

# The God who satisfies our souls

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Today is Good Friday. It is the anniversary of that day when Christ was crucified. We remember and honor and celebrate that great sacrifice that Jesus made to save us. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all dedicate large parts of their gospels to the last week of Jesus' life. As a matter of fact, the gospel of John is almost 50% the last week of Jesus' life. There is no doubt that this story is important for Christians.

The night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, he ate his last meal with his friends and disciples. Jesus then took them to a small olive tree grove where he would go to pray. It was there that his enemies arrested him. They came at night and took him. Then he was interrogated and slapped, mocked, and beaten. That led to him being brought out to the crowds, along with a murderer and criminal named Barabbas. Pontius Pilate told the crowd that he would gladly release a Jewish prisoner to them as an act of goodwill, as the Jewish people celebrated one of their most important feasts, called the Passover. The crowd asked to free the murderer and chose to condemn Jesus to death. They shouted, "Crucify him!" He was then ordered to be executed. First, he was flogged. That is to be tied to a post and whipped almost to the point of death with a whip that had nine chords. After that, they made him carry a heavy wooden cross beam to a hill outside of the city. Then, they nailed him to the cross. They put nails in each hand and on his feet. Brutally, they hung him and waited for him to die. People were watching and shouting at him, "If you are really the Son of God, save yourself!" What they did not know was that if he wanted to save himself, he could have easily saved himself, but that would not have been obeying God or loving us. He then hung for 6 hours in extreme pain. While he hung, there are seven statements that he said. Last year we looked at his words to the thief that was beside him: "**Today you will be with me in paradise.**" This year, I want to share another statement that Jesus said while he was on the cross. John 19:28-29 says:

*<sup>28</sup> After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'*

*<sup>29</sup> 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."*

Here are three things that we can learn from this statement:

1. Jesus trusted that God planned the evil that was done to him for a good purpose.
2. Jesus understands our pain and suffering because he experienced terrible pain and suffering.

3. Jesus was thirsty, so our soul's thirst could be satisfied forever through a relationship with God.

Let us look at each one.

## 1. God planned the evil that was done to Jesus for a good purpose

*"Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'"*

The statement *"I thirst"* fulfilled the scriptures. Psalms 69:21 says, *"For my thirst, they gave me sour wine to drink."* Psalm 22:15 says, *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death."* Both of these speak of the thirst that Jesus would suffer as he was being crucified. I just want to point out that the fact that it was prophesied means that it was planned by God.

Many times, it is hard for us to believe that God would allow so much pain to come into his children's lives. But I ask you to consider this: If God planned for suffering to happen to his own son, why would it not happen to you and me? Throughout my life, many times, I read the Bible and didn't really understand what God was saying. If you pay close attention to the Bible, this idea that God plans to use evil for good is all over the place.

I just want to point out two very clear and obvious examples: Joseph and Jesus. Joseph, in Genesis 50:20, tells his brothers who mistreated him and sold him into slavery as a young man, *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* Much later in the Bible, in Acts 2:23, the Apostle Peter says, *"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."* In both Joseph's and Jesus' example, God and men are said to have a part in the pain. God "meant" the suffering of Joseph to bring good and to save lives. It was for a good reason. In the case of Jesus, God had a definite plan to see Jesus crucified for a very good reason. Jesus' suffering on the cross was planned for good, and in three short days, he would be raised from the dead. Joseph's suffering was planned for good.

If the Christian can just stop and let this redirect their thinking, the cross becomes a symbol of hope. When we have faith that God is doing good in our suffering, then we have the hope that no matter how difficult it is, there is a reason for it all. Do you have that hope? Look to the cross not only as of the instrument of your salvation, but also as a guide to how God thinks and acts. See the beauty as God intends you to see it. If God allowed his son to suffer for a good reason, he will also allow us to pass through suffering for good reasons. Most of our suffering is very light compared with Christ's. God knows why he does what he does. Many times we have a bad attitude and complain about the circumstances we are in. But what was Christ's reaction to God's difficult plan? Jesus knew and trusted in God's plan, not what his eyes could see. Jesus trusted in God's plan and not his feelings. Jesus said, "I thirst", to be faithful to God and fulfill prophecy, not to complain about being thirsty. Jesus moved toward the path God was showing him and not away from it.

