

Eyewitness of Calvary

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the significance of Jesus' humanity and willingness to suffer for our sins, as demonstrated by his cry of 'I am thirsty' and the fulfillment of Scripture in his crucifixion.

Duration: 24:21

Scripture: John 19:28

Topics: "Cross of Christ", "Redemption", "Faith in Christ"

Description

Mariano Di Gangi emphasizes the profound significance of Jesus' final words on the cross, 'I am thirsty' and 'It is finished,' illustrating His humanity and the completion of His redemptive work. He explains that Jesus' thirst symbolizes the weight of humanity's sins, while His declaration of 'It is finished' signifies the fulfillment of His mission to redeem and reveal God to humanity. Di Gangi highlights the importance of Jesus' sacrifice, noting that no bones were broken, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies, and that from His side flowed blood and water, representing the sacraments of baptism and communion. The sermon calls believers to trust in Jesus as the sole source of salvation, urging them to stake their faith on His completed work. Ultimately, Di Gangi encourages the congregation to embrace the truth of the Gospel as eyewitnesses of Christ's sacrifice.

Transcript

Reading from Holy Scripture, the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to John, and beginning at verse 28. 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, and put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to the lips of Jesus.

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished. And with that, he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit. Jesus cries out, I am thirsty.

And this cry of Jesus reveals to us something of his frail and broken and needy humanity. We believe that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and that is why our worship of Jesus is not an act of idolatry, it is homage that he richly deserves. But he is God manifest in the flesh, and in his humanity he can not only experiences weariness, joy, sorrow, but hunger and thirst.

Vinegar is offered to him to drink, and he takes it. Earlier he had been offered wine mingled with myrrh, and he had refused it. Why? Because for him to take the wine mingled with myrrh would dull his senses,

and he wanted to go through the work of redemption with a clear mind, as well as a willing spirit.

So he denied that which would be stupefying, in order that he might experience the whole range of what it means to bear the sin of the world and be in a state of alienation from a holy God. But now he cries out with a burning thirst from parched lips, and he accepts the vinegar, that he might be moistened enough in order to cry out with a crowd of triumph and a victory that is soon to issue from his lips. He suffers from a burning thirst and cries out, I am thirsty.

And not fancifully did the early church fathers see in this the reality that Jesus, with his burning thirst, with a tongue that was parched, was suffering the penalty of the sins of the human tongue. The sins of lying, the sins of blasphemy, the sins of gluttony, the sins of drunkenness. For all these does Jesus atone by the burning thirst that parches his tongue.

And because he was willing to endure that, you and I can come to Jesus in answer to his call. Oh, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Do you thirst for the forgiveness of sins? Do you thirst for peace with God? Do you thirst for friendship that will fill the emptiness in your life? Then come to Jesus, slake your thirst, and be satisfied in him.

Jesus spoke these words to the woman of Samaria, and he continues to speak to them to us today. I give you the water of eternal life. Come and drink and live.

But there's another cry from the cross that is in the words of our text, and that is the one in which Jesus cries out, it is finished. What is finished? His suffering? His humiliation? Undoubtedly. He has been despised, rejected, betrayed, denied, scourged, mocked, crucified, and now all of that is at an end, and he cries out, it is finished.

But there's a deeper significance than that. He had come into the world with a mission to fulfill. He had come into the world to reveal God.

He had come into the world to redeem humanity, and now that work of revelation was complete. Now that work of atonement was done once and for all, and he cries out, it is finished. No more need to offer up upon the altar lambs and sheep in sacrifice for sin.

It is finished, and what you and I must do today is not to presume to add to the finished and perfect work of redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, but rather to rely on him and to trust in him as being all-sufficient, having made full and final atonement once and for all in the sacrifice of himself on the altar of the cross. I thirst. It is finished, and with this he bowed his head and gave up.

Reading again from the Gospel according to John, the 19th chapter, at verse 31, Now it was the day of preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews 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. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.

But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. And then continuing at verse 36, These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

Not one of his bones will be broken. And as another Scripture says, they will look on the one they have pierced. And those milling around the scene of Calvary want the bodies to be taken down rather than left to linger on, clinging to life by a slender thread, exposed to the elements, exposed to birds and beasts of prey, going on from Friday into the Sabbath and desecrating the Sabbath and defiling the land.

And so they go to Pilate and ask that death be hastened through a process that the soldiers often used. They would take a very heavy mallet and swing at those who hung upon the crosses in order to crush their bones and hasten their death. And so the Sabbath would not be defiled and the process of death would be speeded up.

So they come to one thief who hangs alongside of Jesus. He is groaning and moaning and they smash his bones and he dies. They go to that other thief who has repented for his sin and who has been promised by Jesus that as his last act he will indeed steal heaven by the grace of a lenient God.

And for him, the heavy hammer blows will only hasten his entrance into glory. When they come to him who hangs helplessly upon that center cross, they find that he is already dead. He has bowed his head, committed his spirit into the hands of a loving father and died.

