

# **The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross**

## **5. The Word of Suffering**



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*“Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst” John 19:28.*

*“I thirst.”* These words were spoken by the suffering Saviour a little before he bowed his head and gave up the spirit, They are recorded only by the evangelist John and, as we shall see, it is fitting they should have a place in his gospel for they not only evidence his humanity but bring out his divine glory too.

“I thirst.” What a text for a sermon! A short one it is true, yet how comprehensive, how expressive, and how tragic! The Maker of heaven and earth with parched lips! The Lord of glory in need of a drink! The Beloved of the Father crying “I thirst!” What a scene! What a word is this! Plainly, no uninspired pen drew such a picture.

Of old the Spirit of God moved David to say of the coming Messiah, “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my *thirst* they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psa. 69:21). How marvellously complete was the prophetic foreview! No essential item was missing from it. Every important detail of the great tragedy had been written down beforehand. The betrayal by a familiar friend (Psa. 41:9), the forsaking of the disciples through being offended at him (Psa. 31:11), the false accusation (Psa. 35:11), the silence before his judges (Isa. 53:7), the being proven guiltless (Isa. 53:9), the numbering of him with transgressors (Isa. 53:12), the being crucified (Psa. 22:16), the mockery of the spectators (Psa. 109:25), the taunt of non-deliverance (Psa. 22:7, 8), the gambling for his

garments (Psa. 22:18), the prayer for his enemies (Isa. 53:12), the being forsaken of God (Psa. 22:1), the thirsting (Psa. 69:2 1), the yielding of his spirit into the hands of the Father (Psa. 31:5), the bones not broken (Psa. 34:20), the burial in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9); all plainly foretold centuries before they came to pass. What a convincing evidence of the divine inspiration of the scriptures! How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word!

“I thirst.” The fact that this is recorded as one of the seven cross-utterances of our Lord intimates that it is a word of precious meaning, a word to be treasured up in our hearts, a word deserving of prolonged meditation. We have seen that each of the previous sayings of the suffering Saviour have much to teach us, surely this one can be no exception. What then are we to gather from it? What are the lessons which this fifth cross-word teaches us? May the Spirit of truth illumine our understanding as we endeavour to fix our attention upon it.

### ***“I thirst.”***

#### **1. Here we have an evidence of Christ's humanity.**

The Lord Jesus was very God of very God, but he was also very man of very man. This is something to be believed and not for proud reason to speculate upon. The person of our adorable Saviour is not a fit object for intellectual diagnosis; rather must we bow before him in worship. He himself warned us, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father” (Matthew 11:27). And again, the Spirit of God through the apostle Paul declares, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). While then there is much about the person of Christ which we cannot fathom with our own understanding, yet there is everything about him to admire and adore:

foremost are his deity and humanity, and the perfect union of these two in one person. The Lord Jesus was not a divine man, nor a humanized God; he was the God-man. Forever God, and now forever man.

When the Beloved of the Father became incarnate he did not cease to be God, nor did he lay aside any of his divine attributes, though he did strip himself of the *glory* which he had with the Father before the world was. But in the incarnation the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men. He ceased not to be all that he was previously, but he took to himself that which he had not before — perfect humanity.

The deity and the humanity of the Saviour were each contemplated in Messianic prediction. Prophecy represented the coming one sometimes as divine, sometimes as human. He was the Branch “of the Lord” (Isa. 4:2). He was the Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of the ages (Hebrews), the “Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6). The one who was to come forth out of Bethlehem and be ruler in Israel, was one whose goings forth had been from the days of eternity (Micah 5:2). It was none less than Jehovah himself who was to come suddenly to the temple (Mal. 3:1). Yet, on the other hand, he was the woman’s “seed” (Gen. 3:15); a prophet like unto Moses (Deut. 18:18); a lineal descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12, 13). He was Jehovah’s “servant” (Isa. 42:1). He was “the man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3). And it is in the New Testament we see these two different sets of prophecy harmonized.

The one born at Bethlehem was the divine Word. The Incarnation does not mean that God manifested himself as a man. The Word became flesh; he became what he was not before, though he never ceased to be all he was previously. He who was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be

equal with God “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6, 7). The babe of Bethlehem was Immanuel — God with us — he was more than a manifestation of God, *he was* God manifest in the flesh. He was both Son of God and Son of Man. Not two separate personalities, but one person possessing two natures — the divine and the human.

