

There is a Fountain

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- [0 : 00] If you want to follow this morning's reading, if you can open your pew Bibles at page 1072 and have your fingers ready at 1087.
- This morning's reading comes in two parts. So it's John 7, 37 to 39, and then John 19, part of verse 16 through to verse 37.
- On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.
- Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. And by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.
- Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. The crucifixion of Jesus.
- [1 : 25] So the soldiers took charge of Jesus, carrying his own cross. He went out to the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.
- There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side and Jesus in the middle.
- Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.
- The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, Do not write the king of the Jews, but that this man claimed to be the king of the Jews.
- Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written. When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining.
- [2 : 44] This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Let's not tear it, they said to one another. Let's decide by lot who will get it.
- This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. So this is what the soldiers did.
- Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, Woman, here is your son.
- And to the disciple, Here is your mother. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.
- A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.
- [4 : 02] When he had received the drink, Jesus said, It is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Now it was the day of preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.

The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true.

He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

[5 : 19] Not one of his bones will be broken. And, as another Scripture says, they will look on the one they have pierced.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you so much for reading, Lamont, and it would be great help to me if you'd keep your Bibles open at John chapter 19.

Well, we're all at different stages, I guess, this morning. Different stages, different backgrounds. And some of you, of course, have been around church for years.

For others of you, this is all new. And for those of us who've been around church for a long time, a passage like this can seem familiar.

And the risk for us, I guess, if we're not careful, is that when we come to a passage like this, the risk is the cross kind of gets lost in the rear-view mirror, as someone puts it.

[6 : 29] Lost in the rear-view mirror in the remote history of our own personal spiritual journey. But without the cross, there can be no gospel.

There simply is no good news without the cross. So let's pray and ask God for his help as we come to think about this this morning.

Heavenly Father, as we come to the cross this morning, would you give us alert minds and attentive ears? Would your spirit come in power?

Lord, would you open up the floodgates of your mercy and make known the gospel to each of us here, applying it to our hearts afresh and pointing us to the finished work of your son, our Lord Jesus, that we may have life in him.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. Well, I remember being at the cinema some years ago watching an award-winning documentary, Grizzly Man, a film by Werner Herzog, and an extraordinary and moving film it was about the life and tragic death of Timothy Treadwell, a self-styled bear conservationist who'd spent 13 summers on Kodiak Island off the coast of Alaska in the Gulf of Alaska with his beloved brown bears who he'd befriended, at least so he thought, off the coast of Alaska.

[8 : 15] By the way, these bears are absolutely massive, ridiculously big bears, bigger than polar bears. The biggest bears in the world, these Kodiak bears.

And amidst the stunning footage, there's moments of the sublime and the ridiculous, almost funny if it weren't so tragic, I guess. Like when he's talking to the camera in the foreground of the frame and there's these enormous bears playing in the background and it's a bit like a pantomime at times or scooping up salmon with their enormous paws in the background.

And he gives them pet names like Thumper or Sergeant Brown or there's a scene with one of his favorite bears, his good friend, Mr. Chocolate, standing about 15 feet high in his hind legs.

And I remember at the cinema thinking the most surreal thing, the most absurd thing about this was an interview with one of his ex-girlfriends.

And she's sitting there, I kid you not, wearing on her ears grizzly bear earrings, almost a spoof at this point. Her ears adorned with jewelry in the form of the very thing that had devoured somebody she loved.

[9 : 32] And I thought to myself, this is absurd. This is utterly bizarre. And yet we almost don't realize it, do we? We almost don't notice it, the equivalently bizarre jewelry that many of us wear as Christians, a cross.

Think about it. It's barbaric. An instrument of death, an instrument of torture. A strange symbol in some ways, but one that gets right to the very heart of the Christian message.

And as we survey this scene in John chapter 19, as we gaze at Jesus, lifted up on the cross, nailed to that wooden cross for a small group of his followers, most of them women.

