Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The last two years we have paused whatever sermon series we were in for a special Advent series in the weeks leading up to Christmas. And if we were going to do that this year, today would have been the day to begin such a series. So for those of you who really like Advent sermons, I have bad news and good news.

* The bad news, as you can see from our text today, is that we are not pausing our regular series for a special Advent series; we are continuing with the Gospel of John.
* The good news is that we are continuing with the Gospel of John ☺
  + And here is why this is good news: Earlier in the service, we sung the Christmas hymn, ‘Christians, Awake, Salute the Happy Morn.’ And in one of its stanzas, we sung, “Trace we the babe, who has retrieved our loss, from His poor manger to His bitter cross.” So Christmas is not just about baby Jesus lying in the manger; we must always remember that He came to save His people from their sins.
  + And so, because we are literally at the “bitter cross” in this sermon series, we are perfectly placed to ‘trace the babe,’ which means to see how the child who was born in Bethlehem became our Saviour.
  + And that is in view in our text because what Jesus says from the cross here says a lot about how He “retrieved our loss,” meaning, *why* we need to be saved and *how* we are saved in Him.
  + So this passage should fill us with love and admiration for what Jesus did to save us, which means that while this is not a special Advent series, this truly is an Advent sermon.

But congregation, our text is important also because it is a simple yet profound record of the moment that Jesus, the Son of God, died. It is almost too incredible and mysterious for us to even begin to understand. It is already beyond staggering to think that the Second Person the Trinity would choose to leave heaven and be born as a baby in some sort of nondescript stable room in Bethlehem, but that He would subject Himself to the horrors of the cross and die is just astonishing and confounding. So before anything else, just as we would reverently and silently bow our heads with the news that someone we love has died, we have even more reason to reverently and silently bow our heads at what we read here. And yet, as we shall see, what we read here is also reason for the loudest thanksgiving and praise because it is our salvation!

So **in this record of the moment that Jesus died**, our two, main points will be **How Jesus *Prepared* for Death** and **How Jesus *Died*** . And it will be a sermon in two parts. Our focus today will be *how Jesus prepared to die* from vv28-29. Next Sunday we will look at v30 and *how Jesus died*. But how He prepared to die and how He died are very connected, as we shall see today.