While here on earth the Lord Jesus gave full proof of his deity. He spake with divine wisdom, he acted in divine holiness, he exhibited divine power, and he displayed divine love. He read men’s minds, moved men’s hearts, and compelled men’s wills. When he was pleased to exert his power all nature was subject to his bidding. A word from him and disease fled, a storm was stilled, the devil left him, the dead were raised to life. So truly was he God manifest in the flesh, he could say, “he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.”

So, too, while he tabernacled among men, the Lord Jesus gave full proof of his humanity — sinless humanity. He entered this world as a babe and was “wrapped in swaddling clothes” (Luke 2:7). As a child, we are told, he “increased in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52). As a boy we find him “asking questions” (Luke 2:46). As a man he was “wearied” in body (John 4:6). He was “an hungered” (Matthew 4:2). He “slept” (Mark 4:38). He “marvelled” (Mark 6:6). He “wept” (John 11:35). He “prayed” (Mark 1:35). He “rejoiced” (Luke 10:21). He “groaned” (John 11:33). And here in our text he cried, “I thirst.” That evidenced his humanity. God does not thirst. The angels do not. We shall not in glory: “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore” (Revelation 7:16). But we thirst now because we are human and living in a world of sorrow. And Christ thirsted because he was man: “Wherefore in all things it

behooved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17).

***“I thirst.”***

**2. Here we see the intensity of Christ’s sufferings.**

Let us first consider this cry of the Saviour’s as an expression of his bodily suffering. To realize something of what lay behind these words of his we must recall and review what preceded them. After instituting the Supper in the upper room, followed by the lengthy paschal discourse to his apostles, the Redeemer adjourned to Gethsemane, and there for an hour he passed through the most excruciating agony. His soul was exceeding sorrowful. As he contemplated the awful cup he shed not beads of perspiration but great drops of blood.

His wrestling in the Garden was terminated by the appearing of the traitor accompanied by the band who had come to arrest him. He was brought before Caiaphas, and middle of the night though it was, he was examined and condemned. The Saviour was held until early morning, and after the weary hours of waiting were over, was brought before Pilate. Following a lengthy trial, orders were given for him to be scourged. Next he was led, perhaps right across the city, to Herod’s judgment-hall, and after a brief appearance before this Roman prelate, he was delivered into the hands of the brutal soldiers. Again he was mocked and scourged, and again he was led across the city, back to Pilate. Once more there was the weary delay, the formalities of a trial, if such a farce deserves the name, followed by the passing sentence of death.

Then, with bleeding back, carrying his cross under the heat of the now almost midday sun, he journeyed up the rugged heights of Golgotha. Reaching the appointed place of execution, his hands and feet were nailed to the tree. For three

hours he hung there with the pitiless rays of the sun beating down on his thorn-crowned head. This was followed by the three hours of darkness, now over.

That night and that day were hours into which an eternity was compressed. Yet during it all not a single word of murmuring passed his lips. There was no complaining, no begging for mercy. All his sufferings had been borne in majestic silence. Like a sheep dumb before her shearers, so he opened not his mouth. But now, at the end, his whole body wracked with pain, his mouth parched, he cries, "I thirst." It was not an appeal for pity, nor a request for the alleviation of his sufferings; it gave expression to the intensity of the agonies he was undergoing.

"I thirst." This was more than ordinary thirst. There was something deeper than physical sufferings behind it. A careful comparison of our text with Matthew 27:48 shows these words "I thirst" followed on immediately after the fourth of our Saviour's cross-utterances — "Eli, Eli, lama, sabachthani" — for while the soldier was pressing the sponge of vinegar to the sufferer's lips, some of the spectators cried out, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him." We all know the internal trials of the soul react upon the body, rending its nerves and affecting its strength — "A broken *spirit* drieth the bones" (Prov. 17:22); "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned *into the drought of summer*" (Psa. 32:3, 4). The body and the soul sympathize with each other. Let us remember that the Saviour had just emerged from the three hours of darkness, during which God's face had been turned away from him as he endured the fierceness of his out-poured wrath. This cry of bodily suffering tells us, then, of the *severity* of the spiritual conflict through which he had just passed! Speaking

anticipatively by the mouth of Jeremiah of this very hour, he said, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done upon me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: *he hath made me desolate and faint*” (Lam. 1:12, 13). His “thirst” was *the effect* of the agony of his soul in the fierce heat of God’s wrath. It told of the *drought* of the land where the living God is not. But more: it plainly expressed his yearning for communion with God again, from whom for three hours he had been separated. Was it not Christ himself who said by the spirit of prophecy, said it now, immediately he emerged from the darkness: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. *My soul thirsteth for God*, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” Do not the words which follow identify the speaker and reveal the time that longing and “panting” was expressed? “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?” (Psa. 42:1-3).

