

# THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

F. W. Krummacher

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## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

### “I THIRST!”

THAT PORTION OF THE HISTORY of our Saviour’s passion which will form the subject of our present meditation, does not apparently belong to the more important and edifying parts of it. But let us not be deceived by the mere appearance, for if we dig sufficiently deep, we shall here find also the water of life abundantly springing forth from the inexhaustible well of salvation, which was opened for us on Calvary.

It is about the ninth hour, or three o’clock in the afternoon. The awful cry of “**Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!**” has just been uttered. The sun again shines forth from its gloomy covering, and heaven again looks kindly down upon the earth. But you would be under a mistake in supposing this to be a sign that the agonizing darkness which reigned in the Redeemer’s soul, was now over. It continues even till the moment of His decease, although essentially diminished by the clearness of faith, and even the words, “**I thirst!**” reach our ears from the midst of that darkness. To doubt this would show little acquaintance with the sixty-ninth Psalm, the expressions in which receive their final fulfillment in this last stage of our Lord’s crucifixion.

It is true that Jesus knew, according to the express declaration of the evangelist, that His passion was drawing to its close. He clearly saw that the cup of suffering was emptied, with the exception of the last drops; but these last drops still remained, and they did not yield in bitterness to those already tasted. Ah, see, He already drinks them! The woes of that death which was threatened in paradise seize Him. He enters into that state in which the spirit of prophecy represents Him in the abovementioned Psalm, as saying, “**I am weary of my crying, my throat is dried, mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. Draw nigh unto my soul and redeem it. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.**”

And these complaints conclude with the remarkable and prophetic words, “**They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.**” This had to be realized in the progress of His passion; and as a proof that this was really the case, or, as the Gospel expresses it, “**that the Scriptures might be fulfilled,**” our Lord exclaims from the cross, “**I thirst!**” Yes, these words tell of complaint, distress, and agony. This, the sixty-ninth Psalm, which portrays a succession of trials, places beyond a doubt.

But of what nature was the distress expressed by the cry?

First, it was certainly of a physical kind. How wounded and exhausted was the Saviour, even when He reached Mount Calvary! and He had already hung nearly six hours on the cross. The blood vessels of His sacred body are almost dried up. A dreadful fever rages through His frame. His tongue cleaves to His jaws. His lips burn, and a drop of water seems a great refreshment to Him. There is scarcely a greater, torment than that of insatiable thirst.

Travelers who have experienced it in the burning steppes of the East give us descriptions of it which fill us with horror. They assure us that when thus situated, if they had possessed all the gold in the world, they would gladly have resigned it for a few drops even of the muddiest water of our brooks.

Only think, the Saviour of the world was no stranger to this torment also! Even to this depth of destitution and wretchedness did He, who was so unspeakably rich, descend. And all this for us, **“that we through his poverty might be made rich!”** Who is able to comprehend and worthily to praise such amazing love?

But the cry from the cross, **“I thirst,”** refers to something worse still than bodily torment.

Does it not remind you of the awful representation from the invisible world, which the Lord once portrayed to our view in one of His parables?

Does not the remembrance of the rich man present itself to you, who, while on earth, clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day; but after inexorable death had swept him away, wrung his hands despairingly, being in pain and torment; and agonized by a nameless inward thirst, he called upon Abraham to send Lazarus, that he might dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his parched tongue, but whose request was refused without mercy, however suppliantly it knocked at heaven’s gates from the habitations of eternal night?

“No;” I hear you reply, “we did not think of this parable here. How should the rich man in torment remind us of the holy and righteous Sufferer? We should deem it impious to compare the thirst of the guiltless Jesus with that of this child of hell. By such a comparison we think we should be acting worse than the Jews in numbering Him with the transgressors.”

So you say; but know, my friends, that only those can speak thus who do not believe what the Scriptures state of the vicarious enduring of the curse by Jesus Christ.

But he to whom the light of the Holy Spirit has risen upon the words, **“the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed,”** would be indeed astonished if the Mediator did not actually experience the lot of the man in the parable - that is, if He had not tasted, as far as was possible, all the torments of the damned. And He actually did so! The bitter scorn and ridicule which reached His ear from below, and was also expressed in the words, “Let us see if Elias will come and help him,” was only a faint and human representation of the assaults which He had to endure behind the veil of that which was external.

There, unseen, He was surrounded by the bands of Belial.

There the powers of darkness aimed at Him their most dangerous missiles. From this appalling host of adversaries, from this horrible desert, from this "pit in which there was no water," and in which He could only believe that God was His God, without feeling Him to be so, rose, like the prayer of the lost man to send Lazarus, the cry, "**I thirst!**" To spare us sinners the thirst of an infinite absence of comfort, He submitted to such torment in His mediatorial capacity! O what a well of consolation has He opened for us by His thirst!

"**I thirst!**" For what did He thirst?

I think the answer now is plain. It was not only for earthly water that He languished, but for something greater, higher, and more essential. He longed for the termination of His redeeming toil, and the completion of His great work of mediation. When this object was attained, He would again be restored to the full beatifying fellowship of His heavenly Father. He would not then have laboriously to struggle for the consciousness that God was kindly and paternally inclined toward Him, but would again taste it, for He would then rest as formerly in His Father's bosom, and instead of the horrible images of sin, the curse, and death, the radiance of a spotless purity and holiness would beam upon Him anew from every side. Peace and joy would then return. The viperous hissing of the powers of darkness around Him would be silenced. He would hear only the hallelujahs of angels and the blest above. Every discord would be dissolved in blissful harmony, and the atmosphere which He breathed would again be love, entirely love.

Yes, He thirsted after the full restoration of His Father's countenance, and after His Father's renewed and plain declaration, "**Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,**" as well as after the paternal confirmation of His work of redemption, as being spotlessly perfect.

That He thirsted chiefly for this is no arbitrary supposition, but is derived from those passages of the sixty-ninth Psalm which belong here, and which represent Him as saying in His agony, "**Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. My prayer is unto thee, O Lord! hear me in the truth of thy salvation. Turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. Hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in trouble. Hear me speedily; draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it.**"

Hence His thirst is an expression of desire toward His heavenly Father.

But think not that in this complaint He had only Himself and what belonged to His peace in view. It was not for His own sake that He hung upon the cross. He longed to be again received into fellowship with God, because His reception into it would be a pledge of theirs, whom He bore vicariously upon His heart.

As the second Adam, He experienced their fate in what He endured, and by that means acquired a legal claim to prepare their future inheritance. After taking their place as their Representative, He could not be justified, exalted, and crowned without their participating in it. But how did He long for the moment when He could appear before His Father and say, "Here am I, and those whom Thou hast given Me!

I have redeemed them, have bought them with My blood, and now present them before Thee unreprouable. Henceforth they are Thine and Mine, and worthy to enter into Thy courts." It is to this desire of His heart, and to this especially, that He gave utterance in the symbolical words, "**I thirst!**"

O with what rich garlands of love has Jesus adorned the accursed tree!

But we do not fail to perceive that the words, "**I thirst,**" not only expressed the Saviour's longing after God His heavenly Father, but likewise a request to mankind, whom He saw represented at Calvary by those who crucified Him. Even from them He solicited a charitable act. He requested of them a drink of cooling water for His parched tongue. Do not overlook this circumstance. However trivial it may seem, there is something great concealed under it.

Who, even if he had been the noblest of his race, would in Jesus' situation have uttered those words to his scoffing foes, and have besought of them a manifestation of kindness and charity?

These men were deserving of proud contempt; but as a proof that He was so differently minded from His brethren after the flesh, and that nothing dwelt in His heart of all that is termed wounded pride, revenge, or angry feeling - He solicits from His adversaries an act of compassion and kindness, and says to them, "**I thirst.**"

What else did He intend to say by this, than, "See, I do not break with you. I continue faithfully inclined toward you, and hold the bond firmly which connects Me with you."

Let him look here, who does not yet know what it is to heap coals of fire on his enemy's head! How does the holiness of your Redeemer again manifest itself! How does the pure golden grain of His divine nature here display itself afresh! Yes, light is His garment. But it was necessary that He who was willing to be our Surety and Mediator should be so constituted. A speck on the white robe of His righteousness would have sufficed to have deprived Him of the ability for the accomplishment of His great work.

It might be supposed that the words, "**I thirst,**" must have filled those who crucified the Saviour with a confusion which would have scarcely permitted them to lift up their eyes any more. And it certainly seems as if it had not entirely failed of its conciliating impression, by producing in them milder sentiments. We see them immediately prepare to fulfill His request. One of them runs and fetches a branch of hyssop, and after they had dipped a sponge in vinegar, and put it on the reed, they held it up to His mouth that He might suck it.

But even this miserable refreshment is mingled with the gall of renewed mockery. "**Let alone,**" say they, "**let us see whether Elias will come to take him down!**"

But if I mistake not, there is more seriousness than jest in this speech, and that they really intended by it to disguise the better and gentler feelings of compassion - nay, even a certain inclining toward the dying Man, which they felt arise within them at that moment.

If we wish to gain our opponents, we cannot do so more rapidly or surely than by requesting them to do us a kindness, and thus oblige ourselves to thank them. This will immediately soften them. But in order to do this, a degree of humility and charity is requisite, which everyone does not possess. But this charity and humility dwelt in the Saviour in unlimited fullness; and in order to place Himself in a position to owe the world His thanks, He gives the latter by saying, “**I thirst,**” the opportunity of presenting Him with the last earthly solace of His life.

What an affecting and heart-winning thought is this!

O that it may win our hearts also, if they are not already gained for Jesus! For that for which He chiefly thirsts is that He may gain us over to Himself. The principal object of His desire and longing is that transgressors may be freed from sin; they that are under the curse, absolved; those that are bound, liberated; and the prisoners set free. But that this great end of human redemption may be accomplished, He still thirsts for our love, the resignation of ourselves to Him, and for our childlike confidence in His saving Name. We therefore know how and with what we can still refresh the Lord of Glory. The first solace which He with desire awaits from us, is our tears of penitence and repentance.

O let us bear them to Him! Shall the blood which flowed on the cross never succeed in softening the hard ground of our hearts, nor the love which died for us inflame our frigid souls with a reciprocal affection?

O the abundance of awakening voices and attracting powers which urge themselves upon us from the cross! Will we ever resist them, as if the hardness of our hearts were altogether invincible? May God prevent it, and bestow upon us the humility of the publican, and the ardent desire of the dying malefactor!

There may be some of my readers whose eyes, from which a penitential tear never flowed, will soon close in death.

O that they would melt before despair hardens them forever!

There may be those who, from childhood up, have witnessed what many prophets and kings have desired to see and have not seen, and yet are far from recognizing the one thing that is needful.

O that they would weep at length over their blindness, and their base and appalling ingratitude!

There may be those also whose eyes require no light to reveal to them their misdeeds, and yet are nevertheless like sealed fountains which yield no water.

O that you could weep as Peter wept, and like David, who watered his couch with his tears!

Such tears are the drink offering for which the Saviour still thirsts.

God grant that we may approach His throne with them! As soon as this takes place, the actions change, the relations are reversed. It is then He who gives us to drink, and refreshes us, and we imbibe and enjoy.

And blessed is he who experiences in himself the truth of His words, **“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”**

Who would not say with the Samaritan woman, with reference to such a draught, **“Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not!”**

**~ end of chapter 48 ~**

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