And the soldier comes along with a spear and just to confirm the fact that this crucified one is indeed dead and does not need to have his bones smashed, he thrusts that spear through the Savior's side. And immediately there gush forth from that gaping wound blood and water. All this happened, says the author, so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled.

What Scriptures? Way back in the Old Testament and let us never forget that our Christian faith is rooted in the Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament. Without them we'd be terribly impoverished. In the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus at the twelfth chapter, it is said that the Passover lamb must be slain, must be eaten, but not one of its bones must be broken.

The body of Jesus is battered, the body of Jesus is bruised, the body of Jesus is wounded, the body of Jesus is pierced, and through it all, by the marvelous protecting providence of God, that Paschal lamb somehow does not have any bone that is broken. He fulfills the type that has been mentioned in Exodus 12, the Lamb of God who not only bears away the sin of the world, bruised, battered, and bleeding, and yet not a single one of his bones is broken, fulfilling the Scripture. In another Old Testament writing, in the twelfth chapter of the prophet Zechariah and at verse 10, it was written that the people would look on him whom they had pierced and would mourn because of him.

And now that Scripture is fulfilled. Five hundred and twenty years after it was uttered, that prophecy matures into history. And the careless, cruel thrust of the spear by a passing Roman soldier fulfills the ancient Hebrew prophecy about him who would be pierced and who would move and melt those who looked upon him in the moment of his death.

Blood and water flow from his pierced side. A hymn writer of the 6th century by the name of Venantius Fortunatus wrote words that have been translated to read like this. A Roman soldier drew a spear to mix his blood with water clear that blood retains its living power.

The water cleanses to this hour. And John Calvin, following the lead of the early Church Fathers, said that our two Christian sacraments flow from the wounded side of our Redeemer. Water that points to baptism.

Baptism that speaks of cleansing. Baptism that speaks of renewal. And blood.

Blood symbolized by the fruit of the vine in the chalice of the communion service. This blood is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for the remission of the sins of many. Water to cleanse the stain of sin.

Blood to atone for the guilt of our transgressions and our iniquities. And both symbolized by what comes from the Savior's side. And this, of course, has come to finest expression in the words of him who wrote, Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed be of sin the double cure. Save me from its guilt and power. Jesus, crucified for us and in his death with water and with blood, dramatizing the secret of your salvation and mine.

Reading again from the 19th chapter of the gospel according to John and at verse 35. The 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 also may believe.

The Apostle Peter wrote, we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the excellency, the power, the majesty, and the glory of Jesus Christ. For we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And the Apostle John here states, I am telling you the truth.

I know that that is the way it happened. With my own ears I heard his voice. With my own eyes I saw that victim hanging upon the tree.

I was there when they crucified my Lord. Jesus was later to say, you shall be witnesses unto me. And John is qualified to be a witness to Jesus because of his firsthand eyewitness experience of what happened then and happened there.

When all the others had forsaken him and fled, John was there comforting and strengthening Mary, the mother of the crucified. When others had fled, John was there and he heard Jesus cry out with a burning thirst. He had seen them give the vinegar on a stalk to the lips of Jesus.

He had heard that cry of achievement and accomplishment. In the atonement it is finished. He had seen the maker of heaven and earth, the Lord and giver of life, bow his head and die.

He was there. He was there when not one of his bones was broken despite the savage beating that Jesus took. He was there when that side was pierced and water and blood flowed from it.

He was there. And he says, I have seen it. I give testimony.

My testimony is true. I am honest. I am a person of integrity.

I have nothing to gain by taking my stand beneath the cross of Jesus. I risk everything to do that, but I must do it because that is the way it happened. I saw it for myself.

And why is he so insistent? Why is he so concerned that we should be convinced of his honesty and integrity as an eyewitness of Calvary? He states his reason. He makes no secret of his purpose. He testifies all this under solemn oath as in the very presence of him who shall come to judge the living and the dead.

He testifies this word of truth so that you also may believe. John's purpose is not merely to recount a story, not merely to move the hearts of men and women by a scene of unparalleled pathos. His purpose is that

you and I may come to believe what he has seen, what he has heard, what he himself believes.

It's not enough for you and me to know the facts of the crucifixion, nor is it sufficient for you and me to say, I believe that John was indeed telling the truth and bearing testimony that has integrity. We've got to go beyond knowing the facts that he relates, beyond admitting that what he says is true. We must be willing to stake our everlasting destiny upon the truth of what he has said by believing, by receiving the Jesus whom he offers us in his gospel, by renouncing any idea of our own self-righteousness and merit, and relying always and only on Jesus for our salvation.

That is the purpose of the Apostle, that you and I should be so persuaded of the truth of what happened then that we here and now may put our faith in Jesus and Jesus only as the full and perfect atonement for our sins. And those indeed who are persuaded by the testimony of the Apostle will be able to say, yes, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name, on Christ.

That solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. May we never glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to us and we to the world. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Amen.

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