***“I thirst.”***

### **3. Here we see our Lord’s deep reverence for the scriptures.**

How constantly the Saviour’s mind turned toward the sacred oracles! He lived indeed by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. He was the “Blessed Man” that meditated in God’s law “day and night” (Psa. 1). The written word was that which formed his thoughts, filled his heart, and regulated his ways. The scriptures are the transcript of the Father’s will, and that was ever his delight. In the temptation that which was written was his defence. In his teaching the



statutes of the Lord were his authority. In his controversies with the scribes and Pharisees, his appeal was ever to the law and the testimony. And now, in his death-hour his mind dwelt upon the word of truth.

In order to get the primary force of this fifth cross-utterance of the Saviour we must note its setting: “Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, *that the scripture might be fulfilled*, saith, I thirst” (John 19:28). The reference is to Psalm 69 — another of the Messianic psalms which describes so graphically his passion. In it the spirit of prophecy had declared, “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (verse 21). This remained yet unaccomplished. The predictions of the previous verses had already received fulfilment. He had sunk in the “deep mire” (verse 2); he had been “hated without a cause” (verse 4); he had “borne reproach and shame” (verse 7); he had “become a stranger unto his brethren” (verse 8); he had become “a proverb” to his revilers, and “the song of the drunkards” (verses 11, 12); he had “cried unto God” in his distress (verses 17-20) — and now there remained nothing more than the offering him the drink of vinegar and gall, *and in order to fulfil this* he cried “I thirst.”

“*Jesus knowing that ALL things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*” How completely self-possessed the Saviour was! He had hung on that cross for six hours and had passed through unparalleled suffering, yet is his mind clear and his memory unimpaired. He had before him, with perfect distinctness, the whole truth of God. He reviewed the entire scope of Messianic prediction. He remembers there is one prophetic scripture unaccomplished. He overlooked nothing. What a proof is this that he was divinely superior to all circumstances!

Ere passing on we would briefly point an application to

ourselves. We have remarked how the Saviour bowed to the authority of scripture both in life and death; Christian reader, how is it with thee? Is the book divine the final court of appeal with you? Do you discover in it a revelation of God's mind and will concerning *you*? Is it a lamp unto your feet? That is, are you walking in its light? Are its commands binding on you?

Are you really *obeying* it? Can you say with David, "I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. I have stuck unto thy testimonies... I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Psa. 119:30, 31, 59, 60)? Are you, like the Saviour, anxious to fulfil *the scriptures*? O may writer and reader seek grace to pray from the heart, "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies... Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psa. 119:35, 36, 133).

***"I thirst."***

**4. Here we see the Saviour's submission to the Father's will.**

The Saviour thirsted, and he who thirsted thus, remember, possessed all power in heaven and earth. Had he chosen to exercise his omnipotency, he could have readily satisfied his need. He that of old had caused the water to flow from the smitten rock for the refreshment of Israel in the wilderness, had the same infinite resources at his disposal now. He who turned the water into wine at a word, could have spoken the word of power here, and met his own need. But he never once performed a miracle for his own benefit or comfort. When tempted by Satan to do this he refused. Why did he now decline to satisfy his pressing need? Why hang there on the

cross with parched lips? Because in the volume of the book which expressed God's will, it was written that he *should* thirst, and that thirsting he should be "given" vinegar to drink. And he came here to do God's will, and therefore did he submit.

In death, as in life, scripture was for the Lord Jesus the authoritative word of the living God. In the temptation he had refused to minister to his need apart from that word by which he lived, and so now he makes known his need, not that it might be ministered unto, but *that scripture might be fulfilled*. Mark he does not himself fulfil it, God can be trusted to take care of that; but he gives utterance to his distress so as to provide occasion for the fulfilment. As another has said, "The terrible thirst of crucifixion is upon him, but that is not enough to force those parched lips to speak; but it is written: In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink — this opens them" (F W Grant). Here then, as ever, he shows himself in active obedience to the will of God, which he came to accomplish. He simply says, "I thirst;" the vinegar is tendered, and the prophecy is fulfilled. What perfect absorption in his Father's will!

