

Scripture Fulfilled In Christ's Death

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Does suffering and sorrow come to those Jesus Christ loves? The answer is seen in fulfilled prophecy. The apostle John records only three of Christ's seven statements from the cross and he is careful to note the fulfillment of Scripture:

1. In the gambling for the seamless robe,
2. the giving of the vinegar, or sour wine,
3. and the piercing of His side without breaking any bones.

Every detail of the crucifixion was carefully worked out by the hand of God.

The Scriptures are, both in their general outline and in specific details, God's Word to us about Jesus Christ. Whenever we approach the Bible, we know from the start who is speaking in it and what its theme is.

This was not the case with the apostles. There were undoubtedly times early in their lives, when the Scriptures that they had were confusing. They read it, heard it, and taught it, as most pious Jews of their day, but they did not understand it. It took time for them to gain an understanding from Christ's teaching and also after His resurrection and the time He spent with them and then later through the Holy Spirit. So it does take time to understand and interpret Scripture.

Specifically, they did not fully understand its prophecies of the coming Messiah. This was even true during their three-year association with Jesus. But when He suffered, died, rose again, and came to them after those events to explain how all that had happened to Him had been prophesied beforehand in the Scriptures, their confusion vanished, and their outlook had changed entirely.

They knew that the ancient Scriptures were indeed about Jesus Christ, and they saw it in a new light. In fact, they now saw prophecies of His life on many of its pages, where before they had missed it.

Now much that had happened to Jesus up to this point had been in fulfillment of Scripture. No less than twenty Old Testament predictions relating to events that would surround the death of Christ, words written centuries before His first arrival, were fulfilled with precision within a twenty-four-hour period at the time of His crucifixion. Please turn to John 19.

John 19:23-24 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

John has not drawn attention to this fulfillment of Scripture until this point, and now he begins to note the events of the crucifixion which were in fulfillment of specific Old Testament prophecies showing: 1) that God was in charge of these events, 2) that the Scriptures do not fail, and 3) that Jesus is indeed the anointed One of God, the Messiah.

Now there are four such prophecies which John records. The first prophecy is the division of Christ's clothing among the soldiers of the execution party and the casting of lots for his seamless inner garment. It is prophesied in Psalm 22:18.

The second prophecy is the giving of a vinegar, or sour wine solution to Jesus to drink. This is the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21. Jesus provoked this act by exclaiming, "I thirst." John tells of this fulfillment in John 19:28-29.

The third prophecy John records is the breaking of the legs of the two thieves coupled with the decision not to break Jesus' legs. John describes this in John 19:31-33, 36. It was prophesied in Psalm 34:20. Then the fourth prophecy is the piercing of Christ's side with a spear. John mentions this in John 19:34-35, 37. It is prophesied in Zechariah 12:10.

Now clearly John believed, as did the other writers of the New Testament, that the Bible is God's Word about His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. It is where we meet Him, learn of Him, believe in Him, and grow into the fullness of the faith, through a study of the Word. Without it, none of these things take place.

Now I will go into a little more detail about these four prophecies here. The first is the matter of the dividing of His clothing, which John notes as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22, which we will read here.

Psalm 22:18 They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.

A condemned man was customarily taken to the place of execution by a detachment of four soldiers under the command of a centurion and it was the prerequisite of these soldiers to receive the clothes of the victim.

William Barclay points out in his commentary that the Jews normally wore five articles of clothing: the shoes, turban, girdle, tunic, and an outer robe. Barclay suggests that, since there were four soldiers and five articles of clothing, each had one garment and one article—the inner garment or tunic—was left over.

This may have been the case, or it may have been that the first four items were torn apart or otherwise divided. Regardless, the inner garment was without seam, being woven in one piece from top to bottom. It could not be divided without ruining it. So the soldiers cast lots or gambled for it. John notes this, saying:

John 19:24 They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Many have read a great deal into this reference. It has been said that the mention of Christ's seamless tunic suggested the wholeness of Christ's teaching, or, possibly, that it symbolized the unity of the church. It has also been suggested as being the perfect righteousness of Christ now imparted to the sinner as the basis of his justification.