1. So our first sermon from this passage is on vv28-29 and **how Jesus prepared to die**.
   1. We mentioned in our last Gospel of John sermon that when you put all of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ death together, we read of Jesus speaking seven times while on the cross. Our text last time looked at the fourth of the seven sayings, which is where Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to John, the disciple and the author of this Gospel. Well, the fifth thing that Jesus said from the cross is not recorded by John. Matthew and Mark tell us that there were three hours of darkness from 12pm to 3pm and at the end of those three hours, Jesus cried out, “‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani?’ which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”
      1. And we are going to see in a moment why it is important to know about this fifth saying as we consider the sixth and seventh sayings that we have here in our text. But I first want to take a minute to address **a common misunderstanding** that some of us might have about the order of events here.
         1. Please take out your Forms and Confessions book and turn to p. 8. There you will find the words of the Apostles’ Creed. And notice what is said about Jesus’ death – “Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again…” These are words that most of us have recited hundreds of times.
         2. But it is because of these words that we can easily make the mistake of thinking that Jesus *went* to hell *after* He died and *before* He rose again. For on face value, that is what these words seem to be saying – crucified, dead, buried, descended into hell.
         3. But if He went to hell after He died and He did something there that is part of our salvation, it would make the words “*it is finished,*” that He spoke before He died, something of a lie. Right? So the work of securing our salvation must have been completed while He was alive and on the cross.
         4. And this is where **the footnote** at the bottom of page 8, helps us: It says, “That is, on the cross Jesus suffered the agony of hell which our sins deserved.” And we know that Jesus suffered the agony of hell while on the cross because of the words of His fifth saying from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”
         5. So that statement, “He descended into hell,” is not in the creed to tell us *when* He did that or to suggest that it is about *a place* that Jesus went to; it is there to tell us that Jesus suffered the punishment of hell that we deserved, and that He did this *throughout* the crucifixion but *especially* during the three hours of darkness. Indeed, a key reason for those three hours of darkness was to cover or hide the spiritual agony that Jesus suffered as He endured the eternal torment of His Father’s wrath that your sins and my sins deserve.
         6. So Jesus descent into hell means that He suffered the agonies of hell while He was on the cross.
   2. So coming back to our text, what this means is that there was a three hour or so gap between what we read in v27 and what we read in v28. Jesus entrusted His mother’s care to John, then He suffered the agonies of hell during the darkness, then He spoke those words about being forsaken by His Father, and next comes what we read in our text about Jesus preparing to die and then dying. And before we say anything else about our text, consider this for a moment: With ordinary, unbelieving and unrepentant human beings, death comes first and later comes Judgment Day and eternity in hell, but with Jesus, in order for Him to be our acceptable Saviour, He first endured the agonies of hell and then He died. And that is very significant because it means that He died having already defeated sin and hell and the devil. So although He still had to die, in order that He be like us in every way, He died triumphant and victorious. And this is brought out by what we see in the sixth and seventh sayings from the cross. And it is this sixth saying that is our focus today: “*I thirst*.” We are told that Jesus, “*knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst*.’” And these words reveal **the divinity and the humanity of Jesus**.
      1. They reveal His divinity because, as God, He knew that all was now finished. Just as He knew beforehand that Peter would deny Him, and that Judas would betray Him, and the moment of His arrest and all that would follow, so He knew here that there would not be some angelic rescue mission but that the time of His death had come. And He also knew what would follow Him saying that He was thirsty. So this Jesus is the divine Son of God.
      2. But we also see His humanity:
         1. We are told that what He said next, “I thirst,” was **to fulfill Scripture**. And we must never think that Jesus was born with the words of the Bible downloaded into His mind. No no, just like you and me He had to study the Scriptures to learn them. And it was from His study of the Scriptures that He learned all of the things that He and others needed to do in order to fulfill every prophecy about His life and death. So He knew about the prophecy about thirst and drink that we shall look at in a moment.
            1. But surely this is an encouragement for our own Bible study, right? To be obedient to the Father’s will, the Son studied Scripture. And if He had to do this, how much more must we?! And this means the hard work of listening to sermons and setting time aside for personal Bible study and group Bible study preparation and memorization.
            2. On Friday I saw many of the boys and girls receiving certificates for Bible memorization work. And boys and girls, you earned those certificates with your hard work. Well done! But I hope that your work was first and foremost not about getting a certificate but about storing the word of God in your heart. Having Bible verses in your heart will give you words you can use to praise God and will also help you to resist sin. And it is hard to imagine but there may come a day when you are in prison because you are a Christian and you are not allowed a Bible. And then those Bible verses and passages that you have learned will be so precious to you.
         2. But we also see the humanity of Jesus in that **He was thirsty** and He asked for a drink.
            1. I got home from Wellington on Tuesday and the grass was high. So late on Tuesday afternoon I mowed the lawns and at the end of it all I was thirsty. And I am sure you all know how physical activity makes you thirsty.