As we gaze at Jesus, as we're confronted by the cross, it's worth our asking, I think, two questions. Worth our asking two questions.

A big question and a small question. A wide-angle question and a narrow-focused question. The wide-angle question is this. What does the cross mean to you?

[10 : 52] What's the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross? That's the big question. The narrow-focused question is this. And by the way, the narrow question will help us to answer the big question.

But at the end of our passage, we're told verse 33, his legs are not broken. We're told verse 34, his side is pierced.

Then we're given this very visual thing, this very graphic image, aren't we? A fountain opens up from Jesus' side. A sudden flow of blood and water.

And John, the narrator, is extremely excited about this. He thinks this is the most significant thing in the whole narrative.

So let's read verse 35. The man who saw it, that's John, has given testimony. His testimony is true. He knows, he tells the truth.

[11 : 54] He testifies, so that you may believe. So the focused question, worth our pondering, is this.

Why is John so excited about this in particular? What is it that John thinks is so significant? We've got two headings this morning.

They're in the handouts, and that very graphic image of the flow of water and blood from Jesus' side giving us our headings. The atoning blood, firstly, and the living water, secondly.

So the atoning blood first. Right at the heart of the Christian message is Jesus' death on the cross. His death in our place.

His death making possible our salvation. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish.

[12 : 56] But Jesus doesn't want us to believe in him, doesn't want us to trust him on blind faith. He gives us evidence. And over the past weeks in our study of John through the lens of water, we've looked at Jesus' miracles, some of them.

We've looked at the water into wine in chapter two. We've looked at the man paralyzed for 38 years, healed. We've looked at the healing of a man born blind in chapter nine.

These are signs that John has recorded for us. He tells us at the end of the book, so that you may believe that Jesus is who he says he is. But by believing in him, you may have life.

And we've seen this eyewitness evidence for these signs. And we've seen that the evidence checked out.

And so that's one strand of evidence, these miraculous signs. Another strand of evidence in John's gospel comes three times in our passage.

[14 : 00] You might have noticed as it was read, this little phrase, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. We see it in verse 24 with the soldiers casting lots.

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled. Verse 28, Later, so that the scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

And then again in verse 36, these things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled. So if you know your Old Testament as John's original Jewish readers would have, you begin to see the connections and realize what's going on.

The idea that Jesus' life and death was predicted and foretold in astonishingly detailed ways. And so a couple of things for us to note about this evidence.

Firstly, the predictions were made hundreds of years beforehand. 500 years beforehand, 1,000 years beforehand, 1,400 years beforehand.

[15 : 14] So it's not a case of twiddling the evidence, adjusting the prediction after the event. But secondly, the fulfillment of these predictions doesn't depend on Jesus or his friends.

It isn't contingent on Jesus or those who follow him. This is important. So let's go through them. The Old Testament references are at the bottom of the handout if you want to follow along with them.

So verse 23 in chapter 19 of John's Gospel. When they crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them.

But let's not tear the undergarment, they say. A quarter of an undergarment isn't worth anybody's use, I suppose. But notice the people doing this are Roman soldiers.

They haven't a clue about the Jewish scriptures. They don't care about King David. They don't care about Psalm 22. They've never heard of it. They're just doing their job.

[16 : 24] It's a bit gruesome, isn't it? But for the Roman soldiers, they're just getting on with the grisly business. If your job is to kill people in the Roman Empire, you get to keep their possessions.

It's one of the grisly perks of their job. So that's what they're doing. But it's uncanny, isn't it? It's just in the precise detail, following a script that God had announced a thousand years beforehand.

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, they divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

What about the second one? Well, maybe it looks like Jesus fixes this one. Verse 28, later, knowing that everything had now been finished and so that the scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

I thirst, literally. Jesus knows his Old Testament, of course. Maybe he's just following the script deliberately. But actually, the prophecy isn't that Jesus is thirsty.