Again we pause to point an application to ourselves — a double one. First, the Lord Jesus delighted in the Father's will even when it involved the suffering of thirst. Are we so resigned to him? Have we sought grace to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done?" Can we exclaim, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight?" Have we *learned* in whatever state we are in "therewith to be *content*" (Phil. 4:11)?

But now mark a contrast. The Son of God was denied a draught of cold water to relieve his suffering — how different with us! God has given us a variety of refreshments to relieve us, yet how often are we unthankful! We have better things than a cup of water to delight us when thirsty, yet often we are

not grateful. O if this cry of Christ's were but believingly considered, it would make us bless God for what we now almost despise, and beget contentment in us for the most common mercies. The Lord of glory cried "I thirst" and had nothing in his extremity to comfort him, and dost thou, who hast a thousand times forfeited all right to temporal as well as spiritual mercies, slight the common bounties of providence! What! grumble at a cup of water, who deservest but a cup of wrath. O lay it to heart and learn to be contented with what you have, though it be but the very barest necessities for life. Complain not if you dwell in but a humble hovel, for your Saviour had not where to lay his head! Complain not if you have nought but bread to eat, for your Saviour lacked that for forty days! Complain not if you have only water to drink, for your Saviour was denied even that in the hour of death!

*"I thirst."*

**5. Here we see how Christ can sympathize with his suffering people.**

The problem of suffering has ever been a perplexing one. Why should suffering be necessary in a world that is governed by a perfect God? A God who not only has the power to prevent evil, but who *is* love. Why should there be pain and wretchedness, sickness and death? As we look out on the world and take cognizance of its countless sufferers, we are bewildered. This world is but a vale of tears. A thin veneer of gaiety scarcely succeeds in hiding the drab facts of life. Philosophizing about the problem of suffering brings scant relief. After all our reasonings we ask, Does God see? Is there knowledge with the Most High? Does he really care? Like all questions, these must be taken to the cross. While they do not find there a complete answer, nevertheless they *do* meet that which satisfies the anxious heart. While the problem of

suffering is not fully solved there, yet the cross *does* throw sufficient light upon it to relieve the tension. The cross shows us that God is not ignorant of our sorrows, for in the person of his Son he has himself “borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4)! The cross shows us God is not unmindful of our distress and anguish, for becoming incarnate, *he suffered himself!* The cross tells us God is not indifferent to pain for in the Saviour he *experienced it!*

What then is the value of these facts? This: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted (or tried) *like as we are*, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Our Redeemer is not one so removed from us that he is unable to enter, sympathetically, into our sorrows, for he was himself “the Man of Sorrows.” Here then is comfort for the aching heart. No matter how despondent you maybe, no matter how rugged your path and sad your lot, you are invited to spread it all before the Lord Jesus and cast all your care upon him, knowing that “*he careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). Is your body wracked with pain? So was his! Are you misunderstood, misjudged, misrepresented? So was he! Have those who are nearest and dearest turned away from you? They did from him! Are you in the darkness? So was he for three hours! “Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a *merciful* and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17).

***“I thirst.”***

## **6. Here we see the expression of a universal need.**

Whether he articulates it or not the natural man, the world over, is crying “I thirst.” Why this consuming desire to acquire wealth? Why this craving for the honours and plaudits of the world? Why this mad rush after pleasure, the turning

from one form of it to another with persistent and unwearied diligence? Why this eager search for wisdom — this scientific inquiry, this pursuit of philosophy, this ransacking of the writings of the ancients, and this ceaseless experimentation by the moderns? Why the insane craze for that which is novel? Why? Because there is an aching void in the soul. Because there is something remaining in every natural man that is *unsatisfied*. This is true of the millionaire as much as of the country rustic who has never been outside the bounds of his native country: travelling from one end of the earth to the other and back again, fails to discover the secret of peace. Over all the cisterns of this world's providing is written in letters of ineffaceable truth, "Whosoever drinketh of this water *shall thirst again*" (John 4:13). So it is also with the religious man or woman: we mean, the religious *without Christ*. How many there are who go the weary round of religious performances, and find nothing to meet their deep need! They are members of an evangelical denomination, they attend church regularly, contribute of their means to the pastor's support, read their Bibles occasionally, and sometimes pray, or, if they use a "prayer-book" say their prayers every night. And yet, after it all, if they are honest, their cry is still "I thirst."

