

Words of Longing

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to take time now to look together at what we read with Israel earlier in John chapter 19. COVID, global pandemic, the economic shutdown that we've suffered, education has been thrown into turmoil.
- So much of life disrupted over the last six months, lockdown, isolation, family stress. And that's why I decided a while ago that it'd be really interesting to look at how Jesus coped with hard things.
- And so look at the cross of Jesus and what he says when he's there, because that helps us to think about how do we live well as human beings in hard times?
- How do we find wisdom to live when things seem dark? And today we've got the saying of Jesus on the cross, this cry of Jesus on the cross, I'm thirsty. Words of longing. And we have so many longings, so many needs, so many hurts.
- That we were crying out for help with. There's a song that you probably recognize. When your day is long and the night, the night is yours alone.
- [1 : 2 8] When you're sure you've had enough of this life. Well, hang on. Don't let yourself go. Because everybody cries and everybody hurts sometimes.
- So that's an REM song. It's called Everybody Hurts. And the song just moves through this whole process of somebody who's in a really dark place, struggling to hold on.
- And the song just reminded them, hang on. Everybody cries, everybody hurts sometimes. So we're asking, how do we live well when our bodies and our minds are hurting?
- So come Thursday, when you jump out of bed, put on your running shoes and go out the door, what are you going to think about? Well, one thing I'd like you to remember is this great verse from the prophecy of Isaiah.
- And it's just this. In all your afflictions, he was afflicted. That's just talking about God.
- [2 : 3 2] That when Israel suffered, God suffered. That he gets our distresses. When we hurt, he hurt. And that's a great thing that when we suffer, we have this understanding that God knows what our suffering is like.
- And that's especially true for us in the person of Jesus Christ. And so that's what we see of Jesus here in John 19.
- He's hurting. He's in need. He's suffering. He's crying out, I am thirsty. We have a real God who became really human and who is in real pain.
- So my first kind of real point then this morning is real pain for a real man. Just to think about what this thirst that Jesus was experiencing tells us is real thirst.
- This is not a piece of theater that Jesus is performing. He's been beaten. He's bleeding. He's sweating. He's deeply dehydrated.
- [3 : 4 2] A thirst was part of the torture of crucifixion. And crucifixion, of course, was designed to torment human beings and cause them to die in such a terrible way that no rebel, no terrorist would ever dare challenge the power and might of Rome.

So the cross was an instrument of terror. Which meant that what happened to the crucified person had to be terrifying. And so Jesus here, as he cries out with this deep thirst, this powerful dehydration, he is in pain.

He's suffering. And he's longing for that most simple thing, for water and for the life that water brings, for a drink and the relief that it would offer.

What does that tell me and you? Well, it tells us this, that Jesus, in his incarnation, he's the son of God. He's come into earth. He's born of Mary. And his humanity is real.

He's a real man suffering real pain. So there's this picture, okay? That's Superman. And sometimes we might be tempted to think, you know, Jesus is kind of like some kind of Superman, that he's above the fray, that he doesn't experience life the way that we experience it.

[5 : 06] But that's not what we read here. He's thirsting. He's dehydrated. His suffering is real. It's intense. It's brutal. So Jesus does not just look human.

He is human. He's utterly human, as well as being utterly God. And so his pain, his suffering is real. I've got a really high pain threshold, or I used to think I did anyway.

And when I was a dumb, stupid kid at the end of primary school or in my early teens, I loved to show people how much pain I could put up with. They could hit me.

They could pull my ears and twist them as hard as they can. Throw snooker balls at my head. We used to shoot each other with air pistols to prove it didn't hurt. All kinds of pain contests, putting lit cigarettes inside our mouths, stubbing them out in our hands, getting into fights.

And no, it didn't really hurt. But eventually you find, of course, that even for those of us with a really high pain threshold, things do hurt. So that's what I'm saying about Jesus.

[6 : 15] He didn't have a supernatural pain threshold. He wasn't immune to physical agony, to physical torment. He's very composed at this moment on the cross.

But that composure is not a result of his immunity to pain. It's a result of God's sustaining grace. So let's remember this. When he's crucified, he endured what all crucified people suffer, a burning and consuming thirst.

In this moment, Jesus is engaged in a titanic physical and spiritual battle. Every aspect of his being, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, is under enormous strain.

His whole person is under fire. He's not just dying, he's tasting death. Slowly, steadily, relentlessly, absorbing death.

Absorbing its sting, its pain, its sorrow, its fears, its agonies, its wounds and hurts. Why? For us. And so his death is not instant, it's not peaceful.

[7 : 27] It's tortuous, it's slow, and it's painful. He here is slowly, intentionally, and deliberately yielding himself into the grip or the jaws of death.

