woman quietly, "but don't you see? The way back is written right here in the third line of your poem: 'Streams of mercy never ceasing.' Those streams are flowing still, even here, even tonight."

In suffering the awful thirst of the cross on our behalf, Jesus opened a fountain of life, a spring of salvation that will never run dry.

Let's pray.

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Chapter 7. In The Last, The Great Day Of The Feast') Modified by me.