            2. Well, here our Lord Jesus adds dignity to something as simple as being thirsty. Many religions have Supreme gods that are unknowable and invisible or gods that come to earth and get up to all sorts of mischief. But every time you take a sip of water to quench your thirst you can remind yourself that your Saviour, who is God, is also a human being just like you, except for sin. Your humanity is precious to Him! He knows your ordinary needs as a human being for He had them too. And you can talk with Him about these ordinary needs in your prayers. What wonderful encouragement just from the fact that Jesus was thirsty!
   3. Well, that brings us to **v29** where we see that in response to His statement about His thirst, He was given some sour wine, which He drank. And the two things we must note here are that this was an unkind act of one of the Jews in the crowd but also a very deliberate and gracious act of the Lord Jesus to drink this sour wine.
      1. How do we know that it was one of the Jewish onlookers who gave Him this drink and that it was an unkind act?
         1. Well, **Matthew 27:47** tells us that “*one of the bystanders*” gave Him this drink with a stick and sponge. And it is clear from the context that the bystanders were Jews who mocked Him and made fun of Him throughout the whole ordeal.
         2. And we know this also because of what we read from **Psalm 69**. Psalm 69 describes the Psalmist as surrounded by many enemies who hated him. And in vv20-21 of that Psalm the Psalmist describes some of the unkind things that his enemies did to him. And we read, “*For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink*.” So Jesus knew that the only prophecy about the suffering of Messiah that was yet to be fulfilled involved Him being thirsty and being given sour wine to drink by His enemies. And that is exactly what happened here in v29.
         3. And it was **an unkind act** because the sour wine was the cheapest and weakest type of wine you could get. An alcoholic equivalent today would probably be what we disparagingly refer to as chateau cardboard or marque spew. It is not going to get anyone drunk unless they drink many liters of the stuff.
         4. But an even better modern day equivalent for this sour wine is a cheap energy drink. You see, water was so bad in those days that no one would carry a water bottle around with them; this sour wine was how you kept yourself hydrated if you had physical work to do, which makes it exactly the sort of drink that the soldiers who were crucifying Jesus would have with them.
         5. So one of the Jewish onlookers took this drink and gave it to Jesus to **revive** Him so that His agony and suffering would be prolonged. In the mind of the person who gave it to Him, he or she was making Jesus feel the pain more clearly. It was one more act in a day full of mocking and unkind acts.
      2. But why was it also a deliberate and gracious act of Jesus to drink this sour wine?
         1. Well, in **Mark 15:23** we are told that before they crucified Jesus, the soldiers “*offered [Jesus] wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it*.” Wine mixed with myrrh was like an anesthetic that would dull the pain. But Jesus knew that He had to experience every ounce of the Father’s eternal agony in order to be our Saviour, which is why He refused *that* drink.
         2. But what He was offered here, as we have seen, was a kind of cheap and nasty energy drink. So Jesus drank this reviving drink so that with full consciousness He could do the very last thing He came to do, which was to die. There would be no semi-conscious slipping into death for Jesus but a wide awake, deliberate, active, entering into death, which we shall consider in more detail next Sunday, God willing.
   4. So congregation, let’s finish with two points of application:
      1. First of all, Jesus did what He did here to fulfill all Scripture. Some tiny verse buried deep in Psalm 69 was recalled by Jesus and fulfilled. You can actually Google Old Testament prophecies about Jesus the Messiah and you will find lists about which tribe He had to come from, where He would be born, the circumstances of His birth, that He would flee to Egypt for a time, that He would be sinless, that He would come from Galilee, that He would perform miracles, that He would be rejected, how He would save us, that He would be betrayed, how He would die, that His clothes would be cast lots for, and that He would be given sour wine, and many, many more. Boys and girls, maybe you can ask you parents to help you look up that list during the school holidays. One of them that I saw had 55 prophecies on the list. What a great project! And you can tick them all off, tick, tick, tick, tick… And here is the last one to tick off as Jesus drank sour wine given to Him by His enemies. And what this reveals is that Bible is totally trustworthy. It is reliable. Every prophecy and promise in it will be fulfilled.
         1. Right now, the people of the world are so anxious and uptight about climate change and whether or not the planet will survive another 10 years. But while we should minimize pollution and recycle, etc, God has promised not to destroy the world as He once did with the global flood. And He has promised that the end of the world will come when He sends His Son back to earth to usher in Judgment Day and the new heavens and the new earth. So do not fear that the whole world will be flooded or uninhabitable in 10 years, or that a meteor will obliterate the planet. And you can be confident about these things because Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 69! The Bible is trustworthy!
      2. But secondly and most wonderfully, Believer, do you see the love of Jesus for you, here in this act? This is amazing love! He refused anesthetic so that He could experience every ounce of the Father’s eternal wrath that all your sins deserved. But He took a drink now so that He could enter into death as the victorious, conquering Saviour!
         1. He knows how much we fear death as human beings. It is the horrible, dark intruder that steals life away from ourselves and our loved ones. But believers need not fear death, because of Jesus. He has gone there before you and has come out the other side. He is the resurrection and the life! **1 Corinthians 15:55-57** says, “*"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Death comes to us all. But as a believer, how Jesus prepared for death is why you can prepare for death with peace and confidence that the Lord will receive your soul into His presence.
         2. Do you have this peace and confidence, my friend? Are you free of the fears and anxieties that consume so many people today? It can be yours if you will repent of your sins and believe today that Jesus died on the cross for you. Turn away from your evil deeds. Confess your sin to God. Take hold of Jesus and trust in Him and live for Him from this day onwards.

So congregation, we have traced the babe, who has retrieved our loss, from His poor manger to His bitter cross. We have seen the gospel in how Jesus prepared to die.

Let us pray: