

## John 19:23-29 – Lent 4 Wednesday – I Thirst – March 18, 2026

*+In Nomine Iesu+*

Our Gospel reading today contains some familiar words from Jesus as He suffers on the cross. We hear the third word again—between Jesus, Mary, and John—a word of compassion we have covered already in this sermon series. But here we add the fifth word. And we will focus there.

St. John the Theologian—the Disciple—the Apostle—present at the cross—tells us, “After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.”

It seems like an insignificant detail of the passion story. But I want us to pay attention to the smallest details today. We are drawing near to the end of His suffering. Jesus is thirsty—as we might expect. This is no easy experience—as we saw this clearly last week with the Cry of Dereliction. But to relieve His thirst—even for just a few seconds—He is given sour wine to drink.

Sour wine refers to cheap wine—wine with vinegar—that the soldiers likely drank. Which is probably why it is there at the cross. It was regularly used to relieve thirst. It was cheaper than regular wine. It’s not something you would serve to your guests. But it was a favorite beverage of the lower ranks of society. Jesus is crucified by common men.

Now, this detail—this sour wine—is mentioned in all four Gospels. It has meaning. And we do well to pay attention. Sour wine is not the same as the myrrh wine we find in Mark 15. Here Mark tells us, “And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.” This account is earlier in His suffering—at the beginning of the crucifixion.

And just to be clear, in Mark, the language is different. And the purpose is different. Mark refers to regular wine mixed with myrrh. This is actually medicinal. It is meant to ease his suffering as a painkiller—a sedative. It is a tiny bit of compassion amidst this torturous Roman execution. And Jesus rejects this path. He experiences all the suffering this moment requires.

But later, towards the end of His suffering, Jesus receives the sour wine. And on a practical basis, it doesn’t ease His suffering. In fact, it actually gives Him just one more moment. It provides Him enough moisture in His parched throat—knowing that His suffering is now complete—to be able to cry out, “It is finished”—a loud cry of triumph at the end—in the very next verse. This is important for everyone to hear. And we will talk about this line next week.

But John tells us that this thirst—and this sour wine—happened to fulfill the Scripture. We saw this last week with Psalm 22 and Jesus’ word, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” Jesus takes up this Psalm. Really, He intends for us to remember the whole Psalm. And by praying these words, He shows that He fulfills it—that it was about Him from the beginning.

Jesus’ thirst has a similar connection. And John makes sure that we are clear about this. He tells us Jesus thirsts to fulfill Scripture. It is probably best to start with Psalm 69.

In this Psalm, David says, “I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.”

Then later in this same Psalm, he says, “Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”

But other Psalms come to mind as well. Psalm 22—the Psalm we talked about last week—is also notable. Here, David says, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.”

And you get the idea. We have hints of the cross throughout the Psalter. Hints that only fit the life and experience of Jesus. And John would have us notice.

Now, truly, Jesus was thirsty. How could He not be? This was part of His physical suffering. It is even the intention of the Roman soldiers. You aren’t going to stay hydrated long under the Judean sun.

But Jesus isn’t just complaining about His physical condition. His mind is steeped in Scripture. He understands the relevance of these Psalms to Himself—and for us. And John wants us to know that every part of Jesus’ passion was the Father’s plan of redemption. And the Son is fully obedient to it. In the Psalms, David is a prophetic model. And Jesus is David’s greater Son.

There is one other interesting detail here regarding Jesus fulfilling Scripture. John chooses a rather unusual verb for this purpose—a careful verb. In fact, he uses it three times in just a few verses. It gets a little lost in English. But here, Jesus knows that all is now *finished*. Jesus *fulfills* the Scripture. Jesus says, in just one verse beyond our reading, “It is *finished*.” It’s all the same verb.

We’ll pick this up with more detail next week. But here, John highlights the completion—the fulfillment—of Jesus’ work. And part of that work is the fulfillment of Scripture—all of the prophecies that God left for His people for their coming Savior. Jesus’ cry, “I am thirsty,” is the final instance of His active, self-conscious obedience to the Father. He has perfectly completed the entire prophetic image of the Suffering Servant—to borrow Isaiah’s language.

