

THE CRY OF SUFFERING

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." John 19:28.

While there is much about Christ which we cannot comprehend, yet there is everything about Him for us to admire and adore. Foremost among these things is the union in one person of His deity and His humanity. He was both the Son of God and the Son of Man. While He was here on earth He gave full proof of His deity by speaking with divine wisdom, acting in divine holiness, exhibiting divine power and displaying divine love. He read men's minds, moved their hearts and swayed their wills. When He spoke the storm was ended, the sick were healed and the dead were raised to life.

During our Lord's stay on earth He had various needs. As long as we are here, we shall continue to have physical, mental and spiritual needs which we cannot supply. In many ways we are partially dependent on others. We are completely dependent on God. Let us never forget our need of Him.

Between Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's cross Christ encountered much opposition. He was betrayed, arrested, forsaken, tried and condemned. From the scene of His trial at Pilate's judgment hall to the place of His crucifixion was nearly a mile. He did not bear His cross much of that distance until His strength failed. The sleepless nights, the severe scourgings, the painful crown of thorns, the agony of Gethsemane and the weight of the cross were too much for Him. After He had fallen under the weight of the cross, they transferred the ghastly burden to the shoulder of Simon and then proceeded to the skull-shaped hill outside the city wall. Upon their arrival there they drove the cruel spikes through His hands and feet and fastened them to the cross. Then they lifted the cross on end and dropped it with a thud into a hole which had been dug in the ground, leaving Him to suffer a lingering and painful death as the blood dripped from His head, His hands and His feet.

"There was none other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate of heaven
And let us in.
We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us,
He hung and suffered there."

While hanging on that cross our blessed Lord uttered seven matchless sayings. After hanging there for six hours of unparalleled and indescribable suffering, His mind was still clear and His memory was unimpaired, and He uttered the shortest of the seven sayings from the cross. It contained only one word of two syllables, and yet there is compressed into it the most intense anguish of which a human body is capable. That word was "dipso," and it has been translated, "I thirst." Although our Lord had been hanging on that cross for six hours, this cry was the first which had any reference to His bodily sufferings. This was the only cry of physical pain that was ever heard from His lips while on the cross or elsewhere. In His previous sayings He had been absorbed in praying to God or in planning for others. In the cry immediately before this one, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Christ gave expression to His spiritual agony.

The most demanding need of the human body is for water. Man may live for many days without food. The Irishman, McSwiney, lived for sixty-three days without a morsel of food. But man can live only for hours without water. This is true under normal circumstances, and even more so in the case of crucifixion, which is the worst form of torture.

It had been several hours since Christ had quenched His thirst. Probably the last liquid He had swallowed was merely a sip of wine at the Last Supper. During the intervening hours He had endured an ordeal which was designed to break the strongest of men. His agony of sweat in Gethsemane had taken its toll. The numerous indignities to which He had been subjected and the rugged road He had trod to Calvary had sapped His strength. The mounting fever which accompanied His sufferings made His thirst unbearable. Drop by drop dehydration incessantly tolled away the remaining moments of His life.

Early in the day Christ had declined the stupefying wine mingled with herbs which had been provided by the merciful women of Jerusalem for the unfortunate victims of crucifixion. This soporific was offered in kindness to condemned malefactors to deaden the pains of the cross, but our Lord refused to drink it. He would not offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins while drugged into virtual insensibility.

He Who thirsted thus possessed all power in heaven and on earth. Had He chosen to exercise His omnipotent power, He could have satisfied His need readily. He who turned the water into wine at a word could have met His own need by merely speaking the word of power. But Christ never performed a miracle for His own comfort or for His own personal benefit. In this case He refused to use His mighty power in His own behalf, faithfully submitted to the will of God and voluntarily suffered humiliation and shame in order that He might save us.

Certainly Christ's body was drained of physical strength by the terrific struggle of those six horrible hours on the cross through which He had just passed. However, His cry, "I thirst," was not made in the midst of the contest but after the battle was over. He was announcing Himself as the Victor Who was exhausted from the conflict. God's Word says, "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." Our Lord reserved this remark until something had happened. Christ said, "All things are now accomplished," meaning the things He went to the cross to do. All these things were accomplished before He said, "I thirst." They stood finished. There was nothing more to be done. He had made the once-for-all sacrifice.

For hours Christ had gone without rest, sleep, food and drink. He had been tortured until every drop of moisture had been sapped from His fevered body. Every cell of His body cried out for water, but He was so intent on fulfilling the scripture by doing His work for others that, up to this time, not one word about His terrible physical sufferings had escaped His lips. After hanging on that cruel cross for six long hours, enduring the fierceness of God's outpoured wrath, He saw that He had won the victory for the souls of men. Now, that His work was finished, His thoughts turned to His famished and thirsty body and He expressed His first concern for Himself by saying, "I thirst." What a text for a sermon! It is short, but so expressive and comprehensive. The Lord of Glory was in need of a drink, as was indicated by His cry, "I thirst." That was a word of precious meaning, a word to be treasured in our hearts, and a word which deserves our prolonged meditation.

It is impossible to hear this pleading cry, so expressive of dependence and submission, without recalling the words which He spoke when He sat on the parapet of Jacob's well at Sychar. When the Samaritan woman came to that well for water, Christ asked her to give Him a drink, but, having aroused her spiritual thirst, He was so eager to help her that He forgot His own thirst. Pointing to the well, He said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4: 13-14). This pleading cry, "I thirst," also reminds us of the words which Christ spoke when He was surrounded with a great multitude in Jerusalem, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37).

When Christ said, "I thirst," He did not make a request. He merely revealed a condition. Even in that dark hour and place some love was found as was evidenced by the soldier's gesture of compassion in offering the suffering Saviour a sponge soaked in sour wine with which to cool His lips and to slake His thirst.

Thirst is a sensation of lacking something. A person who serves Satan is never satisfied, but is always craving something else. Indulgence in sin only sharpens the desire to commit more sin.

Of all human suffering the need of water is most severe. Above the din of battle the most terrible pleas of all are those of wounded soldiers crying, "Water! Water!" Even the pains of wounds are swallowed up in the extreme severity of the pain of thirst. For six hours Christ had been hanging on the cross and losing blood all of that time. Fever was becoming more and more difficult, and yet the Saviour bore it all without complaint. His pain was vicarious. He endured it for our benefit. "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

Every person thirsts for something, but far too many thirst for the wrong things. So great is the thirst of some for money that they are willing to sell their souls to gain possession of it. Why do people have a consuming desire to acquire wealth? Others thirst for pleasure and a life of thrills. Many give themselves with singleness of purpose to the pursuit of pleasure, but find that sort of thing very unsatisfactory. They are learning that Burns spoke the truth when he said,

"Pleasures are as poppies spread;
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed.
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment seen, then gone forever.
Or like the borealis rays
That flit ere you can point the place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Vanishing amid the storm."

Still others thirst for rank and station. Their chief desire is to get into the select circle. In order to do this they compromise with their better selves in order to live a life of sham and outward show. Why do people crave the honors and plaudits of the world? Why all the craze for that which is novel? It is because there is an aching void in the soul. Christ alone can quench the thirst of the soul and meet the needs of the heart. He alone can impart that peace of which the world knows nothing, and can neither bestow nor take away. Only Christ can satisfy your spiritual thirst. In describing his experience with the Lord, Horatius Bonar said,

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast."
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.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live."

I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that lifegiving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till traveling days are done."

A group of sincere lovers of Christ were meeting secretly in Russia to worship their Lord and to rejoice in Him. They knew the danger of such meetings. Even though the Communistic authorities had outlawed the worship of Christ, they remained true to Him. Many were the happy hours they spent in communion with Him. One fateful night the door of their meeting place was flung open and there entered an agent of the secret police, followed by a group of his soldiers. "Take the names of these people," he commanded. The names were written down, thirty of them. With a warning that they await summons to trial, the agent was turning to go when an old man from the group stopped him at the door and said, "There is one name you do not have." Surprised, the officer replied, "I assure you that you are mistaken. I have them all!" "Believe me," said the old peasant, "There is one name you do not have." "Well, we'll prove it," exclaimed the impatient agent, "we'll count them again!" And they verified every name; they were sure that there were only thirty, no more, no less. "You see" cried the officer to the old man, "I have them all, every one. I told you I had!" But still the old Christian insisted, "There is one name you do not have." "Who is it, then?" the officer demanded. "Speak out, who is it?" "The Lord Jesus Christ" was the answer. "He is here!" "Ah," said the officer with a sneer, "that is a different matter." Indeed, it is a different matter! If Christ is with us as our Saviour, Friend and Lord, all will be well. Will you receive Him as your Saviour now and go with Him wherever He leads you?