Which direction are you going in? Are you moving toward God, or are you running from him? Are you trusting, or are you complaining? Are you confident, or are you shaking in fear? You cannot choose the plan for your life; you can only choose your response to God's plan. How will you

respond? Trust him that he has a good purpose for everything. In India, fathers and sons work together to make beautiful dresses to sell. The father sits above where he can see the design, and he instructs the son below on where to move the pieces on the weaving machine. The son's job is to listen extremely carefully to the instructions of the father. From the lower section where the son is, it looks like a total disaster. Random stitches and colors that seem to make no sense, but from above where the father can see, he knows where all the pieces are going, and he's weaving a masterpiece of beauty into the dress. That is the way with God. Though for us on earth it looks disconnected and ugly, the reality is if we could see from God's perspective, we would understand how all the pieces of his plans are coming together to make a beautiful masterpiece.

## 2. Jesus understands our pain and suffering because he experienced terrible pain and suffering

The men who hear Jesus' statement on thirst give him vinegar wine to drink. We learn by comparing the gospel that Jesus was twice offered to drink while he was on the cross. The first time it was the kind of drink that would numb his senses and therefore lower the pain Jesus would have felt. Jesus refused it. How could he serve as a true substitute for sin if he drugged himself? So why did he drink the sour wine in this story? David Mathis explains what this sour wine was and what it means:

*“Sour wine vinegar is mentioned in the Old Testament as a refreshing drink, and in Greek and Roman literature as well it is a common beverage appreciated by laborers and soldiers because it relieved thirst more effectively than water and was inexpensive . . . There are no examples of its use as a hostile gesture. The thought, then, is not of a corrosive vinegar offered as a cruel jest, but of a sour wine of the people . . . The offer of the sip of wine was intended to keep Jesus conscious for as long as possible.”*

The soldiers would give criminals the wine to extend their pain longer, because it would refresh them only for a short time and then it really made the pain worse. Jesus took this wine because he was very thirsty from the loss of blood that he had experienced, but no doubt because he was given the task of suffering in our place. He knows what is to suffer. This scene demonstrates that he chose the suffering of the cross.

Let me ask you a question, have you been treated unjustly? Do you know what it is to experience terrible physical or mental pain? If either of those are true for you, then I have an encouraging word for you today. Jesus was treated unjustly, and so he understands you. Jesus suffered terrible physical and mental pain, so he understands the pain you are feeling. While we run from pain, he chose it because God called him to do that for us and because he loved us. Does it help you to know that he understands your pain?

I will never forget hearing the story of a young boy who had leukemia. His parents have tried to comfort him as he was in the hospital receiving painful treatment. They had little success. They asked the Pastor to come, but he also failed to be able to comfort the boy. One day, some of his family had sent a small gift of flowers and a toy for his room in the hospital. It is common for these flower companies to have their own messengers who would deliver these kinds of purchased gifts. When the delivery man came into the room and saw the boy, he immediately knew what was happening. He looked at the parents and asked, "What is he sick with?" The parents told the

messenger that the boy had leukemia. That's when something amazing happened. The delivery man walked over to the boy. He said, "I know that you don't know me, but when I was a child, I also had leukemia. And look at me, I'm here today. Don't give up, you can beat this cancer." The boy's parents, the professional Pastor and the gifts from the family could not cheer up the boy or give him hope. But the delivery man changed everything. He gave him hope.

Here's the point of that story. In a time like now, where we are going through so much pain and suffering, we must remember that Jesus understands us. He really does know what it is to be alone. He knows what it is to be betrayed. He knows what it is to be misjudged and treated unjustly. He is the God who knows real pain. Think about it. Jesus does not only allow evil; he chooses to suffer under the power of evil for our good. Who do you turn to in your pain? Who do you think will listen? We have a great high priest named Jesus, and he understands us. The beautiful truth is that as we suffer, we do not only take comfort that he knows us and our pains, we come to understand him better because of our pains.

In Hebrews 4:14-16, the word of God tells us:

*"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

One very important thing you must know to correctly understand these verses is that the word for temptation, tests, and trials is only one word in Greek. So it is perfectly equally valid to translate this sentence like this: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested or placed in a trial as we are, yet without sin."* I believe Christ clearly understands our temptations, but there's also no doubt that he also understands what it is to face the tests and trials of pain, suffering, and injustice. He understands how hard it can be to live in this world, and that is why with confidence *"draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* He really understands you, and he loves you. He has drunk of that sour wine.

### **3. Jesus was thirsty, so our soul's thirst could be satisfied forever through a relationship with God**

All throughout the Bible, the image of hunger and thirst is used. In Psalm 42:1, David speaks of how he longs for God as a deer pants for water. Isaiah 55:1-3 calls us to come, drink and eat, that our souls may be filled. God repeatedly allowed his people to be hungry and thirsty so he could be the one who satisfies them. In John 6:35, it reads: *"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'"*

All throughout the story of Jesus' last moments, we are intended to see ourselves in those around Jesus and to see Jesus suffering in our place. At times, we are cowards like Peter and deny Jesus in front of those who are non-believers. We are like Barabbas, who is the guilty one and was released because Jesus was condemned in our place. Many of us are like the crowds who at one-time mocked Jesus. Others of us are like Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus cross, and we understand what it

means to share in the humiliation of Jesus. Jesus took our condemnation. Jesus took our shame. Jesus took our punishment. Jesus took our suffering. He did this so that we could have a relationship with God forever. God is like an all-consuming fire that burns up everything that is bad, and the blood of Jesus is the only thing that can resist that fire. If you want to be in the presence of God, you must be covered in the blood of Jesus. This happens when we believe in him, and it happens spiritually. It does not stop there though. You see the text today speaks to how Jesus took painful thirst on the cross in our place. He went empty and thirsty so that we could be satisfied. This according to the same John is not only physical thirst. In John 6:35 when he said, **“whoever believes in me shall never thirst”**, he means spiritual thirst.

So how do we spiritually thirst? For example, some of us are thirsty for love and intimacy. We are thirsty to be genuinely loved. That is why we try to fill this thirst with relationship after relationship, but he or she never can quench our desire. Jesus took that thirst on the cross and he gave us our relationship with the God that will never stop loving us.

Some of us are thirsty for meaning and purpose. We try to quench our thirst for meaning in a job or in our role as a parent, spouse, church leader, or even Pastor. We find our identity in our wealth or our status. If our job role, title or wealth were taken away, you would be very low, maybe even to the point of wanting to die. But those things never take away the thirst, do they? Like Jesus' thirst on the cross, the sour wine, our false drinks only make our pain and suffering last longer.

Some of us are thirsty for security. We want something to make us feel safe and cared for. We enter into bad relationships, and are willing to do bad things just to continuously receive that false sense of safety. We thirst for that. The truth is that only a relationship with God is capable of giving us real security. He is our Father and he will always save us. Listen to what I mean. Our security is that we cannot be separated from his love. He saves us sometimes **from** the problems we face. This is where he sets up a hedge of protection around us. Nothing can touch us. Other times, he saves us by carrying us **through** the problems we face, like Joseph in the Bible or the three men of Daniel 3 that are in the fire. Though we suffer, he is carrying us through that fire unharmed, though it is scary and even emotionally painful. Lastly, he saves us like he saved the thief on the cross beside him. He saves us **by taking us to be with him in paradise through our physical death**. That is the greatest kind of salvation. But whichever way God chooses, he will always save us. His loving security will never leave us hanging. His promises and people will be there.

Some of us thirst to rid ourselves of the guilt we feel. We want to feel like a good person. Jesus died to pay for every sin: past, present, and future, so that we can be righteous people in God's eyes. Therefore, there is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He forgives us, and he says we are righteous because of what he did. We do not need to do certain things, support popular causes or post our lives in detail on social media to make us feel righteous. Jesus made us righteous on the cross.

It is these twisted desires that live inside each of us that always seek to spiritually satisfy our souls in the wrong places and ways. Jesus was thirsty and drank from sour wine so that he could promise us that whoever believes in him will never thirst again. In a relationship with God, you can have all of these desires met and satisfied by God. Good Friday is a good Friday because it brings us into an eternal relationship with the God who can satisfy our souls.

### Discussion questions:

1. How does Genesis 50:20 help us understand our suffering? How does it help us understand God's role in our suffering? How does it help us to understand how those who are evil sometimes get away with their evil?
2. How does Acts 2:23 help us understand our suffering? How does it help us understand God's role in our suffering?
3. When you think of all of the things Jesus had to suffer as the innocent son of God, does it help you to be able to understand how Jesus can truly relate to your sufferings? How does Hebrews 4:14-16 help you? How might your suffering help you to know Jesus better?
4. Psalm 42:1 speaks of how David longs for God as a deer pants for water. He compares his soul's thirst to the deer's thirst. What things do people's souls thirst for? Are those thirsts bad? When we drink from the wrong place, what happens to our thirst?
5. John 6:35 reads, "Jesus said to them, *'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'*" How does Jesus satisfy our soul's thirst?
6. How can a person come to have a relationship with God, according to John 1:11-13?