[17 : 38] Psalm 69, again, written a thousand years beforehand. the prophecy is that when he is thirsty, when he is thirsty, they give him vinegar.

Jesus says he's thirsty, he doesn't control what they give him. Well, there's a jar of wine vinegar lying about, they soak a sponge in it, they put it on a stalk and they lift it up to his lips.

They give him vinegar for his lips. a thousand years beforehand. We'll come back to this one in our second section.

The last one is to do with the soldiers making sure that they're definitely dead, those who are crucified that day. Crucifixion is a long, slow, torturous death.

To speed it up, they sometimes did a thing they called *crurifragium*. they broke the legs of the person being crucified. One way or another, there's medical papers on this for those of you who are medics and want to swat up on it.

[18 : 47] One way or another, if you break the legs, they die faster. Now this is important because as they're being killed, we read in verse 31, as they're being killed, it was the day of preparation for the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders didn't want bodies on the cross on the Sabbath. And this, I think, is amongst the worst kind of religious hypocrisy, isn't it?

They don't mind killing somebody based on a fake trial, but as long as we keep the bodies out of sight on the Sabbath, please make sure it's cleared up before the special religious day.

It'd be like us committing a murder on a Saturday and then coming to church on a Sunday as if nothing had happened. It reminds me of a line from one of Lord Byron's debaucherous poems.

Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter, sermons and soda water the day after. Religious hypocrisy. Well, Jewish Sabbath starts at nightfall.

[19 : 53] Get a shift on, won't you, they say, to the soldiers. So the soldiers come, verse 32, and break the legs of the two who'd been crucified with Jesus.

But when they come to Jesus and find that he's already dead, they don't break his legs. So just to check, they pierce Jesus' sides with a spear.

Out flows the blood and the water. This is a powerful medical testimony. What's described here is consistent with heart failure and occurs only, I understand, in a narrow range of circumstances.

Again, there's medical papers on this for those of you who are interested. The point is he's definitely dead. And the soldiers, they don't know the first thing about Numbers chapter 9 or Exodus chapter 12 written 1400 years before this.

They don't know the prophecy of Zechariah written 500 years before. They're just doing their job. They're just checking he's dead. But John, he knows the prophecy.

[21 : 07] He knows the significance of it. And he points out just how extraordinary this is. It's exactly what was predicted. It's not like Jesus is calling out the script here.

He's dead. It's just the soldiers going about the grim business that they're doing. And it turns out God has predicted, God has planned out every little detail, even in the apparent defeat of Jesus' death.

It turns out that God is sovereign and in control after all. Jesus lays down his life for us. He chooses to die.

So what does this tell us about the meaning of the cross? What does this tell us about the meaning of Jesus' death? To understand that, we need to dig a little deeper and think about those last two prophecies a little bit more.

Not one of his bones is broken and his side is pierced. John's really excited about this. We saw earlier.

[22 : 14] He thinks this is the most significant thing. They didn't break his bones, but they pierced his side. One of the highlights of the Jewish calendar was the Passover around Easter time, celebrating an event 3,400 years ago when God's people were enslaved in Egypt.

The book of Exodus tells us of an amazing rescue where God delivered his people out of Egypt. The way he did it was this. God demanded that Pharaoh let the people go and worship him.

Pharaoh says no, so God sends plagues to compel them. But Pharaoh is stubborn. He needs the slave labor for his pyramid building and stuff like that.

He says, I'm not going to let your people go. So finally God sends the worst plague of all. At midnight he will pass through the land and strike down every firstborn son.

So hands up if you are firstborn here. a significant proportion of us. Some of us may be not admitting to it. A terrible judgment passed through the land.

[23 : 29] The firstborn struck down. God's wrath at the atrocities, at the oppression in the land of Egypt. God explains there's a way to escape this judgment.

He gives instructions in Exodus chapter 12. So why don't we turn there now. It's page 69 in our Bibles. Keep a finger in chapter 19 of John.