And it is also no mistake that this sour wine comes to Him on a hyssop branch. Again, John would have us notice the details. Truly, the soldiers didn’t care. A hyssop branch was sturdy enough to hold the sponge—which held the sour wine. They just used whatever they had nearby. But Jesus knew He fulfilled prophecy. They fulfilled it inadvertently—which is just often the case—think Judas, Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate.

Remember, at Pentecost, according to Exodus 12, the Israelites were to “Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.”

This was about averting God’s wrath in the plagues. God supplied them with a substitute—a lamb at the Passover. The blood of the lamb painted on the doorposts with a hyssop branch would keep them safe from the destroyer when he came upon the Egyptians.

And now God provides them at Passover with the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Again, it is as David says in Psalm 51, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” This is what the cross is all about.

But there is yet one more detail worth mentioning here. Now, admittedly, it is a little more symbolic. Jesus’ thirst is physical. But I think we can suggest it is also spiritual. Remember that Jesus just prayed, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” At the cross, the Father turns His face away. But now, Jesus desires for that fellowship to be restored. His desire is for a right relationship within the Godhead. He thirsts for restoration as He returns to the Father.

Again, we look for insight in the Psalms. In Psalm 63, David prays, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

And this kind of language is all over the Psalms. It is true of Jesus. But it is to be true of us as well. It is the proper attitude—flowing out of the first commandment. God is our highest good. We are to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. We are to love Him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are to thirst for God and the things of God.

I really appreciate the way our hymn says it. We have been working through the 21 verses of Jesus, in Your Dying Woes. Each of the seven Words of Christ are given three verses each. In verse 15, for “I thirst,” the hymn says this, “May we thirst Your love to know. Lead us in our sin and woe, where the healing waters flow: hear us, holy Jesus.”

We have spiritual needs akin to physical hunger and thirst. God helps us to see our need for repentance, renewal, regeneration, righteousness, reverence. And these can only be met in the places God has promised to be with His grace. And this is where we find Jesus. The cross is right in the middle of everything.

Keep in mind that this is John’s Gospel. This is the Gospel in which Jesus offers living water to the Samaritan woman at the well—our Gospel reading a week ago. Here, Jesus says, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

But this is something we find in the Sermon on the Mount as well. In Matthew 5, we hear, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” And this kind of thirst is a thirst that Christ desires for you to recognize. And this brings us full circle back to Christ as He fulfills all righteousness for us on the cross. We are to thirst for the living water that Jesus alone makes available to us.

We often misunderstand our own needs. We think we need someone to listen to our complaints. We need someone to affirm our life choices. We need something to appease our relentless boredom. We are never quite content. We are always thirsting for more. And none of it actually satisfies.

But Jesus gives us what we actually need. He gives us His Word and His wisdom. He supplies the forgiveness of our sins. He gives us the water of life for all eternity. He gives us Himself.

And we see this especially in His crucifixion. His sacrifice was to meet our most fundamental needs for forgiveness, life, and salvation. And because of this, we thirst—not just for the gifts—although we desperately need them—but for the Giver of the gifts Himself. This moment on the cross places a desire in our hearts for a rightly ordered relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus thirsts on the cross. And the details matter. And here, His true Humanity becomes visible—even as we recognize His true Deity—as He suffers—but He suffers for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus thirsts to fulfill the Scripture, bringing to mind the Psalms—and all they say about the Suffering Servant. The hyssop branch brings to mind the Passover—and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And the details even cause us to hunger and thirst for Christ—and His righteousness.

Next week, we will stay in John’s Gospel. In fact, we will pick up with the very next verse. This is actually where we hear that Jesus received the sour wine. And this may be Jesus’ most famous word, “It is finished.”

This is the word we find on our black paraments on the altar. And with this word, we find more than just a conclusion to Jesus’ suffering—although it is that. Jesus doesn’t suffer in hell after His death. And this is not a cry of desolation or despair. Instead, it is an announcement of triumph. And we will deal with “It is finished” next Wednesday. Until then, **may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*