

## ***I Thirst • John 19:28***

What is the best test of your character? When does the real ‘you’ and the stuff of which you’re made best show through? When you’re on a roll? When you have it made? When everything’s going great and it’s slick as can be? Or when adversity strikes? When ill health comes? When financial reverses are all around you? And when life really gets tough? Which is the real person? What is the character of which we are made?

It seems to me that we learn a great deal about character in times of adversity. Perhaps far more about our character in adversity than ever we could figure out about ourselves or see about the character of another person in times of prosperity. And it seems to me that we learn a great deal about the character of Jesus in adversity when he speaks now for the fifth time from his cross. The words are recorded in John 19:28-30.

*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. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

I find here three profound revelations about Jesus Christ all tied together in the simple statement, “I am thirsty.” The first profound revelation about Jesus’ character is simply that he kept his own problems until last. Understand that Jesus was near death, and he knew that he was near death. Verse 28 says, “[Jesus], knowing that all was now completed....” So we’re talking about the last moments before he died, and he knew he was about to die.

Although he had been on the cross for a period of six hours, it seems that several of Jesus’ final statements were clustered together in the last few minutes before he died. Those last few minutes marked the end of an ordeal that had begun almost twenty-four hours before. He’d gone through the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane on that Thursday night. It continued through a series of trials on Thursday night and into Friday. He had been severely beaten; he had been crucified at nine o’clock on Friday morning. And now, at the time that we read this

***The first profound revelation about Jesus’ character is simply that he kept his own problems until last.***

from John 19, it’s three o’clock in the afternoon. So for six hours he has hung on the cross and for six hours he has suffered for our sins.

During that time he has prayed for the forgiveness of those who have crucified him. During that time he has offered paradise to the malefactor on the cross to the side. During that time he has made arrangements for the care of his mother. And during that time, most significantly of all, the Bible says that he was made sin for us.

All of this has transpired. And now it’s time to die. But it’s only after all of these other things are taken care of that Jesus now, for the first time, says anything about his own need. About his own problems. About his own wants. And I find some lessons in that.

I find, again, the reminder that Jesus lived and Jesus died for other people. He continually put others first. He was far more concerned about our needs than he was concerned about his own needs. And he subordinated his own needs and his own problems for us and for others.

When I am tempted to think that my needs are too insignificant to warrant the attention of a busy God, I must remember that Jesus’ character is such that he gives priority to my problems even above his own.

But I also find another lesson in it. It’s a lesson that’s a very practical one for me and perhaps for you also. The lesson is that concern for others helps us to handle our problems.

To be sure, we do not dare to minimize the greatness of Jesus’ suffering and thirst. But I can’t help but think that Jesus, as a man, somehow shifted the focus of attention away from his own thirst to the needs of other people. And that shift enabled him to cope with the physical pain that he then suffered.

He was so preoccupied with serving God and with securing our salvation. He was so involved with praying for his enemies. He was so committed to seeing that his mother Mary’s needs were met. He was, caring so much about our salvation that his own awful thirst did not capture his own central attention.

Now, I’m not suggesting that we ought to forget about our own needs. But I am suggesting that the

best therapy for our own problems is often found when we seek to meet the needs of others instead of putting our own needs at center stage.

Sometimes I find that I can get terribly 'down.' I look at the list of all the things that must be done and it seems that there isn't paper enough to write the list. And then I look at my own inadequacies and I think, "I have all of this stuff that I'm suppose to do for myself and for everybody else. How am I supposed to do that?" And I become overwhelmed with my own inadequacy as a Christian, as a husband, as a father, as a pastor, as a citizen. I look at the list and sometimes my response is that I wish I could run away. I wish there were some way to just go and hide and escape. And that becomes depression in the making.