There may be some truth in each of these explanations, but I doubt that John or any other of the Gospel writers had those things in mind. What they are concerned to emphasize is that this specific detail of the crucifixion, like all the other details, was planned for and prophesied by God. Consequently, neither this nor any other aspect of the death of Christ was accidental.

Now this is not to say that no more may be learned from this prophecy. On the contrary, Psalm 22 in particular seems to have been on Christ's mind during these final hours of His earthly life. Therefore, it gives us a clue as to what he thought His suffering meant and what was to be accomplished by it.

Although there is no reason why we should know all of what was in Christ's mind during those three hours, there are nevertheless several clues which relate His thoughts to this psalm and thereby indicate that He was thinking of it while hanging there.

The first clue is that at the beginning of the period of darkness Jesus cried out with a loud voice, as verse 34 of Mark 15 records, which is a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1:

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The second clue is that He cried out again at the end of three hours of darkness, as recorded in John 19, saying: This phrase is a quotation of Psalm 22:31.

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

The English reader will not find this phrase, "it is finished" in the most common English translations of Psalm 22, but it is a legitimate translation of the one Hebrew word that occurs there. The verse reads:

Psalm 22:31 They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this.

Now this has great implications, because it means that during the hours in which Jesus Christ hung upon the cross His mind remembered the scope of this psalm and He thought of the alienation of the One who was made sin for mankind. He passed on to reflect on the description of suffering the psalm includes and He thought of the final section that speaks of the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles. Only after that did Jesus utter the phrase that marks the psalm's ending—"He has done this" or "It is finished."

In Psalm 22 there are three pictures of Christ that partially explain His suffering. The first verse pictures Christ as having been forsaken. Christ was bearing the penalty for sin, which is death, and death means separation from God. Paul makes this clear in Romans 6.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is death? Not only physical death alone, but spiritual death. Spiritual death is the separation of a person from the source of life, which is God. That is the penalty Christ bore for human sin— separation from God. So when He cried out in a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” it was the cry of one actually separated from the Father. The most terrifying moment He had ever experienced. Christ was forsaken, and it was only by this means that He accomplished our salvation.

Now the second picture of the suffering Savior comes from verse 6.

Psalm 22:6 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.

Why a worm? Why this unusual image? To understand this image one must realize that the Hebrew word for “worm” had come to refer almost exclusively to a special kind of worm from which the people of the Near East derived a valuable crimson dye. It was much like an insect that exists in Mexico today called the cochineal.

As an interesting side note, archeologists have found that this cochineal dye have been found in Hebrew garments from the Middle East back before the time of Christ. So that means that Jews came to what is now known as Mexico, because that is the only place where that bug is found and they carried or imported that dye back to Israel.

The worm known to the Hebrews was the tola. The dye was formed from its blood, released when the animal was crushed. In Hebrew the word for scarlet literally means the “splendor of the tola”

The tola is referred to several times in Scripture. It is the worm that spoiled the manna in the wilderness. The scarlet dye for the linen of the wilderness Tabernacle came from the blood of the tola. It is said of Saul, in II Samuel that he dressed the women of Israel in scarlet, that is that he introduced a period of such prosperity that all their robes could be dyed with this dye.

This image throws light upon Christ’s thoughts, because when Christ thought of Himself as the tola, He thought of Himself as the worm who is crushed for God’s people. His blood was shed for us that we might be clothed in bright raiment.

Now the third picture refers to execution. That is referred to here in verse 21, where it says:

Psalm 22:21 Save Me from the lion’s mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.

The animal mentioned in this verse in the KJV is not really a unicorn, because a unicorn does not exist. The NKJV correctly translates it as a wild ox. It has long pointed horns to which victims were sometimes bound for execution.

