

# John 19:28-29 "The Thirsty Savior"

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 30 March 2025

Preacher: Will Spink

[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Hallelujah! What a Savior!! What a wonderful thing to contemplate as we consider the cross of Jesus particular.

As we sang last week, we're going to stay near the cross in our sermons for a few weeks. Marvel at our great Savior. Consider what His love and sacrifice means for us.

Some of you were concerned that we were going to reach the resurrection in the Gospel of John before Easter. You expressed that the pace we were going at wasn't tracking right.

And I just want to listen. I got you! Okay? Pastor Will can talk for a very long time about a very few number of verses.

[ 1 : 06 ] You know that about me. We've got this under control. We'll hit John 20 on Easter. Lord willing, just, you know, hang in there. We're slowing down a little bit. But not just for the schedule.

Really, we're slowing down at the cross to see the heart of God for us on display in our crucified Savior. There's so much here in this most significant event in all of history.

We said last week that the cross draws all of our little stories and tiny moments into His big story. And even more wonderfully, perhaps, God does that, not as some distant, divine puppet master who stays far away from us, but rather, God does that by taking on flesh, entering into our world, becoming one of us, living with us, suffering like us, even dying.

So John has set the scene for us. Jesus hanging on the center cross, the sign above Him reading, King of the Jews. The soldiers nearby dividing up His clothes.

John and Mary beneath the cross, attracting the attention and the affection of Jesus. And then we know from the other Gospel accounts there are three hours of darkness.

[ 2 : 46 ] Here in the middle of the day, as Jesus hangs on the cross, and we continue reading at verse 28 of John 19.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the Scripture, I thirst.

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.

This is God's Word. This is God's Word. Let's pray and ask for His help. Father, we can see Jesus there on the cross in our minds.

We pray that you would give us clarity by your Spirit to see truly what's happening. To know Him.

[ 3 : 47 ] To be transformed by the reality of relationship with Him. Use your Word this morning to speak to my heart, to our hearts, and to change our lives today and for eternity.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You've probably heard before that to err is human.

I wonder if we might say as well that from one perspective, to thirst is human. I mean, from our earliest moments as newborn babies, we cry out for milk to live.

If you've ever gone on a long hike on a hot day and realized halfway through that you left your water bottle in the car and you had to keep hiking all the way back, you may know how your body feels when it starts to ache for a drink.

Your mouth is parched. You know that feeling, kids, when it gets sticky and you need something to wet your mouth? I've never run a race longer than 5K personally.

[ 5 : 04 ] Don't really want to. But I know the experience of being at the one-mile mark and thinking, I can't go any further. And then there's a paper cup of water.

And just that little bit, you get that taste. You think, I can go one more mile. Now, I imagine that at mile 13 or mile 24, it's only more intense.

But again, I can only imagine. So some of you can tell me how that feels. But saying to thirst is human could also be true in a figurative sense.

It's not just a physical thing when we say that. There's that longing for something even intangible in our souls, isn't there? You've heard of someone having a thirst for truth.

We thirst when we desperately ask, why am I here? We long to know our purpose, right?

[ 6 : 04 ] Thirsting for significance. I want a matter. For joy, for peace, for hope. We so deeply desire not only our physical thirst, but also this existential thirst to be satisfied.

To thirst, it seems, is at the essence of being human. So, when Jesus on the cross says, I thirst, something really profound is happening.

We are seeing the full humanity of Jesus on display, right? He feels thirst like us. Now, I'm not saying that Jesus is only human in this moment.

He remains certainly fully God, fully man, those two natures mysteriously in one person. But remember that Jesus throughout the Gospel of John, one of the main things he's been doing is he's been revealing to us God in the flesh.

The Word became flesh so that, for example, at the tomb of Lazarus, do you remember that? That was many months ago. Jesus showed us the heart of God as he wept.

[ 7 : 29 ] That God in the flesh, that God as man grieves with us in the face of death. Just like that here, Jesus shows us God who has truly and fully entered into our humanity as he thirsts on the cross.

And I think the text pushes us to understand this from two important perspectives. Both Jesus' physical thirst and his spiritual thirst.

The two kinds of thirst that we understand, don't we, as humans. Jesus' full humanity will make all the difference in both of them. Okay? So, those are the two things we're going to look at.

Let's consider the physical thirst. Jesus enters the struggle we experience. This is the most obvious meaning of Jesus' words, I thirst, right?

It's certainly what the soldiers understood. What'd they do when he said that? They went to get the sour wine in response. Something to drink. Any person undergoing the torturous process of dying on a cross would have experienced dehydration.

[ 8 : 45 ] Losing blood. Hanging and gasping for air. Aching all over. And so, the most basic thing Jesus acknowledges here is that he's human.