So he's a real man with real pain. The incarnate God gets our lives. He feels our pain, our suffering, our grief. He gets us. When we suffer, he suffers with us.

He's the high priest who offers himself as a sacrifice, but is touched with a feeling of our infirmity. So you might be struggling with stuff today.

Physical pains, illness. I know some of you are going through grief and loss and bereavement. Personal struggles of all kinds.

So remind yourself of this. The God who sits on the throne today is not some kind of remote, detached deity. Our saviour, Jesus, sits on the throne.

[8 : 30] He's a real man. He is still the incarnate Christ. He hasn't set aside his humanity. And he's suffered real pain.

So we have a real Jesus who is a real man with real pain. And then I want to say this. Real life means that we need real people. So the reality of Jesus is amazing.

He burped. He sweated. His thumb hurt when he hit it with a hammer. He bled when he sawed through his hand. He cried. He got anxious and breathless.

He wept. He felt compassion. I was reading an article this week by somebody called Kelly Capuch from Covenant College, who taught Anna Lauren theology. And he says this.

Jesus experienced restless nights. Weariness. Belly laughter. Hunger pains. A dry throat. And the need to relieve himself. We don't mention any of this to be humorous or to be controversial.

[9 : 32] But it's good, isn't it? It's good to say Jesus' humanity was real, just like ours. That's freeing for us. We don't need to be ashamed of our bodily and mental frailties.

Jesus dignifies and blesses them. So let's remember, we're not made to be Instagram perfect. It's okay to be a messy, needy human being.

We're not robots. We're sufferers. And we're sinners. And this world, guess what? This world is not always a very easy place to be. It wasn't easy for Jesus.

And it's not always going to be easy for you. And it's not always been easy for me. Because real human people are needy. Real human people are inadequate.

Real people have pain. Real people have illness. Our bodies let us down. We get disease and injuries. Our minds let us down. We struggle mentally. Our thoughts can hurt us as much as our bodies.

[10 : 34] We saw that with Jesus last week. He felt alone, forsaken, and abandoned. So we are needy people and we need others. Real life means we need real people to help us.

Because that's the way we're made. Frail, inadequate. I'm going to show a really horrible picture now. Look away if you're squeamish. Turn your eyes, avert your gaze, protect your children.

And this is a picture I've never shown anyone else before. But I'm going to give you a quick glimpse of it. Because this is me suffering. So this is me in hospital about six years ago.

After an operation. And there's a big purple line going into my arm there. It's my favourite line. It's the morphine pump. So after surgery in the high dependency unit. Really struggling physically.

Don't really like showing that picture to people. So I'll move on. But I just want to say. I think for your good and for the good of our church.

[11 : 36] We need to be able to be open about how we struggle. And what we find difficult in life. So that we're not all faking it. And just pretending we're fine.

Because that doesn't get us very far. And in that picture that I showed you there. I was in a lot of pain physically. I'd had a major operation.

My colon removed actually. But the thing about that picture was. I wasn't just sore physically. I was really hurting mentally and spiritually.

I was. How do I put it? I don't know. Just. My body was in pain. My mind was in pain. I was mentally and spiritually.

Finding it hard to cope with what my body was going through. And often when our bodies hurt. Our minds hurt too. Our whole.

[12 : 36] Our whole person is thrown into turmoil. We're a psychosomatic unity. And we're not stoics. We don't deny our pain.

Or just grin and bear it. You know. Think about Jesus on the cross. He needed a drink. And he couldn't get it for himself. I remember often being in hospital.

Thirsty. Not able. To lift a cup of water. IV fluids. And people coming around with little sponges. And wet my mouth. And Jesus is just as frail.

And vulnerable. And needy. And inadequate. He needs somebody else. Just to lift up a sponge. And wet his lips. And you know.

When you're sick. Or in hospital. We hate the loss of independence. We hate accepting help. We hate being pitied. But if Jesus can embrace it.

[13 : 36] So can we. Because all it means. When we're pitied. And helpless. And hurting. Physically. And when we feel broken.

In our minds. And wounded spiritually. It just means. We're human. We're really human. So I put up this nice picture. Of people.

Friends. Friends. I was looking for a picture. Of my city group. And I couldn't find one. City groups are communities. Of sort of 10. 12. 15. 20 people. At Cornerstone.

In normal times. We meet together. For dinner. We talk about life. We share life. We do stuff together. We pray with each other. We read the Bible together. And after I had that surgery.

There was. An amazing. Kindness to me. In my church family. You know. My city group. They did up. And decorated my bedroom. They cooked food.

[14 : 31] People came to visit me. People came to pray with me. People loved me. And looked after me. I had friends. That I really needed.

In order to recover physically. Recover mentally. Recover spiritually. From everything that I was going through. So it is a good thing. And it is a godly thing.