As Jesus thought about this image, He probably reflected on the execution aspect of His death and contemplated that God was putting Him to death for our sin.

Now let us go to Luke 23. Forsaken, crushed, and executed, these ideas all help to explain Christ's crucifixion. But there is a more moving concept, That Jesus was, even just before His crucifixion, thinking of other people. This can be seen in His words to the women when He was on the way to Golgotha.

Luke 23:28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

"Weep for yourselves." Christ was concerned with their lives even with what He was facing. And even in His words to Mary and John shortly after the stake was erected, when Jesus saw His mother and John standing by, "He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!'" Then He said to John, "Behold your mother."

From noon until three in the afternoon, when God shrouded the world with darkness, His mind turned to the meaning and purpose of His suffering. His mind eventually turned back again to other people as He went on to think of the fruit His work would produce in those who would later become Christians.

We know that Jesus thought of His disciples, because immediately after the verse that speaks clearly of Christ's death, Psalm 22 goes on to say:

Psalm 22:22 I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

Now not long before His crucifixion Jesus had prayed for His disciples, and in the long prayer recorded in John 17. Now, even while He is dying, He thinks of them again. Before, they had been only followers but now they are brethren. Because by His death they were to become sons of God and coheirs with Him of God's glory.

At the very end, Jesus looked to the spread of the gospel beyond His disciples, even beyond Judaism, to the Gentiles. This is suggested by the contrast between verse 22 and Psalm 22:25.

Psalm 22:22 I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

So in the context of the psalm this obviously means the congregation of Israel. Verse 25 speaks about praise in the great assembly or great congregation. With equal clarity this speaks of the spread of the Gospel beyond Israel to the Gentiles.

Psalm 22:25 My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.

Psalm 22:27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You.

Jesus was thinking of us as He hung on the cross. He died for us personally, and it may help you to know that in the moment of His death He looked forward to the spread of the good news of the

coming Kingdom of God and He was satisfied with what He saw in the future. He was as a priest, purchasing this happiness for us and is ready, as a king, to confer it upon us when we are prepared and made ready for it.

Now let us turn back to John 19. There is something particularly solemn and significant about the last words of men and women. The reason is that, in the face of death, what a person is often comes clearly to the surface and is reflected in speech.

John 19:25-27 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple [that is John], "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

Now the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross have been termed his "last words." This is correct if you are referring to His physical life, however He had much to say after His death. He returned to His disciples to say many more things to them. In fact, these last teachings are essentially important because they have more to say about the great commission of the church.

On the other hand, the sayings from the cross are nevertheless extraordinarily significant. They are significant because they show that: 1) Jesus was in clear possession of His faculties until the very last moment, when He delivered up His spirit to the Father; 2) He understood His death was intended to provide salvation for the world, and; 3) He knew His death would be effectual to that end. The words also show His habitual concern and love for other persons, even at the moment of His most acute suffering.

Jesus was crucified about 9 AM, remained on the stake until 3 PM, and from noon to 3 PM, there was darkness over all the land. He spoke seven times during those terrible hours and the words from the cross are these: The first is found in Luke 23.

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.

These words are a prayer for God to forgive those who were crucifying Him and they show the merciful heart of the Savior. The second scripture is in verse 43 which says:

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

These words were spoken to the believing thief and were a confident promise that he would have an opportunity to enter into God's Kingdom. Jesus discerned that his attitude was one that could be worked with when he was resurrected in the second resurrection.

The third scripture is in John 19.

John 19:26-27 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

The fourth is a record of Christ's words in Matthew 27:46 and also Mark 15:34, which both say:

Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

In this saying the true nature of the atonement is made clear and the deep anguish of Christ being separated from God the Father is revealed to us. The fifth scripture is also recorded in John 19.

John 19:28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"

This request shows the true humanity of Jesus, but even more importantly, it shows His desire that every fact of His death, as also of His life, be in accord with Scripture and in accord with the will of God.

The sixth scripture is in verse 30 of John 19.