Exodus chapter 12. Reading from verse 21. God explains as a way to escape his judgment there to select animals and slaughter the Passover lamb.

But to take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in blood and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe.

So God's saying, when I send judgment to be safe, put the blood of the lamb on the door.

[24 : 46] When I see the blood, I will pass over your household. And as a bonus, they got to eat roast lamb for their dinner. This is a source of contention in the Middleton household.

My wife Alice loves lambs. I love lamb roasted. And she loves lambs so much that she spent a season doing lambing on North Yost.

And since then, we haven't been able to eat roast lamb in our households. She loves lamb. I love eating roast lamb. Or I would if I was allowed to. That's an issue that we're working on in our marriage.

But if you're there at that first Passover, you're going to make sure, aren't you, that the door is absolutely plastered in blood. Plastered in blood all over the vertical and the horizontal timbers of that door frame.

Plastered in blood. And on the day of judgment, the only question that matters in Egypt is this. Is there blood on the door? Is there blood on your doorposts?

[25 : 55] It doesn't matter what grades you get at school. It doesn't matter what qualifications you get. It doesn't matter how well you do in your career. The only question that matters at all is do you have the blood of the lamb on your doorposts?

Are you going to be safe on judgment day? One other detail in the Passover that we need to know, the lamb that you sacrificed has to be absolutely perfect without defect, without blemish.

You had to make sure it was a perfect lamb, specifically one without any of its bones broken. So here's Jesus on the cross back in John chapter 19, and it's the day of preparation, the day before the special Passover Sabbath.

Jesus dies at the Passover time of year exactly. Again, humanly speaking, this is not in his control. It's his enemies who decide to kill him at the Passover.

As he dies, they get him some wine vinegar, they put it on a hyssop stalk, exactly the same thing they'd use to paint the blood on the doorposts at the Passover, blood from Jesus' hands and feet on the horizontal and the vertical members of the cross.

[27 : 20] And as he hangs there, they're about to break his bones, they break the bones of the other two beside him, but they don't break Jesus' bones. At the last minute, says John, they don't break Jesus' bones.

I promise. I saw it with my own eyes. They didn't break his bones. Jesus is the Passover lamb, the one who the Passover lamb points forward to, the one who John the Baptist, right at the beginning of John's gospel, John the Baptist sees Jesus and declares, look, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the blood of an innocent lamb, the perfect Passover sacrifice.

So Jesus lays down his life, gives up his spirit to deal with our sins, to deal with your sins. His sacrifice means that on the day of judgment we can be safe.

If we put our trust in his accomplished, finished work on the cross, we put our trust in the crucified Christ. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have life.

And so this leads us on to our second main heading, the living water. not only are our sins dealt with at the cross, not only are our sins dealt with objectively, but subjectively our spiritual thirst is satisfied.

[29 : 02] John's account of Golgotha ends verse 34 with one of the soldiers piercing Jesus' side. He pierces his side, and this it turns out fulfills another super specific prophecy about God being pierced.

In Zechariah 12, 10, God speaks through the prophet, I will pour out a spirit of grace, they will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for a firstborn.

Then Zechariah goes on to describe a fountain that will be opened up on that day. And that everyone who washes in this fountain will have all their sins and impurities washed away.

When they pierce Jesus' side, that very fountain that Zechariah spoke of is opened up and issues forth bringing a sudden flow of blood and water, a fountain filled with blood, a fountain flowing with water.

And John says this, I think he expects us, his readers, to ponder the significance of this, to think about the blood and the water, and for us to be informed by all that he has said about the blood and the water up to this point in his gospel.

[30 : 27] He expects us to think about what Jesus has said about the blood and the water in his gospel. We're to connect the flow of blood and water from Jesus at the cross to what Jesus had said earlier in the gospel about blood and water.