His body is experiencing what mine or yours would in the very same situation. And he says this to fulfill the scripture.

Not meaning, by the way, that Jesus is feigning thirst. Just to check a box. No. It's just highlighting that we can remember again God is in control, right?

It's been over and over through the story heading to the cross. Jesus is submitting to his Father's will. They are together following their eternal plan. There's something of cosmic significance happening and God is at the wheel.

What scripture then? Perhaps Psalm 69. They gave me poison for food and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

[ 9 : 50 ] Or perhaps Psalm 22 that Jesus keeps coming back to describe the cross. Remember, we've seen it multiple times. He talks about being poured out like water.

All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It's melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd. It's like a piece of clay pottery. It's just cracking.

And my tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. Clearly this is a physical reality, right? A thirst.

When your mouth is almost too dry to open. Your tongue swollen in the way of your getting air.

Jesus is entering into the struggle, the thirst of this world painfully and personally.

Lindsay just sang some words from Isaiah 53. Jesus came as a man of sorrows. To be familiar with grief.

[ 10 : 56 ] In fact, to bear our griefs. To carry our sorrows, the prophet adds. Jesus thirsted. He hurt.

He hungered. His skin cracked. His eyes watered. His back hurt. His head ached. He needed sleep. He was thirsty. Isn't that remarkable? Think of who this is. The one who created the universe.

And when he did so, separated the waters of the heavens from the waters on the earth. The one who spoke and the raging waters were still.

The one who walked on water. The one who turned water into wine. Longs for a drop of water.

[ 11 : 59 ] Jesus is really suffering. He's in agony. Physical. Real. Bodily. Torment. Now why is that so important for us to know?

Why spend so much time? You could have just said, fully God, fully man. Let's move on. That's easy to understand. Why is it important for us to know that?

Well, I think first because Jesus relates to us. Jesus understands our suffering. The things that make us want to give up.

The pain some of us bear every day. The despair we feel that tempts us to escape through substances or worse.

There may be nothing worse when you're in pain than feeling like no one understands. Have you felt that?

[ 13 : 04 ] The doctor looks at the scan and says, I don't see anything in there to cause your pain. The friend says, oh yeah man, I hate headaches.

If you just close your eyes for a few minutes, it'll get better. And you think you have clearly not had a headache like this one. But your savior, your God is not like that.

Hebrews says, he knows our weaknesses. He's felt those temptations in every way like us.

He's known the feeling of if I just do what I want rather than what God wants. If I just get down from this cross and he could have, I'll feel better.

Have you thought that? If I just do it my way rather than God's way, I'm going to feel better. Maybe I should. You can really run to him for help.

[ 14 : 11 ] He really sympathizes, not just in theory, but personally and experientially. He's got mercy and grace for your time of need.

Friend, don't keep suffering alone. Cry out to a God who understands, who is really with you. I love to think of this picture of Jesus' presence with us in our pain.

The story is told of a young boy whose father went overseas on a military assignment. And the young boy took a picture of his father and was right there beside him on his, next to him on his bed. And he would look at it all the time. Sometimes, when he felt afraid, he would look at the picture and imagine his dad protecting him. And it was comforting.

But when he was really hurting and overwhelmed, that wasn't enough. One particularly bad night, his mother heard him crying in pain and came to ask what was wrong.

[ 15 : 20 ] Through tears, he said, I want daddy to come out of the frame. Maybe you've experienced that with God because you just know lots of things about what the Bible says he would be like as your father.

Maybe you grew up in the church and you've heard a lot and you've thought it sounds nice. But the message of the cross and our thirsty Savior is that your heavenly daddy has come out of the frame. He is with you in your pain. In the last 24 hours alone, Jesus has sweated drops of blood. He's been betrayed. He's been abandoned by friends. Unjustly accused. Lied about. Beaten within an inch of his life. Mocked.

Publicly exposed and humiliated. Racked with pain and thirst. Washed. I want you to, I want you to contemplate that because some of you this morning are hurting in ways that I can only imagine.

[ 16 : 42 ] I don't know exactly what it's like. But Jesus knows. Jesus feels your pain. Jesus has come out of the frame for you.

To be with you. Finally, someone you can talk to who understands, who responds mercifully, who cares perfectly for you.

Cry to him. Hope in his love. Rest in his arms. There's a second thing that Jesus' thirsty humanity helps us with, I think.

Most of us at some point have wrestled with this idea of a good God and really evil suffering. A good God and bad stuff in the world. How does that work? We've wrestled with it either as we undergo awful suffering ourselves or as we look around us and watch others in this world go through unspeakable pain and grief.