But then God gives to me an opportunity to pour my life into someone else. And I find, sometimes not by my choice but because it's pressed upon me, that I become wrapped up in other people's problems. And I begin to pray for the needs that other people have. I look at their families, I look at their ill health, I look at their financial reverses, I look at their unemployment, and I look at the emotional agony through which they are going and I offer what little resources I have, and I seek to help them. I pray for them. I try to write a note of encouragement or I try to give a little bit of counsel. I try to come alongside and put an arm around someone or give a telephone call or do whatever little bit I can to help them. I put them first. And I discover that, when I give myself to the needs of others, that which at first had monopolized my thinking is now pushed off to the side. And I'm giving myself to others. Then, in that process, I am best able to cope and handle the things that I myself am up against.

And that is exactly what Jesus did. He kept his own problems until last. He first was concerned about the people who were his enemies. He next was concerned about the malefactor on the next cross. He was concerned about Mary and who was going to take care of her. And as he met all of those other needs, the dry parching thirst that was his own concern was not forgotten but at least was pushed off to the side. In the meeting of the needs of others was the meeting of his need. Just as for us, in the meeting of the need of others, we often find the best therapy for the problems that we ourselves face. What a profound revelation! That Jesus kept his own problems until last.

Another profound revelation is that Jesus showed his human weakness. There was a great reality to

Jesus' thirst. But what is stunning about that is the truth that he was God. For all of eternity past, at least prior to the incarnation at Christmastime, he was only God. And God does not thirst.

Have you thought about that? In Revelation 7:16 we are told that there is no thirst in heaven. So for ever and ever and ever in past time Jesus had never experienced thirst because he was God and because he was in heaven. But of course he was no longer just God; now he was also man. And he was no longer in heaven; now he was on earth. And so he says it: "I am thirsty."

Understand that there are two types of thirst. One is the dry throat kind of thirst. And the other is what is called the internal environment type of thirst. Now the first is the kind that we're all familiar with. Maybe I can just mention it and talk you into it. You want to swallow nice and hard. You can almost notice how dry the sides of your throat are, and your lips are a little bit chapped, aren't they? When you lick them, your tongue feels kind of parched, too. You know what that dry throat kind of thirst is because we all experience it sometimes. It can be terribly uncomfortable.

Really, though, it's a rather superficial type of thirst, at least in comparison to that internal environment type of thirst. That comes when the internal organs are short of water. When the cells are damaged, even to the point where the cells begin to die. When there is an increased salt concentration in the blood and when life itself is in jeopardy. Those that study these things say that when that internal environment becomes short of water, one of the things the body does is to signal the throat and the mouth and create that sense of thirst. We can have it assuaged for a moment by taking a little drink of water, but it will come back again because that internal environment has not had adequate liquid.

In all probability the thirst which Jesus described was both. It was both the dry throat kind of thirst and the internal environment kind of thirst. Just think. Let's track back what he's been through in the previous twenty-four hours. We have no record in the Bible at least that he had anything to drink after the Last Supper which was the previous day. We know that he went to the Garden of Gethsemane and went through an agony and a depression that almost cost him his life before he made it to the cross. We know that there was a blood loss even in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Then we know that he went through a grueling series of three trials the previous night and the next

morning so he was without sleep. And we know that there were those who wanted to substitute flogging for crucifixion. In fact, there are those who would say that the thirty-nine lashes of the whip were supposed to be physically the equivalent to crucifixion because it was so terrible that in some cases people actually bled to death. And we know that Jesus was flogged in that way; he was whipped.

There was sufficient loss of blood and he was sufficiently hurt that when the crossbar of the cross upon which he was to be crucified was laid on his shoulder on the Via de la Rosa out to Calvary's hill he collapsed and fainted under it. We know that he was crucified at nine o'clock in the morning and that these words are spoken about three o'clock in the afternoon. During that time there must have, again, been significant loss of blood. And we also know that in the Middle East, which is a terribly dry climate, it would be terribly difficult to be hanging on a cross and be exposed to the sun and to the dryness.

Put all of that together and you have the makings of severe thirst, even to the point of death. It's the kind of thirst that prophetically was mentioned within the Bible. Take a look with me at Psalm 22:14-18 because it is an advanced glimpse of that which Jesus here experienced. Psalm 22 prophetically says what Jesus felt there on the cross.