We've thought about the blood already, so let's think more briefly about the water. Of course, throughout this series we've been thinking about water in John's gospel in particular. When his dying last moments hanging there on the cross, baking in the heat of the Mediterranean sun, Jesus draws breath and says, verse 28, I am thirsty.

And it reminds us if we've been following along in the series of an incident in chapter four when Jesus also thirsts. Another time that Jesus was thirsty at the well in Samaria where he meets the woman and asks her for a drink.

And then they get talking and Jesus says to her, if you knew who it is you're talking to, you'd be asking me not that way around and I would have given you living water. And she's understandably a little bit confused about what's going on, but he's talking here about spiritual satisfaction.

And then in chapter seven, which we read earlier, Jesus says something quite remarkable. At the feast of the tabernacles, the greatest day of that festival, the one who thirsts on the cross stood up and said in a loud voice, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[32 : 04] Whoever believes in me, rivers of water will flow. So Jesus there identifies our need, our spiritual thirst. The city around us is spiritually thirsty.

All of us here spiritually thirsty. It doesn't matter whether we're seeking to satisfy that thirst in relationships like the woman in Samaria. It doesn't matter if we're seeking to satisfy that thirst in the pursuit of material wealth or hedonistic pleasure.

these things won't quench our spiritual thirst, our longings and desires like that. It's not a bit. Back in 1997, the band The Verve released a song that gave voice to the spiritual dissatisfaction of a generation.

The frontman, Richard Ashcroft, was interviewed about it at the time. He says, there's a new track I've just written. It goes like this. It goes that drugs don't work.

They just make me worse. And I know I'll see your face again. That's how I'm feeling at the moment. They make me worse. But I still take them.

[33 : 14] Out of boredom and frustration, you turn to something else to escape. And then, writing from a Siberian gulag, the author Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote this.

people don't know what they're striving for. They exhaust themselves in the senseless pursuit of material wealth and die without realizing their spiritual significance.

Jesus identifies our need, our spiritual dissatisfaction, and he invites us to come to him with the promise of living waters, the promise of something that will truly satisfy.

And then, John explains what this means in John 7, 39. By this, he meant the Holy Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. The living waters refer to the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 22] Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, but now, in his death, Jesus is glorified. So I think what we're seeing at the cross in symbolic form, in very visual form, the water flowing literally from Jesus' side, symbolizing the living waters that will be poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit is sent forth by the risen, ascended Jesus and poured out on all believers.

a life-giving stream to renew us, to transform us, to quench our spiritual thirst, to remind us of the significance of Christ's death on the cross, to equip us to tell others about the good news of him crucified.

what does the cross mean to you? Jesus' death didn't come out of nowhere.

It was foretold and foreshadowed, a fountain of blood and water, the death of the perfect Lamb who chose to lay down his life for you as a sacrifice so that whoever trusts in him on the day of judgment, God will see the blood and his judgment will pass over our lives so that whoever trusts in him is given streams of living water of the Holy Spirit.

Let me close in this way. The ministry of the 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon was driven by the centrality of the cross.

[36 : 05] On his tombstone he has etched into it the third verse of William Cooper's hymn There is a Fountain. The inscription reads like this, Ever since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die.

This is the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. This is why Christians think it's a good thing. This is why we celebrate it why we have jewelry shaped like it. Come to me says Jesus come and drink I am the source I am the fountainhead come and be washed clean come and drink and be satisfied.

Let's pray. Father thank you for the cross.

Thank you that it was your plan all along that it was planned not an accident. Thank you that the Lord Jesus went to his death willingly that he laid down his life as a perfect sacrifice as our substitute so that in the fountain of blood and water we can be washed clean all our guilt and shame removed so that when you see his blood marking out our lives your judgment will pass over us.

We thank you that in the overflowing fountain of your grace you have given us the gift of your Holy Spirit poured out on us like living waters revive us and refresh us and renew us that we may better serve our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray.

[38 : 03] Amen.