[ 17 : 54 ] How is it possible that a good God allows such awful evil in his world? Or why, God? Why? Why is this happening to me?

Why is this happening to them? Why, God, it's a puzzle that we often don't get every piece of, isn't it? every piece of, isn't it? And what I'm about to say doesn't answer every question, especially specific whys every time. But the cross says the God of the Bible uniquely enters our suffering. He's not aloof. He's not removed. He's not just standing idly by, watching, helpless to stop evil.

No, no, no. God has come out of the frame and hurt. He himself has done that. Theologian John Stott wrestles with these tough questions in his classic book on the cross of Christ called *The Cross of Christ*. That's how you know it's a classic. This is what he writes.

I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the one Nietzsche ridiculed as God on the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? And Stott says he's looked at all sorts of other religions and other gods, but I have turned to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross. Nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me. He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering. I love that image. A question mark with a cross stamped over it. It is so true that I don't know all the answers and lots of question marks.

[ 20 : 34 ] But I trust the one who thirsts like me, the one who bleeds like me, the one who suffers like me. Friends, in case you're uncertain, there is no other God like this on offer anywhere. It's utterly unlike any other religion. None of the idols that we chase after, money, comfort, pleasure. None of them suffer with us. None of them enter in. No other God steps out of the frame and says, I'm coming into the suffering. If you're hurting today. If you hurt every day, some of you do.

If you've stopped feeling altogether and decided you just need to numb things out, because thinking of God at all hurt so much one time and you just needed to numb everything out.

Can I urge you to run to this Jesus? Today, tell him how you hurt. Ask for his help, for his grace, for his healing. Jesus relates to you.

In the wake of the horrors of World War I, Edward Shalita wrote a poem entitled, *Jesus of the Scars*. I want to share it with you. It's about the only God to trust in devastating pain.

If we have never sought, we seek thee now. Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars. We must have sight of thorn pricks on thy brow. We must have thee, O Jesus of the scars.

[ 22 : 39 ] The heavens frighten us. They are too calm. In all the universe, we have no place. Our wounds are hurting us. Where is the balm? Lord Jesus, by thy scars we claim thy grace.

If when the doors are shut, thou drawest near. Only reveal those hands, that side of thine. We know today what wounds are. Have no fear. Show us thy scars. We know the countersign.

I love this last stanza. Listen. The other gods were strong, but thou wast weak. They rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne.

But to our wounds, only God's wounds can speak. And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.

Jesus alone. A wounded Savior. A human Savior. A thirsty Savior. Thirsty.

But not just physically. I wrestled with this this week. Pastors and commentators seem to have lots of different opinions about what was going on when Jesus said, I thirst. I'm convinced that Jesus here also experiences that other kind of human thirst. Spiritual thirst. He means that too when He says, I thirst. There's several ways we see this, but biblically thirst is often a metaphor for our good longings for God, right? Our deep need for relationship with Him. As the deer pants for streams of water, so thirsts my soul for you, O God. You're the one I long for. Prophets talk about that existential thirst for purpose in life, fulfillment, being met only in God. And we've heard Jesus talking that way throughout John's gospel, haven't we? You just have to go back a couple years because it took us a long time to get here. But back in chapter 4, He tells the woman at the well that He gives water that you can't find in a well that will make you never thirst again. Some non-physical water and you'll never thirst again. He tells the crowds in chapter 6 that believing in Him leads to a life where you will never thirst again. No more thirsting. In fact, He tells the people in Jerusalem for the feast in John 7 that those who come to Him will leave with rivers of living water flowing out of them.

[ 25 : 36 ] Even more incredible, isn't it, for Him with living water now to say, I thirst. Now notice verse 28.

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished. We'll talk more about what was finished next week, verse 30.

But more than physical thirst, it had to include that Jesus has just endured the suffering that we deserve. A huge part of why He's come to the cross. He's just endured three hours of darkness. One of the descriptions of hell, right? Hell itself, outer darkness. Hell itself, which burns like fire with an unquenchable thirst. I'm thirsty. The wrath of God due to all our sin poured out upon our Savior.

You know, when we say in the Apostles' Creed, He descended into hell, at least the primary part of that was actually when He was physically on the cross. While He still lived a living hell, if you will, the Father turned His face away from the sin bearer for the first time. Jesus had never known sin. He'd never tasted this disruption in relationship. So Jesus thirsted. Oh, how He thirsted. He longed for that relationship with His Father to be restored. He sought peace and joy. His soul ached for rest.

You've been there? Wandering in your own sin, distant from God? Wounded by others' sin? Despairing of God?

