

## **“A Word of Agony”**

John 19:28-29

Series: Words In Red

*Pastor Jarrett Stephens*

We are looking in this series at the last recorded words we have of Jesus while he hung on the cross on what we refer to as that Good Friday.

**Illus. Good Friday** - And speaking of Good Friday, I want to encourage you to make plans to join us on Friday evening of Easter weekend. We will have one service at each of our campuses. The service starts at 6:30 on Good Friday (**Show Slide**) and we will observe baptism and Lord's Supper. If you are interested in being baptized, it would be a great night to do it – just text “baptism” to 77069 and we'll get you signed up and ready to go.

Now, as it relates to these words Jesus spoke from the cross, he may have said more than this, but only seven statements are recorded in Holy Scripture for us. They are “words in red” not simply because he said them, but because he spoke them while his red blood was being poured out so our sins could be forgiven.

- The first statement was a “word of forgiveness”
- The second statement was a “word of salvation”
- The third statement was a “word of comfort”
- The fourth statement was a “word of anguish”

This fifth statement we are looking at today is also the title of the message and it is: **A Word of Agony**

The first three statements were recorded while it was still light. Jesus was put on the cross around 9:00 in the morning and at noon, the scripture tells us it turned to pitch dark.

**Matt. 27:45** – “**Now from the sixth hour (noon) there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (3:00 pm).**”

Luke's gospel tells us at this time (Luke 23:45) the “sun's light failed”. Most scholars believe that statements four through seven were made in rapid succession right near the end of Jesus's physical life on earth.

This fifth statement can be found in **John 19:28-29** – “**After this** (after a word of comfort to his mother and the apostle John and then after it turning dark and Jesus with that guttural screaming out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”), **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.**”

I want to build the message today off three words that describe what is taking place at this moment on the cross. The first word is the word: **Intensity**

This is the height of the pain Jesus was experiencing on the cross. It's why this message is called "a word of agony". It's in this moment that the agony of the cross was the most intense.

We spoke last week of the kind of suffering Jesus endured. And I really encourage you to go back and listen to any of these messages in this series that you might have missed.

- We spoke of the emotional suffering Jesus went through. Can you imagine the sense of loneliness and distress Jesus must have felt as family and friends abandoned him, while his enemies taunted and mocked him.
- We spoke of the spiritual suffering that Jesus went through – as he bore our sin, the separation in fellowship from his Father was something he had NEVER experienced before. It was a God forsaken of God moment – a spiritual suffering that no one has ever known as Jesus was tasting death on our behalf.

There was emotional suffering, spiritual suffering and of course there was physical suffering. This cry, "I thirst" was a result of the physical suffering Jesus was enduring.

We don't know if Jesus had anything to drink since sharing in the Last Supper with his disciples the night he was arrested. Certainly, the beating that he had taken and then hanging there on the cross would have dehydrated him.

**Fredric Farrar** (Anglican cleric – *The Life of Christ*) – **"The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries, especially of the head and stomach, became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and, while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst."**

We looked at Psalm 22 last week, which is a psalm of the cross. It's full of prophecy concerning the way in which Jesus would die. Listen to what the psalmist prophesies:

**Psalm 22:14-18 – "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; <sup>15</sup> my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.**

**<sup>16</sup> For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; <sup>18</sup> they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."**

Roman crucifixion didn't even exist at the time of this writing! For goodness sake, the Roman Empire as we know it didn't even exist when the psalmist penned this prophecy! And here we get a detailed account of what would take place on the cross.

**Illus. Cottonmouth** - The psalmist said, “my tongue sticks to my jaws”. We called that growing up in Louisiana “cottonmouth”. I can remember two-a-days in football. I don’t know why we practiced, we were 0-10 – didn’t do us any good!

It would be so hot and humid. It wasn’t the cross kind of agony and I don’t for a second make the parallel. The parallel is in having that “cottonmouth experience”! ALL we craved was a water break at times. Our mouths would be so dry, you’d suck the sweat out of your under jersey....anything to moisten the mouth!

This thirst Jesus has represents the sheer intensity of the cross! Now, Jesus had been offered something to drink previous to this, but he refused it! Turn with me to Matthew’s gospel.

**Matt. 27:33-34 – “And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.”**

Gall was a poisonous herb...almost opium like. It served essentially as a narcotic...a sedative. It was meant to help deaden or at a minimum lessen the pain. And Jesus doesn’t drink this wine because it was mixed with gall. Think about that!

He is drinking the cup of God’s wrath in full...no numbing the pain. The NIV version of this reads “he refused to drink it”.

Jesus is fully drinking the divine wrath of God and not letting one drop of it spill. He refuses to remove any part of the pain. He is truly bearing the iniquity of us all – to the fullest extent.