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.*

*My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.*

*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*

*Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*

*I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.*

*They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

Have you ever been thirsty? Really, really thirsty? I don't know that I have experienced that kind of thirst. I've read the stories of men and women dying of thirst in the desert who describe that they would give all the gold they had if they could simply have a cup of cool water. Who have offered their kingdoms for something to drink. And it seems to

me that dying by thirst must be absolutely awful. And yet that's the kind of thirst that Jesus Christ not only experienced but here spoke of. Real thirst.

However, what is most surprising, at least to me, is not the reality of Jesus' thirst so much as the revelation of Jesus' thirst. His very speaking of these words indicates that he was not afraid to let his weakness be known. Now think about it. We've already discovered in John 19:28 that Jesus knew he was about to die. When death is just a matter of moments away, don't you suppose you can hold back those few moments longer rather than expose yourself to any further humiliation?

Jesus could have kept quiet. He could have kept his thirst a secret because he knew that death was soon to come. Remember that the circle of enemies that stood around the cross had repeatedly mocked him for his impotence. They had repeatedly laughed at him because of his inability to come down from the cross. They even had a theological twist to what they had said in his failure to save himself much less save others. It would seem that maybe Jesus would have been

tempted to say, "I'll skip telling them that I'm thirsty. They already know that I'm dying. They're already laughing at me. They're already saying I can't perform a miracle. They're already saying that I'm not whom I claim to be. Why let them know that I'm out of control to the point that I just have to gasp out the words, 'I am thirsty'?"

Why let people know when you've got problems? Why let people know about your weakness? Why let people know that you struggle with a problem? Perhaps it's a problem in your marriage, or a problem with alcohol, or a problem with being overweight, or a problem with lust, or a problem with stealing money, or a problem with self-image, or a problem of attitude against other people, or a problem of corruption at work, or any one of a number of problems that are part of who we are. Why not just keep it a secret? Why not take that secret to the grave with the hope that people will never find out that we indeed are weak?

Jesus was unwilling to keep secret his weakness. He wanted all to know the full truth of Hebrews 2:17, that he was made like us in every respect. We can learn a great deal from Jesus Christ. We can learn that we need not hide our human weaknesses. We

***Jesus was unwilling to keep secret his weakness. He wanted all to know the full truth of Hebrews 2:17, that he was made like us in every respect***

don't have to pretend that life doesn't hurt. We don't have to always fight back the tears, and we don't have to always carry some simple little smile upon our faces as if life is all okay when in fact it isn't. Like Jesus we can admit that there is a reality to our sufferings. That life does hurt. Like Jesus it's okay to admit that we, too, are weak.

There's a third profound revelation in those simple words "I am thirsty." It is the profound revelation that Jesus accepted help. Human help. According to the story, one of the soldiers immediately responded to Jesus' statement, "I am thirsty." He reached for a bowl of posca. It was a cheap, diluted vinegar-type wine. Apparently it was often kept near the cross. It was the common cheap-o beverage of the Roman legionnaires in those days. If we correctly understand the story and the narrative and the little pieces that are left out, we can imagine that the bowl sat near the foot of the cross. Perhaps it was there to be drunk by the soldiers themselves. Or maybe it was there ready and available in case someone dying of crucifixion needed to have something to drink.

One of the soldiers had thrown a sponge into the bowl, and it had soaked up all that posca. It was weighty, the way a sponge gets when it's full of liquid. And other soldier went over with a short little hyssop reed that ought to trigger something for the Jews because that was part of the Passover festivities and celebration. He stuck that short little reed, perhaps only twelve to twenty-four inches long, into the sponge, and walked over and put it up to Jesus' face. They couldn't use a cup because when someone was being crucified their body would move so much it would be very hard to fit a cup up to a person's lips. And besides that, it would be almost impossible to get the right angle for someone being crucified to drink out of a cup. The likelihood of the person being able to get the liquid down without choking would be remote, too. It would be too difficult to give someone a drink in a normal fashion. And so the sponge full of the posca and held by a reed was pressed up against Jesus' mouth.