The thirst is a *spiritual* one: that is why natural things cannot quench it. Unknown to themselves their soul "thirsteth for God" (Psa. 42:2). God made us, and he alone can satisfy us. Said the Lord Jesus, "Whosoever drinketh of the water *that I shall give him shall never thirst*" (John 4:14). Christ alone can quench our thirst. He alone can meet the deep need of our hearts. He alone can impart that peace which the world knows nothing of and can neither bestow nor take away. O reader, once more I would address myself to your conscience. How is it with thee? Have you found that everything under the

sun is only vanity and vexation of spirit? Have you discovered that the things of earth are unable to satisfy your *heart*? Is your soul-cry “I thirst?” Then, is it not good news to hear there is one who *can* satisfy you? One we say, not a creed, not a form of religion, but *a person* — a living, divine person. He it is who says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Heed then that sweet invitation. Come to him now, just as you are. Come in faith, believing he will receive you; and then shall you sing:

***“I came to Jesus as I was,  
Weary, and worn, and sad;  
I found in him a resting place,  
And he has made me glad.”***

O come to Christ. Delay not. You *are* “thirsty?” Then you are the one he is seeking for: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they *shall* be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

Unsaved reader, reject not the Saviour, for if you die in your sins your eternal cry will be “I thirst.” This is the moan of the damned. In the lake of fire the lost suffer amid the flames of God’s wrath for ever and ever. If Christ cried “I thirst” when he suffered the wrath of God for but three hours, what is the state of those who have to endure it for all eternity! When millions of years have gone, ten millions more lie ahead. There is an everlasting thirst in hell which admits of no relief. Remember the awful words of the rich man: “And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am *tormented in this flame*” (Luke 16:24). O think, my reader. If physical thirst in the extreme is insufferable even now when endured but a few short hours,

what will that thirst be which is infinitely beyond any present thirst, and which shall never be quenched! Say not it is cruel of God to deal thus with his erring creatures. Remember to what he exposed his own dear Son, when sin was imputed to him — surely the one who despises Christ is deserving of the hottest place in hell! Again we say, *Receive him now as yours.* Receive him as your Saviour, and submit to him as your Lord.

**“I thirst.”**

### **7. Here we see the enunciation of an abiding principle.**

There is a sense, a real one, in which *Christ still thirsts*. He is thirsting for the love and devotion of his own. He is yearning *for fellowship* with his blood-bought people. Here is one of the great marvels of grace — a redeemed sinner can offer that which satisfies the heart of Christ! I can understand how I ought to appreciate his love, but how wonderful that he — the all-sufficient one — should appreciate my love! I have learned how blessed to my own soul is communion with him, but who would have supposed that my communion *was blessed to Christ!* Yet it is. For *this* he still “thirsts.” Grace enables us to offer that which refreshes him. Wondrous thought!

Have you ever noticed in John 4 that though Christ said to the woman who came to the well, “Give me to drink” — for he sat there “wearied” from the journey and heat — that he never took a drink of *water*? In the salvation and faith of that Samaritan woman he found that which *refreshed his heart!* Love is never satisfied till there is a response and love in return! So with Christ. Here is the key to Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

This is often applied to the unsaved, but its primary



reference is to the Church. It pictures Christ seeking *the fellowship* of his own. He speaks of “supping” and in scripture supping is ever symbolic of communion, just as the Lord’s Supper is a special season of communion between the Saviour and the saved. And observe in this passage Christ speaks of a *double* supping — “I will come in to him, and sup with him, *and* he with me.” Not only is it our unspeakable privilege to sup with him, and to commune with him, to delight ourselves in him, but *he* “sups” with us. He finds in *our* communion something for *his* heart to feed upon, something which *refreshes* him, and that something is our devotion and love. Yes, the Christ of God still “thirsts,” thirsts for the affection of his own. O will you not offer that which will satisfy *him*? Respond then to his own call — “Set me as a seal upon thine heart” (Song of Solomon 8:6).

The fifth of seven booklets.

