I THIRST

John19:28–29

The end of Jesus’ earthly life was at this point imminent. To highlight this fact the John used the strategic word tetelestai, by which he meant that the life of Jesus was coming to its intended end or goal. Indeed, within the space of the three verses (vv. 28–30) the verb family of telein/teleioun is used three times, whereas all words associated with this word family are used only six additional times in the rest of the Gospel, and two of those times appear in the summary of chap. 17 (17:4, 23). The intended hour of Jesus’ glorification had finally fully arrived. The King had been crucified, and he was dying.

Jesus understood the implications of this moment, and although he had earlier been troubled by what they would involve and thought seriously of calling on the Father to save him from this hour, he refused to abandon the purpose or goal for which he came (John 12:27). Now the conclusion to the life of God’s unique agent of salvation had arrived. He had been beaten, mocked, been burdened with his heavy crosspiece, been nailed to it, and then hoisted on the pole. According to Mark 15:23 he had earlier refused to accept the dulling sedative of wine mixed with myrrh during the painful march with the crosspiece, but by now his physical body was possibly craving something to drink. So he cried, “I am thirsty” (dipsō).

John then added what he believed was the true reason for this statement, that Jesus said this “in order that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” This refers primarily to the thirst experienced by Jesus in fulfilling scripture. If so, it might be viewed as a statement of an intention on the part of Jesus to fulfill Scripture or more probably concerning the fact that he viewed this cry of Jesus for something to drink as a fulfillment of Scripture. This statement also was made…

* to show that Jesus was truly the Promised Messiah, the One who fulfilled Scripture
* to show that Jesus’ mind was set on fulfilling the Scriptures of the promised Messiah
* to show that Jesus had come as the Promised Messiah to do the will of God, dying as the sacrifice for man. He refused to do God’s will unthoughtfully, with deadened senses and a semi-conscious mind. He had work to do in sacrificing His life for man: He was to taste death for all men, and He would taste it in full consciousness, being as mentally alert as possible

Although in Mark 15:34–36 the giving to Jesus of a drink of cheap sour wine/vinegar is linked to the cry of desolation (anguished misery or loneliness) in that Gospel, there is here in John no such cry. For Mark that cry clearly reflected a scriptural allusion to Psalm 22:1, and the same Psalm alludes to the dividing and casting of lots for the victim’s clothing (22:18). Moreover, it is interesting that the same Psalm also alludes to the dehydrated state of the victim, for his strength is dried up like a broken “potsherd” and his “tongue sticks to the roof of [his] mouth” (Psalm 22:15).

The connection of Mark’s Death Story, and to a lesser extent John’s Death Story, with Psalm 22 is unmistakable. But the Death Stories in both Mark and John can likewise be linked to statements in Psalm 69, where the victim’s “throat is parched” (Psalm 69:3) and he is given “vinegar for [his] thirst” (Psalm 69:21).

In John the drink offered to Jesus is also here identified as a cheap sour wine/vinegar (oxous), which “was cheaper than regular wine, [and] was a favorite beverage of the lower ranks of society.” Good wine would not be wasted on dying men.

Although there is in John no cry of desolation, as indicated above, the reader must not assume that John completely avoided the sense of Jesus experiencing suffering. His entire life was pictured as directed to the hour of his glorification (John 2:4, 11; 12:27). His statement “I am thirsty,” therefore must be understood in this context of hanging on a painful cross and must be viewed in light of the allusions to sufferings in Psalms.

This cheap sour wine was given to Jesus in a soaked sponge (spongon) from a nearby jar or container. The sponge was put on or placed around hyssop and brought to his mouth. The problem is to understand how a small rather flexible bush like hyssop could hold a soaked sponge (1 Kgs 4:33 “hyssop that springeth out of the wall”).

This problem probably led to a variant being introduced in several later cursive Greek manuscripts from hyssōpō to hyssō (“javelin”; Latin peticae), which is the rendering in the New English Bible version.

Other recent translations have attempted to solve the problem by adding a qualifier not present in the Greek such as “branch” (NRSV, NLT) or “stalk” (NIV, TEV). The problem may be alleviated by remembering that the crucifixion pole probably was not very tall and Jesus was certainly not lifted as high as is pictured in most art devoted to the cross. All that would be required was that his feet were above the ground. As a result the soldiers could probably have reached his mouth without too much difficulty by putting the sponge on a small plant that could easily be ripped from the nearby rocks.

As the authoritative, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God, we know Scripture tells us everything we need to know about Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. But there is a sense in which we miss the full weight of His sacrifice with just a simple reading of the text. His hours and hours of agony simply cannot be encapsulated in a few short passages.

The death Christ died on the cross was one of absolute torture. You and I cannot even begin to imagine all the pain that Jesus was forced to endure for our sakes. Let’s refresh our mind about the terrible price Jesus paid that day.

1. Scourged - Matt. 27:26 “Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”
2. Beaten - Luke 22:63-64 “And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him.”
3. Spit upon - Matt. 27:30-31 “And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.”
4. Mocked - Matt. 27:27-29 “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!”
5. Nailed to the Cross - Matt. 27:38; John 20:25 “The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.’
6. Stripped Naked - Matt. 27:35 “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.”
7. Beard Plucked from His Face - Isa. 50:6 “And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.”

These truths don't even begin to scratch the surface of Jesus suffered for you and I. Isa. 52:14 says, “As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:” His was a bitter cup, but one that He drank of willingly so that we might be saved, Luke 22:41-42.

Not only was there pain which the Savior endured for you and I, but there was also shame, Heb. 12:2 which says, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Think of it, the Son of God was stripped naked before the world and nailed to the cross. He endured the most shameful death that anyone could ever know. Gal. 3:13 says, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:” In fact the crucifixion was one of the primary reasons the Jews refused to believe on Jesus Christ. How could the Savior of the world die in such a shameful and cursed manner.

There was severe pain, cruel shame, but perhaps the greatest agony Jesus suffered while on the cross was the judgement that came from His Father in Matt. 27:46 (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?). When Jesus was on that cross, He literally became the sins of the world (2 Cor. 5:21). Then, the Father, unable to tolerate sin in His presence, judged the Lord Jesus as if He were every sinner that ever lived. This was the greatest agony that Jesus was forced to endure, because while He was on that cross, for the first time ever, there was a gulf between Him and the Father. Jesus literally experienced every man's death and every man's Hell while on the cross (2 Thes. 1:8-9).

Why did He suffer these things? Why did the Lamb of God willingly offer up His life as an atonement for our sins? 2 profound reasons:

1. Because He loved us, Jer. 33:3; 1 John 4:19. 2.)
2. Because He wanted to prove His love for us, Rom. 5:8.

The Bible says, “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, ‘I am thirsty.’” ([John 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%2019.28)). This was Christ’s fifth utterance from the cross. As the end neared, Christ uttered a final plea for physical relief. Earlier He had spat out the vinegar mixed with painkiller that had been offered Him. Now, when He asked for relief from the horrible thirst of dehydration, He was given only a sponge saturated with pure wine vinegar. John writes, “A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth” ([John 19:29](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%2019.29)).

In His thirst we see the true humanity of Christ. Although He was God incarnate, in His physical body, He experienced all the normal human limitations of real human flesh. And none was more vivid than this moment of agonizing thirst after hours of hanging on the cross. He suffered bodily to an extent few have ever suffered. So that Scriptures might be fulfilled all He was given to salve His fiery thirst was vinegar. “They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” ([Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Ps%2069.21)).