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

And the seventh is found in verse 46 of Luke 23.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

These words show Jesus to have been in control of His life until the last and indicate that the relationship between Himself and the Father, which earlier had been broken, as He was made sin for us, would be restored.

Luke recorded only three of these seven statements: the first; the second; and the last. Jesus' prayer for His enemies, and His ministry to a repentant thief, fit in well with Luke's purpose to show Jesus Christ as the sympathetic Son of Man who cared for the needy.

Now while they were nailing Jesus to the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do." Not only was He practicing what He taught, but He was fulfilling prophecy and making intercession for the, transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Nevertheless, during His physical life He preached that people should sin no more and He expected them to change. Notice what Jesus told the man with the 38-year infirmity, in John 5.

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

And when there was no longer anyone around to condemn the woman, notice what Jesus said in John 8.

John 8:11 She said, "No one, Lord." and Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Changed action is the most tangible demonstration of repentance. While being stone hearted with an unwillingness to glorify God signals a lack of repentance, toward the end, many people's minds are not changed, and they are scorched and curse God.

Revelation 16:9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

But, large strides in a new direction are the sure sign that repentance has occurred. Having requested the presence of God, David immediately describes his plan of action in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:13-15 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

He lends backbone to his earnest tone by envisioning outward change to demonstrate his inward repentance. The prophets hold changed action to be the form for true repentance; repeated pleas to turn from idols dot their messages throughout Scripture. New Testament writers Luke and John uphold this standard of changed action.

To be Christ-like we must be concerned for our brethren even when we are under duress and trial, or while suffering. Christ was concerned about the brethren and His family, His mother and His friend John, up until the very end, despite His suffering.

The Days of Unleavened Bread are about our sanctification, about becoming Christ-like, which includes repenting of and overcoming our own sin, Satan, and the world. These days are about being made perfect in love. Jesus was very clear about what He wanted us to understand here in John 15.

John 15:12-14 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

What an honor and a privilege it is to be called His friend! That is exactly how He refers to His people.

I John 4:18-19 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

Jesus Christ set this example for us to follow, and we deeply want to please God in our attitudes and actions. Thankfully, He makes it possible by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Now not one of the Gospels contain all seven of these statements, however. Matthew and Mark each contain one, though they allude to others. Luke and John each contain three, but their lists are different and neither one mentions the saying that Matthew and Mark contain, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" John includes the words regarding Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple, "I thirst," and the final affirmation that the work of the atonement was finished.

It is easy to understand why John includes the words of Jesus to Mary and the corresponding words to the disciple into whose care she was committed. The reason, of course, is that John was himself that disciple. Consequently, the charge was his charge and the importance of it came home to him as to no other.

Let us think of these two whom Christ loved possibly more than any other two people upon earth. Think, first of all, of Mary and of the pain that she had in this moment as a mother. Mary must have been in anguish when she learned of Herod's purpose to destroy her infant's life. She must have been troubled when she was forced on his account to flee into a foreign country and sojourn for several years in the land of Egypt.

Mary must have been pierced through the heart when she saw her Son despised and rejected of men. And she must have been grieved and her heart wrung as she witnessed Him hated and persecuted by His own people. And who can imagine what she persevered as she stood there at the cross? If Jesus was the Man of Sorrows, in a sense, was she not the woman of sorrows?

As we think about these words and about the scene they describe, we recall the saying of the aged Simeon, spoken when the infant Jesus was presented in the Temple by Joseph and Mary.

God had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Christ, and now, coming into the Temple area, at the very moment when Jesus was being presented, he took Him up in his arms and blessed Him.

Luke 2:25-35 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul [that is Mary's soul] also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

What strange words those were at that time! A piercing sorrow for one highly favored by God. How unlikely it all seemed, particularly at the time Simeon spoke, yet it all came to pass and here at the cross we see the fulfillment of Simeon's words.

One lesson we learn from this scene is the certainty of the fulfillment of prophecy. God says in Isaiah 46:

Isaiah 46:10-11 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.

He leaves no doubt with His own words there. Another lesson is that sorrow, even such acute sorrow as this, may come even to those who are greatly loved by Jesus.

We remember the story of the death of Lazarus and of those words to Jesus with which the account begins, "Lord, the one You love is sick." Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, yet Lazarus grew sick and eventually died, and the grief of the sisters was great. Love and sickness are not incompatible with God's will.

God's favor and sorrow sometimes flow along together. But again, this is not all we can say, because although it is true that the beloved of God often suffer for God's sometimes hidden purposes, it is nevertheless true that we take comfort in His knowledge of our sorrows and His solace for us in the midst of them. He is our consolation in times of suffering and distress.

In these words we notice that Jesus was aware of Mary, even in His own sorrow He cared for her, and acted to provide what was needful.

The other person involved in this episode of Christ on the cross is John, the beloved disciple. He is here at the cross, but the background for his appearance is the contrasting picture of the scattering disciples at the time of Christ's arrest in Gethsemane.

Turn over to Matthew 26. Christ had warned the disciples of their approaching cowardice and Jesus predicted Peter's denial.

Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

They all protested what Jesus Christ told them, but remember what Peter claimed.

Matthew 26:35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.

But Jesus was right, and they were wrong. They had forsaken Him, John included. Jesus was left to the scorn and cruelty of His enemies. Yet notice, the cowardice of the disciples was only temporary.

Later, after His resurrection, they would seek Him at the appointed place in Galilee and would speak boldly on His behalf. And here, even before the resurrection, there was at least one who sought Him out even while He hung on the stake. Why?

It is not difficult to discern why. That which brought John to Calvary was the same thing that brought Mary and the other women there. It was that which later brought these and others to the tomb and which brought Mary Magdalene back even after she knew that the body of Jesus was no longer in the garden. It was love for Jesus.

Thus, although they can do nothing at all, they still want to be as near to Him as possible and linger to the end. Mary loved Him and it was more than just a mother's love, she had a spiritual relationship through the Holy Spirit with Him.

John loved Him too and this was the disciple whom Jesus loved and who, quite naturally, loved Him in turn and in a greater way through the Holy Spirit in a spiritual relationship with Him.

John came to Him in spite of his earlier failure and what did he find? Did Jesus rebuke him? Did he look with scorn on one who could not watch with Him even for one short hour and then forsook Him when the moment of testing came? Not at all! Jesus did not rebuke John on His return any more than He rebuked Peter or any of the others. Instead, He gave John an unmistakable privilege. He committed His mother to his charge.

Now if you are one who has neglected your relationship with God and Christ, do as John did and cease from your backsliding and return immediately to Christ. He will greet you with a word of consolation and encouragement.

Mary and John are obviously personally involved in this aspect of Jesus' suffering. But clearly, the central figure in this moving story is Jesus, and He is the one who knows Mary's sorrows. He is the one who knows John's love and now He speaks out of His own love to provide for each one.

The One who hangs on the stake is even at this late moment still providing for others. He is stripped of everything, yet He leaves rich inheritances to those He loves. To His executioners, who even now stand guard over Him, He bequeaths a prayer for pardon, here in Luke 23.

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
And they divided His garments and cast lots.

To the dying but believing thief He grants the promise of future opportunity for salvation.

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

In his words to John and Mary He grants a continuing legacy of the tenderest love. By this word He gives a son to His mother and a mother to His friend. Jesus did not commend John to Mary, but Mary to John. And the real meaning of this episode is that Jesus was caring for His mother and thus fulfilling the Old Testament commandment in Exodus 20:12 to "honor your father and mother." So also, must we honor that commandment.

We are under a God-given obligation to honor our parents, and that obligation does not cease even though we should come of age or move far away from them. We note too that spiritual responsibilities do not remove these obligations. What could be more of a spiritual responsibility than that which Christ Himself was fulfilling as an example?

At the very moment at which He spoke these words Christ was dying for sinners and He was offering Himself as satisfaction to the righteous justice of Almighty God. Yet even at this moment, He does not fail to provide for His mother.

There is one thing more. When Jesus commends Mary to John, He bypasses His own unbelieving family and leaves her to the care of the beloved disciple instead. Is this accidental? Or is it because John was convenient because he was near the cross at this moment? No! Rather, Christ is here bringing into existence a new family based on His atonement.

This is to be our fellowship if we are truly Christ's followers and we should conduct ourselves as those who are members of it by caring for and loving one another. John records Jesus as saying in John 13:

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Now let us shift gears here. It is hard for those of us who have grown up in western lands to understand the horror of thirst or the importance of water. But if this is true in regard to normal circumstances, which it is, how are we to appreciate the thirst of Jesus Christ on the stake?

In lands like ours water may be a thing of beauty or even a pleasant delight. But it does not speak of life itself, which it did to those who lived in biblical lands. Fierce thirst, and the blessing of the water which quenches it, are intensely real in the Bible.

In Genesis, the herdsmen of the patriarchs strive with the foreigner for the wells laboriously cut in the hot rock. In Exodus, the panic of thirst shakes and threatens Moses' leadership. The psalmists and prophets liken joy, happiness, life itself, and God's grace to the blessed stream and the filled fountain.

At Sychar, and in the Temple court, Christ likens water to eternal life and on the Mount He promises fulfillment only to those who thirst for righteousness. In biblical lands thirst was a horrible reality. We cannot fully understand it, yet we must try if we are to appreciate the second of the three words from the cross which John includes in his narrative.

The Bible describes Christ's thirst by saying in verses 14-15 of Psalm 22:

Psalm 22:14-15 I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; you have brought Me to the dust of death.

You get thirsty just reading that description, let alone imagining what it was like. Instead of something quenching and soothing, just prior to Jesus' crucifixion, Christ's enemies gave Him sour wine mixed with gall, which you find written in Matthew 27:34, and myrrh, found in Mark 15:23; which after tasting, He declined.

The gall offered to Christ at His crucifixion, and refused by Him, would be very bitter and would act as an anesthetic, and it tended to diminish the sense of suffering. It was given to the crucified to diminish the suffering through its intoxicating effects.

The myrrh was declined by Jesus for the same reason as the gall, because He did not want to dull His mind and suffering by being in a state of stupefaction from the myrrh, which was used for embalming and was a stimulant as a medicine. He did not want to feel removed from the pain.

To criminals it would have been a kindness, but to Jesus the Sin-bearer, the drugged vinegar was meant as an insult.

Luke 23:35-36 And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God." The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine.

Toward the close of His crucifixion, to fulfill Scripture He cried, "I thirst," and vinegar was brought which He received.

John 19:28-30 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

It was in the midst of suffering that Jesus Christ cried out, "I thirst." John stresses the fact that Jesus felt thirst. He wished to show that He was really human and really underwent the agony at the stake. John goes out of his way to stress the real humanity and the real suffering of Jesus in his account.

Spiritually, we must have a similar thirst, but for righteousness. Even if we suffer for righteousness sake, we have no need to be afraid.

I Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Nothing would better express the strong desire which we should feel to obtain righteousness than hunger and thirst. No needs are so awful; none so striking, as these. They occur daily, and when they continue for a long time, as in case of those shipwrecked or doomed to wander through a vast desert with scarcely any food or drink, nothing is more distressing at that time.

Now turn to Isaiah 55. A fervent desire for anything is often represented in the Scriptures by hunger and thirst. A fervent desire for the blessings of pardon and peace is also represented by thirsting. Also, this intense desire is applied to the sense of need which sinners often have, and to our anxious wishes for salvation. God gives us an invitation to abundant life.

Isaiah 55:1-2 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance."

This is the chapter which says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found." Now turn to Revelation 7. Thirst quenched by water is mentioned in the closing pages of the Bible.

