



John 19:28-29  
CrossWords  
Thirst

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When I was in High School, my cousin, Kyle, and I got into Mountain Biking. Some of our riding, especially at first, was out on the Sammamish Plateau, when there were still trees there. His family moved there before even Klahanie was there, let alone everything else (maybe 1979 or so). A few times we went to Tiger Mountain. And the first time we rode there, we ran out of water while in the middle of our ride. We got really thirsty. So we filled our water bottles (this was long before camelbacks were invented!) with water from a little stream that we came across at one point. The water looked good, it tasted good, it was nice and cold. But later that evening, because it was water that hadn't been filtered and had parasites or other stuff in it that we couldn't see and wasn't healthy for us...I'll spare you the details...but let's just say that it took a toll on our bodies and we had bathroom issues later on. My recollection is that it was quite a bit worse for him than it was for me, which is ironic because it didn't occur to me that we shouldn't drink the water, but it did to Kyle – though he didn't tell me that until later.

We all have thirsts in life...and we all quench them with different things. Some of the things we thirst for are good, and some are not so good. Some of the things we quench those thirsts with might look good, but can have consequences that aren't so fantastic. Sometimes we might miss those consequences or suffer them lightly as I did when I drank that water...or other times we might suffer them more severely as Kyle did. **What is it that you long for, that you thirst for, in life, and what's quenching it?** Some people thirst for the natural high of risk and reward, so they quench it with extreme sports or gambling or something similar. Some people thirst for power and quench it through positions they obtain, or through their marriage or raising kids. Some people thirst for popularity, and quench it through wealth or materialism, believing that those things will attract people. I think all of these thirsts are really a search for abundant and joy-filled life, for peace, for community, and so forth. All of these ways we quench those thirsts, however, fall short of our expectations or have negative consequences – like drinking unfiltered mountain stream water. And these thirsts, and

quenching them on a certain level and to a certain degree, are not bad. I think that's part of what it means to be created in the image of God, and separates us from the rest of creation: we thirst to create music, engage in competition, push the limits of our body's capabilities, etc.

**But: Somewhere inside of us, we know that there's a deeper thirst that these things will never quench.** Most people come to that realization, that there's this deeper thirst for something beyond this world...something more permanent than this earth and the lives we live. That's why the search for life outside of our solar system, or the attempt to make other planets in our solar system habitable – like Mars – is such a quest for some people. Others seek to extend our lifespan, or even reverse the aging process or find a way around the aging process. For instance, just this week I read an article about scientific efforts that are being worked on to upload people's brains into computers that are connected to machines – robots, or almost anything you can think of – so that people can live on as a machine, in theory, forever.<sup>1</sup> We have that deeper thirst. Really, it's a thirst for immortality.

Now, for most of us here this morning, you kind of know where this is all heading. You know that at some point I'm going to tell you that Jesus quenches that deeper thirst. Only God can take care of this thirst that we have to live beyond our selves. That God makes abundant and joyful life in this world possible, gives peace that passes understanding, and so forth...and that we can experience eternal life with Him through faith in Jesus as well. And I believe that's true, as do probably most of us here this morning. It's hard to read the gospel accounts of Jesus and not come to that conclusion that that is what Jesus does. And yet for many of us, we still try and quench that deeper thirst with other stuff. In fact, for Christians, it's easy to confuse our thirst for Jesus and quench it with stuff that looks like Jesus, but really isn't. Or the thirst itself is not really for Jesus but instead we thirst for “holier versions” of the stuff the world offers.

Take a look at this video, which is a parody of home-buying reality television shows, and see if this doesn't humorously speak to this thirst trap we fall into sometimes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT70cA-7qMk>

It's a great illustration that helps us to think about this: **Are we quenching this deeper thirst with Jesus, who can actually quench it but who calls us to deny ourselves...or are we seeking to quench it with something else?** And what are we thirsting after: a sermon main point that fits into a tweet or a church lobby with lots of exit door options? I get it that there are personal preferences, and we resonate with certain church stylistic things more than others...but we would do well to be honest with ourselves about what we're really thirsting after, and how are we quenching this deeper thirst that only Jesus can fill – and not just in regards to church stuff, but in general.

So in this morning's two verses we see Jesus thirsting, though: **Ironically, he simply thirsts for something physical to drink.** John writes for us that as Jesus hung on the cross, He knew that all was completed. In other words, his work of suffering on the cross to take upon himself the sins of the world was at its completion. He had done everything there that he could do. And as he gets to the end, he says, "I'm thirsty." You know, after several hours of that kind of work, you'd probably be thirsty, too.

John writes that in saying these words, Jesus fulfilled words (or set the stage for them to be fulfilled by others) from Scripture. Psalm 69, written a thousand years earlier, says, **"I am weary from crying, my throat is parched....for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:3, 21).** While the Psalms are not written specifically as prophecy, there is an inherent prophetic voice about them in the way many of the Psalms are written. And with David writing many of the Psalms, including this one, there will always be a connection between them and Jesus because of the lineage between David and Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. So we see this Psalm being fulfilled right here.

Now, in response to Jesus' exclamation that he is thirsty, he is offered something to drink – some "wine vinegar." This was cheap wine. This wasn't good stuff. There's a bit of a mockery going on here. "Oh, you're thirsty? We could get you some water, but how about this cheap, sour wine that probably won't bring any relief to you?" And so we see that even at the end of Jesus' life, he is despised and rejected by many, rather than being embraced and cared for genuinely. This kind of rejection started when there wasn't a proper

place for his birth, and now at the end the Son of God can't get a proper drink of water, either.

And in this statement of Jesus' we see that **Jesus understood human need.** He knew what it means to be thirsty. If last week was a spiritual need, a spiritual thirst, as the sins of the world came upon him and he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"...If that was spiritual need and thirst, then today we see an expression of his physical need and thirst.

Jesus' thirst and what he was offered to quench it is unbelievably ironic, especially in light of the fact that Jesus is the one who quenches our deeper thirst for abundant and eternal life. In fact, a couple years or so before, he once told a woman who he bumped into at a well outside of her town, **"Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life"** (John 4:14). Jesus quenches our deepest spiritual thirst, but here he is, physically thirsty, and he can't even get a proper drink of water.

Now John, the writer, often times manages to work in details of significance. For instance, he let's us know exactly what kind of branch was used, a hyssop branch, which was a common bush in the area.

Here's what is significant about this: in Exodus 12:22 it is hyssop branches that the Jewish people used to put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes so that the Spirit of the Lord would pass over them, thus protecting them from the judgment of God, and setting the stage for their Exodus from Egypt. It is that event that the Passover meal celebrated...it is that meal that Jesus gave new meaning to in the Last Supper with his disciples just a few hours before he was crucified, and it is that meal that we now celebrate as Communion (which we'll do today). So the hyssop branch was used then and is used here to offer this drink to Jesus. With this detail, John is connecting the dots for us that: **Just as the Jews put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts so that they would be saved, so Jesus Christ is the lamb of God whose blood is shed for us and is the door by which we enter to know the grace of God and our own salvation as well.** This is referenced in Psalm 51 King David's great Psalm of confession and

repentance and asking God to forgive him when he writes, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean.” So this hyssop branch is a sign of God’s forgiveness and the cleansing work that he does, and here as it is pointing up toward Jesus with the wine vinegar on it, it also points us to Jesus, the one who cleanses us...who quenches our deepest thirst.

This brings us back to our original question that started things off: **What do you thirst for and to what are you turning to quench that thirst?** Just as Jesus said, “I’m thirsty,” so do we. And oftentimes we seek to quench our deep thirst in the wrong places. We thirst as Jesus did, and we’re drinking wine vinegar with Jesus – which isn’t really all that thirst-quenching. Or we quench our thirst with stuff that tastes good, like stream water, but has negative consequences later on. Jesus Christ wants to, and is able to, quench your deeper thirst for abundant and joyful life, for peace, and for community, so that you will never be thirsty again. And yet we continue to seek to quench our deeper thirst in so many different ways that are poor substitutes for the real thing.

The place to come is to Jesus Christ. To stand at the foot of the cross and gaze upon him as he thirsts after doing the hard work of taking our sins upon him. To gather with other Christians in community centered around Jesus – even if that community isn’t perfect and the pastor doesn’t wear ripped jeans and he tucks his shirt in, and the lobby doesn’t have side exit doors, and so forth. It’s at the foot of the cross, in relationship with Jesus Christ, where we have our deepest thirsts quenched. There’s significance, meaning, peace, abundant and eternal life that Jesus offers that can never be taken from you, and satisfies unlike anything else we seek to quench our thirst with. Your and my real thirst is for Jesus Christ.

And as a side note, it’s worth asking ourselves about what we’re then bringing to Jesus and offering him for his cause: **Do we thirst to bring something to Jesus that’s of value and significance?** We’ve received much from him...Jesus has done a lot for us...done what we could never do: now do we give back something like wine vinegar that’s cheap and of little worth, that maybe looks authentic and helpful, but isn’t really...or do we bring him something of value, something that’s genuinely helpful to the cause of

Christ?

Jesus gave his best, he gave his all...and he thirsted on the cross. He left it all on the playing field as he gave it everything he had to give. How about us? Are we thirsting for Jesus Christ? Are we thirsting to give him our best? Jesus Christ speaks to you and to me from that cross two thousand years ago, and he says, "I thirst." So do we...and he understands that. **May we quench our deepest thirst at the living waters of Jesus Christ.** May we look to him, and him only, for abundant and joy-filled life, for peace, for this deeper desire for immortality and eternity. Because if we're quenching our thirst with anything else, or if we're thirsting for the wrong stuff – even stuff that's closely connected to Jesus like the church – it's going to be like quenching our deeper thirst with wine vinegar...or water from a stream. And that is not a substitute for the living water that Jesus offers. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/mar/25/animal-life-is-over-machine-life-has-begun-road-to-immortality>