

## John 19:28-30

### Seeing the Accomplishment of our Salvation in the Thirst of Jesus

This morning we come, finally, to the death of our Lord.

**I. John 19:28–30** — After this, Jesus, knowing that **all things were now accomplished** [*teleo*], said (**in order to accomplish** [*teleioo*] the Scripture), “**I THIRST** [*dipsao*; verb].” A jar full of sour wine [*oxos*] was standing there [the preferred drink for quenching thirst and commonly used by the soldiers]; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is accomplished** [*teleo*\*]!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

When Jesus says, “I thirst,” is He referring to physical thirst (which, on a cross, could be a horrible torment), or is He referring to a different kind of thirst?—a spiritual thirst? How we answer this question will change everything about how we read and understand this passage. Because we assume physical thirst—and because only this week I’ve become convinced otherwise—we’re going to need to spend some time exploring this question. In the process, we’ll see in a new and a wonderful way the full accomplishment of our salvation.

### **II. Difficulties if Jesus was speaking of physical thirst**

John tells us that Jesus said, “I thirst,” *in order to accomplish the Scripture*. But John doesn’t cite any specific Scripture. The general assumption is that John has in mind these verses from Psalm 69:

- Psalm 69:20–21 — I hoped for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall [*chole*] for my food and for my thirst [*dipsa*] they gave me sour wine [*oxos*] to drink.

That seems pretty “open and shut” doesn’t it? I believe that John does have this passage in mind, but only in a secondary way.

The physical thirst interpretation assumes that before the Scripture could be fulfilled which says, “for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,” Jesus had to ask for that drink; He had to say, “I thirst.” But if we look at Matthew’s and Luke’s account, that doesn’t seem to be the case. There appear to be three different times when Jesus was offered a drink.

- Matthew 27:33–34 — And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall [*chole*; perhaps a narcotic?]; and after tasting it, He did not want to drink.

Matthew doesn’t mention a fulfillment of Scripture, but he does apparently see this as a “filling up” of the first half of Psalm 69:21 (“they... gave me gall for my food”; cf. “myrrh” in Mk. 15:22-23). Luke tells us about the next time that Jesus was offered a drink.

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\* *Teleo* (and the related *teleioo*) speaks of an end (*telos*) that has been reached—a goal that has been accomplished.

- Luke 23:36–37 — The soldiers also mocked [Jesus], coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”

Luke doesn't mention any fulfillment of Scripture, but this would obviously qualify as the “filling up” of the second half of Psalm 69:21 (“for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink”). So by the time Jesus said, “I thirst,” immediately before He died, Psalm 69:21 had already been “fulfilled.” This doesn't mean that this second offering of sour wine isn't part of the fulfillment (cf. Mat. and Mk.), but it does mean that it wasn't *necessary* for Jesus to say, “I thirst,” in order for this fulfillment to happen. It wasn't necessary for Jesus to ask for a drink in order to “accomplish” Psalm 69:21 because Psalm 69:21 had already been accomplished. And in any case, John's emphasis is preeminently on the word that *Jesus speaks*: “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, said (in order to accomplish the Scripture), “*I thirst.*” If Psalm 69:21 has already been fulfilled, then what is the significance of this word that Jesus speaks *in order to accomplish the Scripture*?

A second difficulty with the physical thirst interpretation is that Jesus asks for a drink *knowing* that *immediately after* receiving the drink He will bow His head and give up His spirit. We know that Jesus doesn't say things only in order to “match” a prediction. In other words, Jesus isn't thinking to Himself: There's a Scripture that predicted I would be offered sour wine, so in order for that to happen, I know I need to ask for a drink before I die. In fact, if Jesus had never been offered sour wine to drink, the Scriptures would still be trustworthy and true (because there was never any “prediction”). If Jesus is *asking* for a drink, then the reason must be because He truly is thirsty and because He truly is craving a drink.<sup>†</sup> But for how long will Jesus' thirst be “satisfied”? Apparently, only for a few seconds before He bows His head and gives up His spirit. But this makes Jesus' drink nothing more than a necessary step that had to be got “out of the way” before Jesus could die. This implies that Jesus' “thirst” was never really the point, and that He only said He was thirsty to fulfill a Scripture about “sour wine.” Not only does this contradict what we know about Scriptural fulfillments, but it ignores the fact that John's primary emphasis is not on the sour wine, but on this word that Jesus speaks: “*I thirst.*”

A third difficulty with the physical thirst interpretation is that it assumes Jesus' *statement* (“I thirst”) is an implied *request* that He's addressing to the bystanders (“Please give Me a drink”). But this seems “out of character.” Jesus did experience the torment of real physical thirst. But in His commitment to drink the cup of suffering that the Father had given Him (18:11), it doesn't seem “in character” for Jesus to be *asking* the bystanders for a drink (cf. Mat. 4:1-4). When Jesus was *offered* a narcotic drink to help take the edge off some of the pain, He refused to take it (Mat. 27:34; Mk. 15:23). Every other word that Jesus speaks from the cross has to do either with His concern for others or with His redemptive work, or with His relationship to the Father.

- Luke 23:34 — “**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**”
- Luke 23:43 — [Jesus] said to [the thief on the cross], “**Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.**”

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<sup>†</sup> Morris suggests that Jesus asked for this drink in order to “moisten His parched throat” so that what He says next can be clearly heard. But this is contradicted by the parallel account in Matthew 27:46-50. In Matthew's account, the drink is offered to Jesus immediately *after* He cries out with a loud voice.

- John 19:26–27 — He said to His mother, “**Woman, behold, your son!**” Then He said to the disciple, “**Behold, your mother!**”
- Matthew 27:46 (cf. Mk. 15:34) — Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “**ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?**” that is, “**MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**”
- John 19:30 — He said, “**It is accomplished!**”
- Luke 23:46 — Crying out with a loud voice, [He] said, “**Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.**”

Given the tenor of everything else that Jesus has said while on the cross, asking the bystanders for a drink of sour wine seems “out of place.” Throughout this whole account, John’s emphasis has been on the fact that Jesus is the one “in control” as He voluntarily lays down His life for us. But is there any real *positive* evidence that the thirst Jesus speaks of is a spiritual thirst?

**III. John 19:28a** — After this, Jesus, **knowing that all things were now accomplished**, said (in order to accomplish the Scripture), “I thirst.”

What Jesus is about to say, He says specifically *as a result* of His knowledge that “all things” have now (already) been “accomplished” (cf. 13:1-4; 18:4). But it seems “anti-climactic” (and possibly even contradictory) for Jesus to ask for a drink so that the Scripture about sour wine can be fulfilled specifically *because* He knows that “all things” have now been (already) “accomplished.”

What are the “all things” that have been accomplished?

- John 4:34 (cf. 9:4) — Jesus said to [His disciples] “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to **accomplish** [*teleioo*] His work.”
- John 5:36 — “The works which the Father has given Me to **accomplish** [*teleioo*]**—**the very works that I do—bear witness about Me, that the Father has sent Me.”
- John 17:4 — [Speaking somewhat proleptically] “I glorified You on the earth, having **accomplished** [*teleioo*] the work which You have given Me to do.”

The “all things” that have (already) been accomplished are all the redemptive and revelatory works that the Father has given Jesus to do. So the question we need to ask ourselves is this: “What is the connection between knowing that all things have now (already) been accomplished and—*as a result of this knowledge*—saying, “I thirst”? What is the connection between knowing that He has already accomplished all the works that the Father has given Him to do, and then saying—*as a result of this knowledge*: “I thirst”?”

**IV. John 19:28b** — After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, **said (in order to accomplish the Scripture)**, “I thirst.”

Nowhere else does John or any other New Testament writer use this word (*teleioo*) to refer to the fulfillment of Scripture (cf. *pleroo*; v. 24). So why does John use this word here (“in order to accomplish the Scripture”)? Using this word reveals an obvious connection with what comes immediately before (“knowing that all things were now *accomplished* [*teleo*]”) and with what

comes immediately after (“it is *accomplished* [*teleo*]”). What John means for us to see, then, is that this word that Jesus speaks—“I thirst”—has everything to do with the final and climactic accomplishment of all His redemptive and revelatory work. This word that Jesus speaks—“I thirst”—has everything to do with the only thing that still remains for Jesus to do, and that is to “give up” His spirit.

**V. John 19:28c** — After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, said (in order to accomplish the Scripture), “**I thirst.**”

We’ve seen that the words of the psalmist come as naturally to Jesus in prayer as any words of His own, because the words of the psalmist belong, ultimately, to Him (see message on John 19:23-24). So Jesus can cry out on the cross using the words of the psalmist: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mat. 27:46; Ps. 22:1). Just a few moments later, Jesus can again cry out using the words of the psalmist: “Into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23:46; Ps. 31:5). Sandwiched in between these two “quotations” from the Psalms is this word of Jesus: “I thirst.” What does His “I thirst” have to do with His prior, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” and His subsequent, “Into Your hands I commit My spirit?” Is it possible that Jesus is still using the prayer language of the Psalms?

In John chapter twelve, Jesus said:

- John 12:27 (cf. Ps. 6:3; 42:5-6, 11; 43:5) — “Now **MY SOUL HAS BECOME DISMAYED** [*tarasso*].”

Later, in the garden, Jesus will say to Peter and James and John

- Mark 14:34 — “**My soul is deeply grieved** [*perilypos*] to the point of death.”

In both of these expressions, we hear echoes of the psalmist’s words in Psalms 42 and 43 (which were likely originally a single Psalm). Three times the psalmist says:

- Psalm 43:5 (cf. 42:5, 11; 6:3) — Why are you **deeply grieved** [*perilypos*], **O my soul?** And why are you **dismayed** [*syntarasso*] within me?

And then he also prays:

- Psalm 42:6 — O my God, **my soul is dismayed** [*tarasso*] within me.

There are other parallels between these psalms and the experience of Jesus. The psalmist laments:

- Psalm 42:3 (cf. 42:10) — My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, “**Where is your God?**”

How can this not remind us of the mockery of the chief priests and scribes and elders?

- Matthew 27:43 — “HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Again, the psalmist laments:

- Psalm 42:7, 9; 43:2 — Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me... I say to God my rock, “**Why have You forgotten me?**” ... You are the God of my strength; **why have You rejected me?**

How can this not remind us of Jesus’ prayer on the cross?

- Matthew 27:46 — “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

In light of all the parallels between Psalms 42 and 43 and the experience of Jesus, should it be surprising to us that Jesus would draw from these psalms the language of His own prayer on the cross? We read in Psalm 42 verses 1-2:

- Psalm 42:1–2 (cf. Ps. 63:1; 143:6 LXX) — As the deer longs for the water brooks, So my soul longs for You, O God. My soul **thirsts** [*dipsao*] for God, for the living God.

Immediately before Jesus said, “I thirst,” He drew the language of His prayer to God from Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mk. 15:24; Ps. 22:1). Immediately after Jesus said, “I thirst,” He drew the language of His prayer to God from Psalm 31: “Into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23:46; Ps. 31:5). Should it be surprising to us, then, if when Jesus says, “I thirst,” these also are words of *prayer* addressed not to the bystanders, but to God? “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? I thirst! [My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.] Into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Only now, when all things have been accomplished—only now, when Jesus has completed the work that the Father gave Him to do—can Jesus turn to His own supreme desire to be with the Father again. Remember the words that Jesus prayed just the night before:

- John 17:4–5 (cf. 13:1, 3; 16:5, 28) — “I glorified You on the earth, **having accomplished** the work which You have given Me to do. **Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.**”

“Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, said (in order to accomplish] the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’” Now that all things have been accomplished, Jesus expresses His longing—His thirst—to be, again, in the Father’s presence. If Jesus’ “I thirst” is drawn from the world of Psalms 42 and 43, then we can learn a great deal about this thirst by reading in these psalms:

- Psalm 42:2, 4–5; 43:3 — My soul *thirsts* for God, for the living God; **when shall I come and appear before God?** ... I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession **to the house of God**, with the sound of a shout of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Wait for God, for I shall still praise Him, for **the salvation of His presence**... Oh send out Your light

and Your truth, let them lead me; **let them bring me to Your holy mountain and to Your dwelling places.**

If Jesus is expressing a spiritual longing to return to the Father's presence when He says, "I thirst," why do we read in verse twenty-nine:

**VI. John 19:29** — 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.

Matthew and Mark both describe how Jesus was given this drink of sour wine. But neither of them tell us that Jesus said, "I thirst."

- Mark 15:33–37 (cf. Mat. 27:45-50) — At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" And when some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Look, He is calling for Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus, uttering a loud cry ["It is accomplished! Into Your hands I commit My spirit."], breathed His last.

In Mark, the bystander gives Jesus a drink in response to His cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Why would he do this? I wonder if it's because he misunderstood the other word that Jesus spoke as a part of this prayer—the word that only John tells us Jesus prayed: "I thirst." Jesus' "I thirst," in John, is the positive counterpart to His "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" in Matthew and Mark. But the bystanders don't understand, and so they misinterpret what it is that Jesus is truly thirsting *for*. Jesus thirsts for God. He longs now to depart and be with Him. And so now we can see an even greater irony in the "filling up" of these words from Psalm 69:

- Psalm 69:21 — ...for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

We hear someone say, "I thirst," and we assume by default that in the absence of any kind of explanation or qualifier this must be a physical thirst. But why should we assume this is the case with Jesus? Over and over in John, people have made exactly these kinds of assumptions — and over and over they've been wrong.

- John 2:19–21 — Jesus answered them, "Destroy **this sanctuary**, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build **this sanctuary**, and will You raise it up in three days?"
- John 3:3–4 — Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be **born when he is old**? Can he **enter a second time into his mother's womb** and be born?"
- John 4:10–11 — Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living [flowing] water." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?"

- John 6:51–52 — “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone **eats of this bread**, he will live forever; and also the bread which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “**How can this man give us His flesh to eat?**”
- John 11:11–14 — He said these things, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has **fallen asleep**; but I go, so that I may **awaken** him.” The disciples then said to Him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be saved from his sickness.”
- John 4:31–34 — The disciples were urging Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But He said to them, “I have **food to eat** that you do not know about.” So the disciples were saying to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?” Jesus said to them, “**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.**”

When Jesus, because He knows now that all things have been accomplished—when He says *because* He knows this, “I thirst,” what should we assume that He is thirsting for? When Jesus says, in order that the Scripture might be accomplished—when He says *for this reason*, “I thirst,” what should we assume that He is thirsting for? I believe this word is simply a part of the prayer that Jesus prays on the cross — a prayer steeped in the language of the psalms. Because all things have been accomplished—because the only thing remaining is for Jesus to lay down His life—Jesus turns now to His own supreme desire to be with the Father again. He expresses His longing—His thirst—to be, again, in the Father’s presence.

**VII. John 19:30** — Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is accomplished!**” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

The bystanders responded to Jesus’ thirst by giving Him a drink of sour wine. But Jesus reveals the true nature of His thirst by bowing His head and giving up His spirit. And so we see in Jesus’ thirst the full accomplishment of our salvation. “It is accomplished!” Jesus cried in triumph. Only then did He bow His head and give up His spirit. He came forth from the Father and came into the world; and now, having fully accomplished the work that the Father gave Him to do, He is leaving the world again and going to the Father (Jn. 16:28). He is leaving the world again and going to the Father, where He has said that He will prepare a place *for us* (14:2-3) because He desires that we should be *with Him* where He is (17:24).

### Conclusion

Do we thirst? Do we thirst for the day when we are with Jesus where He is and we see His glory which the Father has given Him, because the Father loved Him—and *us* in *Him*—before the foundation of the world (17:23-24)? What is it that you are thirsting for? Do we have a thirst that’s even now (“already”) being satisfied in Jesus? Can we say even with Jesus: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”? Jesus said:

- John 4:14 — “Whoever drinks of the water that **I** will give him will never thirst—ever; but the water that **I** will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”
- John 7:37–38 — “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to **Me** and drink. He who believes in **Me**, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

How can Jesus say these things? Because *He* was thirsty. Because after crying out in triumph on the cross, “It is accomplished,” He revealed the true nature of His thirst by bowing His head and giving up His spirit. Are you drinking of the water that Jesus gives? Has this water become in you a well of water springing up to eternal life? Are you *believing* in Him?