[ 27 : 58 ] Jesus knows the feeling. He says, I thirst. And they bring Him some cheap wine the soldiers would drink on a sponge on a hyssop branch. Certainly plenty of hyssop around because it's Passover weekend.

One of the things that happens every year on Passover weekend, part of that ritual was taking the blood of a lamb and putting it on a hyssop branch to put it on the doorframe of the house. And now, they hold it up to the lips of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And again, in this spiritual respect that all of these things are pointing to, Jesus' full humanity is vital. It's really important that we see Jesus here fully God, but particularly as fully man. He endures unthinkable spiritual thirst, the soul torment due to sin, the wrath of God that must be poured out on human flesh for the sins of the human race.

Jesus had to be human to endure this suffering in our place. Not sure about that? Listen to Hebrews chapter 2. Talk about Jesus sharing in our flesh and blood. Therefore, He had to be made like His brothers in every respect. Why? So that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. The one to stand before God and offer a sacrifice, propitiation for sins, had to be a faithful priest. A true representative of humanity.

[ 30 : 14 ] One who really thirsted. It couldn't be pretend. It couldn't be theoretical. It couldn't be hypothetical. It couldn't be hypothetically. Jesus had to thirst. And He thirsted for us.

He not only relates to us in our thirst, but also redeems us from our thirst. Hallelujah. What a Savior. We need Jesus to redeem us from our thirst. Jesus not only knows our deep need, He not only meets us in our need, but He rescues us from our need on the cross, body and soul torn apart, wracked with pain and agony, thirsty in every way you can imagine, so that we won't thirst forever. In many ways, to thirst is human. It's the common human experience in a fallen world, right?

But Revelation chapter 7 tells us it will not be the experience of redeemed humanity. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat.

[ 31 : 49 ] For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. You see what's happening?

It's because we are constantly in His presence. Because we are in relationship with Him, the one who wipes away every tear, the one who satisfies every hunger and every thirst, in relationship with Himself, we will not thirst anymore. Ever. I was at a wedding recently after a long day. I was longing for something sweet. And I got to the reception, and you know what was there at the reception? There was wedding cake, and that's great, but sometimes the cake runs out. There was a chocolate fountain.

Kids, have you ever seen a chocolate fountain? Layer after layer running over, and then it pools at the bottom, and you can dip every... marshmallows and pineapple in your hands and all of it. That's what you do.

That's not what y'all do. That's what you do at a chocolate fountain. Every... all this chocolate. And then you know what happens? It keeps coming up, flowing over and over and over all night.

All the chocolate that I could ever want. There's another wedding that you're invited to. And at the wedding supper of the Lamb, it's not just a chocolate fountain. It's this wedding where you're united forever in relationship with Jesus. So it's not just chocolate. It's not just physical hunger and thirst, although I believe that will be part of it. But no longing of your body or your soul will go unsatisfied. None of them.

[ 33 : 50 ] There will be a peace fountain and a joy fountain and a hope fountain because Jesus is the fountain of life, and you're united to Him. So it just keeps flowing. All the peace, all the joy, all the relief from pain, all of your thirst quenched forever.

Forever. Friend, if you're thirsty today, this promise is for you.

According to God's word, if you will but wash your robes in the blood of the Lamb. What do you mean, will? If you will but find your life, your forgiveness, your hope, your righteousness in Jesus. You don't have to do it. You find your hope in the cross where Jesus thirsted in your place so you wouldn't have to forever. You say, Jesus, I need you to do that for me. I need the gift of the fountain of life. And Jesus gladly gives it. He has entered our struggle, experienced our sorrow, endured our suffering that we might drink forever from the fountain of life, the river of living water, and never thirst anymore. I want to close this morning praying with one of the prayers that I love from a little book called *The Valley of Vision*. It's called *Love Lusters at Calvary*. And I hope you can contemplate the wonderful love of Jesus for you as we pray. Father, what wondrous love is this. Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy, cast off that I might be brought in, trodden down as an enemy that I might be welcomed as a friend, surrendered to hell's worst that I might attain heaven's best, stripped that I might be clothed, wounded that I might be healed, a thirst that I might drink, tormented that I might be comforted, made a shame that I might inherit glory, entered darkness that I might have eternal light, my Savior wept that all tears might be wiped from my eyes, groaned that I might have endless song, endured all pain that I might have unfading health, bore a thorny crown that I might have a glory diadem, bowed his head that I might uplift mine, experienced reproach that I might receive welcome, closed his eyes in death, that I might gaze on unclouded brightness, expired that I might forever live.

Hallelujah. What a Savior. Might we drink of him afresh even now. Might we find water for our parched, thirsty souls. Jesus, thank you. Amen.

[ 37 : 27 ] For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host).