To accept your humanity. And that God made you to need other people. You are not meant for splendid isolation. You are not supposed to go alone. We were deliberately designed.

To need each other. And to need God. So you might have trouble asking for help. And there is lots of reasons. Why we are like that.

But I do encourage you. Move into community. Even with two or three or four other people. Where you can build trust in relationships. Where you are honest about who you are. And what's going on in your life.

[15 : 26] And you're not faking it. To make it. Because we're human. We have to let others know. Who we really are. And how we really are. And we don't want cornerstone.

Ever to be a place where you have to pretend. We're not going to criticize you. For sinning and struggling. We're not going to jump on you.

We're not going to ignore the hard things in your life. Hopefully we're going to respond with compassion. The emotion we read about most in Jesus in the New Testament is compassion.

So let's learn to depend on each other. Real people need real friends. So let's be a church of friends.

Real friends. Real people need the real Jesus. Okay. So we want to just keep going here for a few more minutes. Creatures need the help of the creator.

[16 : 24] We're dependent. Sufferers need the help of the healer. Sinners need the help of the savior. We're dependent on God physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Every hour of every day. And even Jesus in his human nature, his real human nature, he depended on his father through the spirit to sustain him physically, mentally, spiritually.

So let's have less of this kind of thing. Keep calm and carry on. Jesus did not have a keep calm and carry on coffee mug or tea towel or t-shirt.

Instead of turning to himself and his inner stoicism and his amazing powers of endurance, he turns to the father in heaven.

He calls on God in weakness. And so we need real friends, but we need God also.

[17 : 29] And Jesus is the God we turn to because he's been here in our nature and he's able to help us and to heal us.

There's a quote here from Gregory. And he said this, So Jesus assumed our human nature and so he can heal it in its brokenness.

I want to really encourage you to ask God for help. I really want to ask you, ask you or encourage you to ask God to, to be your strength day by day.

Jesus assumed a real finite, limited human nature, taking on himself our infirmities, diseases, illnesses, weaknesses. Because he's got a true human nature in the incarnation, he understands our creaturely needs and he is our helper.

He's like us in every way except for sin. He humbles himself, empties himself, experiences life like us. In his real thirst, he is sustained and helped by God.

[18 : 49] And so in our real needs, we are sustained and helped by Jesus. So do ask God for help when you're struggling to make it through the day.

When you're struggling physically or mentally or spiritually, ask God for help because that's the way you were made. Jesus is our healer.

He assumes a true human nature. He knows what it is to suffer. And so we can come to him with our suffering and he'll empathize. In the pains of life and death, Jesus is there with us.

In the struggles we experience, Jesus is there with us. No matter how deep we go, how hard we go, how dark it gets, how awful it feels, Jesus is there with us, full of compassion, feeling our sorrows.

He will not cure our every physical ailment. He might not mend our every psychological problem. He will work through ordinary medicine and ordinary means.

[19 : 56] But ultimately, he is the healer of our souls. He stills our hearts. He brings peace. He calms the storm. Out my back door the other day, I saw this really great rainbow.

And I love rainbows. A reminder of God's covenant promise. His unbreakable covenant promise that the flood will never overwhelm us again.

In all their afflictions, he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and in his pity, he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

However low we go, however weak we feel, how broken we are, Jesus feels our suffering and he lifts us up and he will carry us.

He will not let the flood overwhelm us. He's our savior. He forgives our sins. He frees us to be ourselves instead of being slaves to our dark desires.

[20 : 58] He takes a true human nature so he can take our sins as well and suffer for them. And so as Jesus is experiencing this great thirst on the cross for sinners, he's doing so that ultimately we can drink the waters of everlasting life.

Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus says this, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

We have so many needs and longings, physical, yes. Mental and emotional, yes. And we can bring them all to God and look for help and strength.

And when we feel overwhelmed, he promises that he will be there with us. And then the very depth of our need is our spiritual need.

The darkness that invades our soul, the sin that crushes us, torments us, imprisons us. And we need a savior.

[22 : 13] We need a new life. We need living waters. We are thirsty people. With a deep longing for life. And we look in so many different ways to find that longing through material things or through family or friendship or people.

And all these things can be so good for us. And yet they're not the ultimate thing that will truly satisfy the longings of our soul. And the longing of our soul is ultimately for the life of God within, for the presence of God near.

And that's Jesus. He's holding out this offer of life. And I want to say to me and to you, take and drink.

Let me pray. Lord Jesus, we just want to pray now for each of us as we feel the wounds of life and the burdens and pressures of life, that we would not be broken, but that we may be made whole again in Jesus Christ.

Thank you that you suffered for us so that as we suffer, that we might know your gracious presence with us. Heal our hearts and minds today, we pray.

[23 : 22] Save us from the depth and the power and the darkness of our sin. And give us those living waters within. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.