

Communion

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[0 : 00] Thank you. I'll just say what a great pleasure it is to be here back in Aberdeen.

It's a long time since I was here. First of all, I think 37 years when I first entered this building. So it is so good to come back. And it's one of my privileges to travel over Scotland and beyond.

And it's so encouraging to see such a youthful-looking congregation. Even those of you who are positively ancient look young. So it is great to be with you here in the granite city, the hard city full of people with soft hearts.

So let's open the Bible, please. It's John chapter 19. John chapter 19, reading at verse 28.

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

[1 : 20] Especially these words, I am thirsty. I am drawn to biographies. I really love them.

I've just bought one last week of the biography of Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The subtitle is Risk-Taker and Reconciler.

I'm moving through just now Jane Dawson's book on John Knox. And these are really interesting, you know, biographies.

I didn't think when I was younger I would ever read the biography of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But as Welby develops, and even the revelations two weeks ago, but his father, he has become a compelling and interesting character.

And John Knox is one of the most fascinating characters I've ever read. I had some spare time yesterday, and I found myself in Asda looking through the book section in Asda.

[2 : 24] And the biographies there are quite intriguing. There are biographies of people so young that the ink in their birth certificates is hardly dry.

And you wonder, do they have a life at all? Never mind a biography. And so I'll maybe put the biography of Beyonce to the side to read again on another day.

Because, you know, biographies are compelling because the people are compelling. And I said to someone recently, and I almost exclaimed, isn't the life of Jesus fascinating?

And the person says, what brought that on? And I says, well, I've just been reading the Bible. The life of Jesus is absolutely compelling. And, you know, it's one of the things that in the church we've got, you know, there is a sense in which we have an easy task.

And that the character of whom we speak, the Savior whom we talk about, is one who is so interesting and one who is so fascinating. And I wish that I could take people from the kind of formal religious view of Jesus, from the kind of songs of praise view of Jesus, if I may say that, the kind of popular Jesus of mythology, and replace him with the edgy, exciting, radical Son of God that we find in the Bible.

[3 : 58] And so, this morning we come not so much to the life of Jesus, but we come here to the death of Jesus. Now, in church there are lots of moods. Even this morning there are different moods.

There's the mood which we had when singing the various songs that we had, reflecting joy, reflecting solemnity.

In the passage this morning, clearly we've got solemnity. This is holy ground. Moses, when he came before the burning bush, took off his shoes because he said, this is holy ground.

And there are different legitimate moods within Christianity and within preaching and within services. And surely a Sunday morning mood is one of solemnity, one of worship, one of reverence, one of a sense in which we are on holy ground.

Now, we get that atmosphere, not by kind of artificiality, but we get that atmosphere, if you like, by engaging with the material before us.

[5 : 17] We are remembering a death. Yes, it burst forth into glorious light eventually, but there is a death. And that's what we're reading about here.

John's account of the cross. Remember his purpose, though. These things are written that we may know that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing in him, we may have life in his name. And so, we're turning here to one of what's known as the sayings of the cross. There are seven last sayings on the cross. And these words, I am thirsty, or even more tersely, as expressed in the authorized version, I thirst, is the fifth of the seven sayings on the cross. And so, what we're going to do for probably about 30 minutes is just meditate on the meaning of these very simple words, two words or three words, depending on your version, I thirst. Now, let me just sketch in the background. I'm conscious that not everyone's been brought up in church. Not everyone knows the story. Not everyone knows the context of what's been happening here.

[6 : 35] Let me just tell you. The Lord Jesus Christ has been hanging on a cross now at this point in John, here, John 19, for six hours.

Three of them have been in the scorching heat. And if you've ever been in Israel, that is really, really, you know, hot, scorching heat. And his last meal had been a very light meal the night before, simple meal of some bread and some wine.

And then he had a night of emotional, powerful intensity. Emotional stress drains us in a way in which physical exercise does not.

We read that the night before, it was a sleepless night for him. He was in a garden praying. Everyone else round about fell asleep. But he was in such agony of soul that the Bible tells that he sweat drops of blood.

So it was, you know, that's the scenario. He's hanging on the cross, hadn't slept the night before, emotional intensity, sweating blood. And then he goes through a series of indignities.

[7 : 48] He is whipped, he's scourged, he's humiliated, and he is naked. Remember this, he's naked on the cross. Everyone's sneering at him, everybody laughing at him.

And this is what he did willingly. He did this willingly, even, the Bible says remarkably, joyfully, joyfully, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.

Now, often we thank people for doing things for us. We experience something, and there's a little touch of folk going the second mile, and it's lovely, Ed, it elicits from us a sense of thankfulness. But here is Jesus Christ went through all these indignities, and he didn't have to. He was a king. He was one of the members of the Trinity.

He was God. He could have dwelt in glory forever, but yet. He became human, and he subjected himself willingly and joyfully to all this, bearing in his own body the punishment that was due for us.

[9 : 14] But now it's coming to an end, verse 28, says later, knowing that all was now completed. Just again, before we get into the meat of here, this was not chaotic.

Jesus was in complete control of the situation. Jesus was not killed. He gave his life. There's a subtle and yet profound difference between that.

Jesus was not a hapless victim. Jesus was not a martyr. Jesus was someone who was in complete control. He knew what he was doing. He was a willing sacrifice.

He gave his life willingly for us. The will of a father and of a son combine at this point. And so he's hanging across.

He is literally dying of thirst. And for the very first time, this is word five of seven sayings on the cross. Only now does he speak about his own pain.

[10 : 17] Only now does he speak about his own agony. How different for us. Aren't we, all of us, part of a me generation? It's all about me.

It's all about my needs. Remember, the focus of the Bible is not me. The subject of the Bible is God, not my needs. And here we see it exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's unpick these words, I thirst. And in true style, let's unpick three themes that we see in the passage.

Again, our imaginary PowerPoint that's behind me. We're going to see three things flash up before us on the screen. Number one is this, he lived in our body.

He lived in our body. That's the first thing that we get from these words, I thirst. Now, some of you have looked at other religions and other faiths, and that is a great thing to do.

[11 : 21] I think that anyone who is a Christian and anyone who has a kind of good liberal education, it's great to look at other faiths, it's good to compare and contrast.

I don't think Christians have got any worry at all about folk investigating as fully as they can other faiths and other religions.

Because there is no doubt, it is self-evident that the Lord Jesus Christ is not only different, he is an altogether different level.

Now, we don't have time this morning for an expansive and in-depth view of comparative religions, and I may, hopefully, I'm not unfair, but we see here there is no other faith where the God or gods or main characters of these faiths know how we feel.

Come with me to a remote village in rural India, and then you see an Indian guru there in his ashram, he's got his long beard, beard, and he's got his fingernails that he's not cut for 50 years, and there he is in his little hut.

[12 : 47] He's a guru giving advice. What does he know? What does he know about the recession? What does he care about the price of oil?

What does he care about a miscarriage? What does he know about being hungry? He is there dishing out advice from his remote place in a splendid isolation, giving wisdom and he hasn't got a clue.

Who would love to live in remote India sometimes in a little hut dispensing advice? It's not the real world. These guys don't live in the real world.

Jesus however says, I thirst. And then you have our friend the Buddha, very wise man, one of the wisest men who ever lived.

God and there he is, benign, unfeeling, just staring out. The benign, unfeeling Buddha. And then there is Allah, one does not want to represent, misrepresent Islam at all.

[14 : 05] But the more and more I speak to folk of the Islamic faith, the more and more they are insulted if you speak about Allah having any relationship with us at all.

It is blasphemous to think of Allah having a relationship with us. He is there and we are there. His will is unbending. He is Allah and it is blasphemous to suggest that Allah cares or has or can have an intimate relationship with us.

Whereas Jesus says, I thirst. One of the most human emotions, one of the most human experiences, he says, I know what that is.

Meanwhile, back on earth, we have Jesus of Nazareth. Now, who is he? This is the amazing story of Jesus. He is God, the very God. He spoke. He turned the water into wine.

He stilled and calmed the seas. He raised dead men. He healed lepers. He gave sight to the blind. He restored dignity where there was none.

[15 : 07] He multiplied bread and fish. He walked on water. He did incredible things and yet he was God and at the same time, here we find that he is that most human of people.

On one occasion, he was transfigured on a mountain. He glowed before them. And so, we have God, but also we have Jesus, this naked man on the cross.

Isn't that the Savior that we have? He hung out with sinners. He hung out with ordinary people. I remember on one occasion, I was in the garden and we had visitors.

They were people who used to live next door to us. And one of our hallmarks was that they were immaculately dressed. I called them the Burberrys.

You know, they were always dressed in Burberry, really, really smart. and they had gone away and they came back and I was on my own and I felt so dirty and so inferior to them because they were just on another level.

[16 : 27] I could see my face in the shine of his shoes and I just felt intimidated. Isn't it reversed with Jesus?

We don't feel intimidated in his presence because he's one of us. He's one of us. The Burberrys, I felt, didn't know any problems in their lives but he lived in our body.

I thirst must. Now, what's the relevance of this? What's the relevance of this humanity? Remember, he lived in our bodies.

There are two points of application. Number one is that he was the perfect substitute. Hanging on the cross of Calvary was someone like us, a perfect substitute, a perfect person.

He was not, the sacrifice had to be connected to humanity and so it wasn't a goat that died, it wasn't a bull that died, it was a man, it was a person who died on the cross.

[17 : 43] This is a great thing about the gospel. There's a stark immediacy here. In the Old Testament, it was kind of substitute through intermediaries like you had the goat, you had the bull, and now we have the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

There is a stark immediacy, no middle man, we have the man. And so he was the perfect substitute. The second application is that we have the understanding man.

The famous expression, of course, that the dust of the earth is now settled on the footstool of heaven. He's not Buddha who does not understand. Remember during the MP's expenses crisis, the outer edge of these expenses was the chap who claimed for his moat to be cleaned, and the other guy who had his duck house.

I don't know how you feel when your moat gets dirty. It's really, you must be absolutely gutted. Or have you checked your duck house this morning? These people don't understand.

They don't understand what it's like to worry about your job. They don't understand what it's like to worry about your pension. They don't understand to worry about that shadow in the x-ray. They don't understand about that rebellious child.

[19 : 08] They don't understand about that lovelessness in their lives. Whereas on the cross we have one who says, I know what it's like to be human.

Folks, it's okay not to be okay. It's okay to be weak. In fact, if you're not weak, you're either misguided or you're dead.

And so hanging on the cross we hear the voice of one expressing in a very human need, I suffer, I thirst. Now, we as pastors, we cannot promise to understand every human need.

We're all different. It's very difficult to understand a wealthy, middle-class, white person cannot understand the life of someone living in a shanty town in Brazil.

It's very difficult for someone who's got perfect health to understand someone who's weak. It's very difficult between the genders to understand what we're all thinking. We cannot understand everything about everybody, but we have a God who understands.

[20 : 23] He lived in our body. Second line in the PowerPoint. He survived by our scriptures. He lived in our bodies. He survived by our scriptures.

Again, 28, later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

See that phrase? So that the scriptures would be fulfilled. He was a son of God, and yet he lived by the scriptures, he lived by the Bible. Have you ever wondered where Jesus got his strength?

Yes, he was God, but in his humanity, how did he get through the day? It was through partly, significantly, the scriptures. Consider all that he went through, loneliness, opposition from family.

His family didn't understand him. His mother gave him a row. His brothers thought he was crazy. His disciples thought he hadn't a clue. He was living in this world surrounded by all these people to the right of him, to the left of him, idiots everywhere.

[21 : 35] They just didn't see who he was. And we assume that he survived because he was God. Well, he was the son of man. He emptied himself.

Philippians 2 is a commentary here. He emptied himself. But the resources which he used as a human are the resources that are available to us.

And so Jesus went through life because he was a Bible man. How did he survive? Remember when he was tempted? He quoted what?

The Bible to Satan. When the woman wept, he quoted the Bible. When he wanted reference points to the cross, he was a Psalm 1 man.

You know Psalm 1? On his law, he meditated day and night. The Bible formed his thoughts, filled his heart, regulated his way. For him, the Bible was the transcript of the Father's will.

[22 : 36] The Bible was just so much part of him. One of our children, when he was a baby, turned orange.

Now, when you're a ranger supporter from Glasgow, that's not the worst possible outcome. But he turned orange. Not suddenly, but this was gradually and we said to the health visitor, our son has turned orange.

And she laughed because this particular child developed a kind of, I don't know, addiction to carrot juice and pureed carrots. Couldn't get enough of the stuff.

And he was ingesting tons of it, so much so that he turned orange, turned the color of a carrot. And we eased off in the carrot juice and he reverted back to his normal pallid complexion.

And you see, it's all very obvious, isn't it? When you ingest the stuff that goes into your system, it just reveals itself in you. It's exactly the same with the Bible.

[23 : 52] As we get into the Bible, as we get into the Scriptures, we love the Bible. And as I get older, and more and more, I love the Bible. It's moved from being a dead letter to a living word. Even this morning, reading this passage, I thought, this is so incredibly exciting.

And Jesus was a Bible man. He knew all the references to himself. He knew the Old Testament literally, I think, off by heart. He knew so much of it.

Again, we be Bible people, he survived by our Scripture. Jesus bled Scripture. It was pervasive. You know the interesting thing about the relationship between the Bible and the Scripture? It was about him. A couple of years ago, I received a book.

And the book is called Edinburgh The Township and Its History. Now, I imagine that nobody in here is remotely interested in a book entitled Edinburgh The Township and Its History.

[25 : 09] Edinburgh is a, nobody here will have heard of it, it's a little village in the northwest of the island of Skye. And it's where my mother's people came from.

When I got that book, I couldn't put it down. Couldn't put it down. There were references there to my grandfather about who he was.

My uncle, my uncle Callum, was a bit of a bard. It's got a song that he wrote there. It's got the story of how he acquired his first set of bagpipes. And just riveting.

It was a page-turner. Now, to you folk, it would be as dull as anything. But to me, it is so interesting because, if you excuse the egotism, it's all about me.

It's all about my family. It's all about my people. It's all about my roots. It's all about part of what makes me me. Jesus, when he read the Bible, how much more, because he is the theme of the Bible.

[26 : 22] It's all about him. And so, that is so much more important. The scripture here is being fulfilled. You can see the relationship that Jesus had with the Bible.

He was the theme. And that's what makes the Bible even more interesting. As we read it, as we read the Old Testament, we're seeing he is there. Later, knowing that all was now completed and that the scripture might be fulfilled.

What is our attitude to the scripture? I was listening to a lecture recently by N.T. Wright, who's semi-famous, and he's giving advice to young ministers, and he says this, know your Bible in the original languages, pray, love God, and love people.

It's not a bad set of advice. Know your Bible in the original languages, pray, love God, and love people. Now, we don't need to know it in the original languages.

God has given us great translations, but know the Bible. Not only know the Bible, but obey the Bible. So, he lived in our body, he obeyed our scriptures, thirdly, and perhaps solemnly, he experienced our hell.

[27 : 43] I am thirsty. What does thirst mean in the Bible? Well, it's one of those key words that when you look at thirst as it's seen all through the scripture, it speaks of terminal, spiritual, agonizing, death, and emptiness.

It speaks of loneliness and separation from God. Read the concept of thirst in Jeremiah. Read it in Isaiah. Read it in the Psalms. When people are without God, they thirst.

You know, the metrical version of the Psalm, my soul longs in a dry parched land, wherein no waters be. That's how the people of God expressed their sense of loneliness and their sense of separation from God.

The great divorce is spoken in terms of profound thirst. Jeremiah 2, when we look for other places, it says you've hewn out for yourself broken cisterns, broken water tanks, if you like, which hold no water.

there is something our soul needs just as much as our body needs water.

[29 : 05] Here's a little health tip. Drink as much water as you can. Good for your skin, good for your complexion, good for your sense of well-being.

Drink water. It's fundamental because, you know, the body needs water. So, our soul needs God. Our soul needs God. Jesus said to the woman, whosoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never ever thirst. And so, we see here Jesus is dying physically.

Now, it's a horrible thought, but I think that death by thirst and the experience of dehydration.

Someone has said that, you know, if you're dehydrated, you're in a desert. Someone has described it as it's like swallowing a furnace. In the last stages, someone has written of it, it says, it feels as if your bodies are burning.

[30 : 12] Every molecule is screaming for water. That's where Jesus is after his six hours on the cross. Every molecule within him is screaming, I need hydration, I need water.

Folks, Psalm 42, as the deer thirsts for water, so my soul thirsts for you. And so, the positive presence of God is like water, water for our soul.

So, therefore, let's work back here. If Jesus is thirsty, in a spiritual sense, remember, this is John we're talking about here, it mirrors a sense of the absence of God.

Because the big thing in the cross is not the physical sufferings of Christ. The big thing in the cross is that at this point, he is experiencing the absence of God.

What is hell? Hell is the absence of God. It's as simple as that. Luke 16, 19, the rich man is where? [31 : 30] He is in hell. And what's he experiencing in hell? He calls out for water, I thirst. thirst. And so we have here Jesus saying, I thirst.

At this point, Jesus is in hell. Not for his own sake, but for our sake.

The church speak of the creed. He descended into hell. He descended into hell, folks, that we will never descend into hell.

He experienced thirst so that we will never thirst again. I don't know if you know the song The Impossible Dream.

To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go, to right the unrightable wrong, to love pure, chase from afar, to try when your arms are too weary, to reach the unreachable star.

[32 : 45] This is my quest to follow that star, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far. Listen to this. To fight for the right without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause.

God's love. The thirsting Lord Jesus marched into hell for the most heavenly cause ever, that we would be pardoned, that we would be set free, that we would experience eternal life, and that we would never experience the condemnation of God.

He was not just beaten for us, he experienced our death. This is our message. Strip it all down. It's about God sending a Savior.

God sending a Savior. Notice how it finishes, verse 30. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished.

With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. It is finished, paid in full.

[34 : 15] Do you know what the last words of the Buddha were? Various translations, but one is strive without ceasing, whereas Jesus' last words it is finished.

Folks, do you ever feel tired of striving? Do you ever feel just that you just can't do it, you can't be good enough, you can't outperform, you can't be perfect?

Yes, we have to obey God's law, but there are times we just collapse and we say, I can't do it. then Jesus says, no, you can't, but I have.

It is finished. Are we beating ourselves up over our own sin? He says, I was beaten for you, with my stripes you're healed.

the boaster may say, I need to do more, I need to do more to qualify myself for salvation. Jesus said, I thirst. This morning, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, let's thank God that he lived in our body, that he read our scriptures, and that he went to hell for us.

[35 : 46] Let's pray. Lord, we bow in your presence. We thank you for who you are. We ask that you would meet with us as you met with us in your word, meet with us in the sacrament that we will enjoy together.

Forgive our sins. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.