Isn't it too bad that we don't have here recorded the names of the people that did that? The pronoun is plural, so I assume there were at least two. I'd like to know. I'd like to know who those soldiers were who gave Jesus a drink. I wondered about them. I've wondered if they ever themselves became followers of Jesus Christ. I wonder if they ever became part of the church in Jerusalem or at Antioch or maybe even at Rome. Whoever they were, they were men who gave human help to meet Jesus' need, and they were

special, indeed.

Let me ask you a question. Suppose that you had been there at the cross that day and you had heard Jesus speak the words "I am thirsty". Maybe you could see he was thirsty, anyway. Would you have given him something to drink? You may think that's a silly question. We all ought to automatically say, "Of course I would." But don't be too quick about it. Would you, in fact, have given Jesus something to drink when he said, "I am thirsty"?

If your answer is 'yes', I want you to look at a passage in the Bible with me. If your answer is 'no', I want you to not look at it, frankly. It's Matthew 25:31-46. Here are words of Jesus that specifically have to do with giving him something to drink:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go visit you?'*

*"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

*"Then he will say to those at his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'*

*"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or need-*

*ing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’*

*“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’*

*“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

The point is very simple. Jesus counts our treatment of the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, and those needing clothes as treatment of Jesus himself. And our automatic response to that kind of a statement is, “Hey, wait a minute, when did I see anyone who was poor or thirsty or hungry or needing clothes or in prison?” And that is exactly what it said in Matthew 25. That will be the response of people who did not see Jesus Christ in the poor and did not see Jesus Christ in the midst of those who have needs.

Where are they, and how do we respond to them? Do you know that there are millions of people who are dying of hunger and thirst on the continent of Africa alone? Do you know that the pastors of churches that we would consider to be churches of like faith and practice, people who are born-again Christians, committed to the Bible and to Jesus Christ who will bury one half of their congregations because of hunger and thirst?

There are one and a half million abortions on demand in the United States every year. But do you know that there are one hundred times as many already born people who are dying of hunger and thirst on the continent of Africa right now. Human help. Would you, if you were at the cross, have given Jesus something to drink? He says that to the extent that we give to those who are hungry and thirsty and in need of clothes and in prison we give it to him.

I find it amazing that there was not only human help at the cross, but divine humility. Jesus drank it. No pride displayed. He was truly a humble man.

Sometimes we find that difficult. We find that, when we are hurting, we are reluctant to take help from other people, particularly those who might be counted as our enemies. And yet Jesus was not so proud.

Help sometimes comes in the form of a cool drink, but more often it comes in the form of good advice from a counselor. Or it comes in the form of constructive criticism from a friend. Or it comes in the form of money or food or clothes when things

get tight.

Jesus Christ the Son of God was humble enough to accept help, even from his enemy. And so he sets for us a model. A model for us to admit to our weaknesses and to our sufferings and to our hurts. May we be like Jesus and not be so proud as to refuse the help that others can give to us.

Well, there he was in his final moments, knowing that soon he was to die. Suffering. Dying. Thirsting. The worst of adversity. And in that worst of adversity he displayed the best of his character.

My beloved friend, I would never counsel anyone to seek adversity. But don’t run away from it, either. And do not fear it. Because the same Christ who hung there on Calvary’s cross is the Christ who indwells every believer and who will again reveal his character through us, even in the midst of adversity.

Lord, we do find them to be profound revelations. That when Jesus spoke his words, “I am thirsty”, he revealed to us that he kept his own needs

until last and so set a model for us to be concerned about the needs of others. We discover, Lord, that when Jesus spoke those words and said, “I am thirsty”, that he was not afraid to show his human weak-

ness and that we ought to be willing to admit our weaknesses. That when Jesus said, “I am thirsty” and drank that posca of long ago that he was willing to accept human help. Lord, may we also be willing to accept help from others. And may we, also, as the words of the Bible exhort us, be ready and willing to give that help to others in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

***The point is very simple. Jesus counts our treatment of the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, and those needing clothes as treatment of Jesus himself.***

*Faith Matters* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
©Leith Anderson