Revelation 7:15-17 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Thirst for righteousness, and the righteousness of Christ will satisfy each one of us. It is the only thing that will satisfy us.

Jesus entered into our suffering and finally died that we might be delivered from sin and its effects. At this point His physical thirst becomes symbolic of our spiritual thirst, and His death the means of alleviating it. This incident teaches something else also, something entirely different from these first lessons. It concerns Jesus' attitude to the Scriptures and His conscious attempts to fulfill them.

We know from the Gospels and also from study of various Old Testament passages that many significant details of Jesus Christ's death were clearly prophesied and therefore fell out in strict conformity to the will of God. Every important detail of the great event had been written down beforehand and all the events were plainly foretold centuries before they came to pass.

But notice in comparing the incident of Christ's thirst with any other list of fulfilled prophecies, that it has a unique quality. Christ had nothing to do with some of these fulfillments during His incarnation; they fell out in simple correspondence to God's will. The false accusations, the verdicts at the trials, the crucifixion with thieves, the gambling for His garments, the fact that His bones were not broken at all. These were all a part of God's will.

In others, Christ played a part. For example, in being silent before His judges; in praying for His enemies; in yielding His spirit into the hands of the Father. But in John 19:28, in this unique incident of His crying out, "I thirst," we are told that Jesus did so specifically in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Now although the Scriptures certainly would be fulfilled, Jesus did not consider this a reason to do nothing. And when it was within His power to bring about the fulfillment through His own action, that is exactly what He did.

This relates to the works part of faith. Christ's faith was not a dead faith, He worked to help fulfill the prophecies in some cases. He had an active participation in it, not only in His beating and death, but also in His words as well.

We know that Jesus had been meditating upon the Scriptures during the hours of His agony and He had been thinking of Psalm 22 especially. Apparently His mind had also run over other prophecies, in a sense, checking them off to assure Himself that everything prophesied concerning His life had been accomplished. He did not just stand back and let things unfold on their own. He and His Father had planned them and carried them out with precision.

Was there anything in Genesis that had been left undone? No. In Exodus? No. In Deuteronomy? No. At last he reached Psalm 69, where it is said:

Psalm 69:21 They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Already they had offered Him gall to deaden His pain, but there had been no offer of vinegar for His thirst and therefore, He calls out, "I thirst," that this might be completed. This was the last prophecy. So we are told, "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!" is one word in the Greek text which is transliterated as *tetelestai*. The word was a common one and was used by merchants to mean "The price is all paid!"

Shepherds and priests used it when they found a perfect sheep, ready for sacrifice, and Christ died as the perfect Lamb of God. Servants, when their work was completed, would use this word when reporting to their masters. Christ, the obedient Servant, had finished the work the Father gave Him to do and Christ willingly and deliberately gave up His life—He laid down His life for His friends and for the whole of humanity.

Now the application for those who believe in the Scriptures is this. If we believe the Bible is God's Word, we believe that the prophecies it contains will come true. But do we sit back and do nothing? Or, do we actively seek to participate in God's work?

Is prophecy a deterrent to human action? Not at all! It is a stimulus, because none are so bold in God's service as those who know the outcome in advance and encourage themselves by claiming God's promises. In John 17, Jesus prays for the sanctification of His people, saying:

John 17:17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

And so we are sanctified if we are members of God's church. But does this mean that we are therefore to do nothing to seek to grow spiritually? Obviously, not at all! The process of our sanctification is study of, meditation on, and obedience to God's Word. This is our responsibility; it is necessary and absolutely must be done.

So although ultimately we will all be made like Jesus Christ, in the meantime we are sanctified if we use the means God has placed at our disposal. In the same prayer in John 17, Jesus prays for the unity of the church.

John 17:20-21 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

So we must work hard to be unified with one another. We must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Jesus Christ set us an extraordinary example of caring for others, even in the face of suffering and sorrow. Caring for others helps strengthen unity of the Spirit.