“I thirst” is peak of the physical torment Jesus was going through and this shows us the human nature of Jesus, doesn’t it?

Jesus was fully divine. He was 100% God. But he was also 100% man. As humans, we come into the world thirsty, and I’ve been around death enough just because of what I do, to know that often what a dying person wants is there mouth watered (wet rag). It’s the most basic human need.

Jesus in saying “I thirst” is identifying with man. He has fully emptied himself (Phil. 2). He can sympathize with us as our high priest (Heb. 4) because he knows what it is to be like us.

**Erwin Lutzer (*Cries from the Cross*) – “Here is proof that Jesus was not aloof from the common suffering of humanity. Christ has entered into our world; He has participated in our suffering. He walked our planet, ate our food, drank our water, and felt our pain. Whatever we may be experiencing today, we can know with confidence that Jesus experienced all that and more. God has entered into our suffering world. Are we in physical pain? Let us remember His burning thirst. Has our dignity been assaulted? He was crucified naked. Do we feel as if we are in darkness? So was He. Do we feel forsaken? He was forsaken by the Father.”**

This statement shows that Jesus identifies with us, and it's also another example of the prophetic scripture being fulfilled. We've seen several examples of this already via psalm 22.

**Illus. Fulfilled scripture** – pretty sure I showed you this at Easter either last year or the year before, but it's a good illustration that applies here.

Did you know that scholars estimate the most probable number is of distinct prophecies in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in the life of Christ is 332?

**Illus. Peter Stoner** - One mathematician by the name of Peter Stoner wrote a book called *Science Speaks*. He was professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Pasadena City College out in California.

Some use science to try and disprove God! Stoner in his book used the science of probability to rule out coincidences and prove the validity of Christ and the claim of the resurrection. And so, in using this science of probability, Stoner put these prophecies fulfilled in the life of Christ to the test. BUT, he didn't do it with all 332, he did it with just 8!

What are the chances that just 8 prophecies could be fulfilled in ONE person? His answer: 1 in 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power...that's a 1 with 17 zeros! **(SHOW IMAGE)**

You've got about as easy a shot at this as filling out the perfect March Madness bracket! It ain't happening...NO WAY! No one picked #16 Fairleigh Dickinson to beat #1 Purdue!

To help us comprehend the enormity and improbability of this, Stoner gave this illustration. He said, take a silver dollar (like the one I have here!) and lay them on the face of the state of Texas. They will cover the state two feet deep.

Now, mark one of those silver dollars...stir the whole mass thoroughly all over the state. Blindfold a man, tell him to travel as far as he wishes, but can only pick up one silver dollar. The chance of that man picking up the marked silver dollar is the exact same chances of just 8 prophecies being fulfilled in one person...and in Christ 332 distinct prophecies fulfilled!

29 of those prophecies from the Old Testament speak to and are directly fulfilled the betrayal, arrest, trial, death, burial of Jesus. One of those fulfilled prophecies is right here in the text.

**John 19:28-29** – “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.”

Here's the fulfilled prophecy, penned over 1000 years before Jesus would ever be born! David is penning this Psalm many believe is near the end of his life and while it speaks to what he is enduring in the moment, it is a prophecy of the “Son of David” to come!

**Psalm 69:20-21 – “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. <sup>21</sup> They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”**

Jesus knowing at all was now finished (fully man, fully God) said to “fulfill the Scripture” – “I thirst”. He knew what came next!

**John 19:29 – “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.”**

Sour wine was the cheapest of wines...it’s referred to in scripture as vinegar as well. And someone, we don’t know who (Matthew’s gospel says it was a bystander who heard Jesus cry out) that jumped into action and grabbing a hyssop branch with a sponge on the end that was full of sour wine.

Now, you Bible Trivia winners out there, when you hear the word hyssop, what do you think of? It should cause you in your mind to go all the way back to Passover.

**Exodus 12:21-24 – “Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. <sup>24</sup> You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever.”**

How beautiful is it? How interesting is it? How wonderful is it that at the exact moment this statute is being observed thousands of years later in Jerusalem, as thousands of Passover lambs are being slaughtered...just as the Israelites took hyssop and dipped it in blood to put it over the doorframes of their home, hyssop is being used to soak the red, blistered lips of the one true Passover Lamb being slaughtered on the cross.

Amazing...and it’s a story that only God could write. We see through this “word of agony” on the cross the intensity of it. But secondly, I want you to see the: **Irony**

Now, I use the word irony here because what Jesus says in “I thirst” is totally contrary to how Jesus referred to himself multiple times in scripture – as the source of “living water”!

Do you remember the conversation Jesus had with the woman at the well in John 4?

(Set context) – **John 4:10, 13-14 – “Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water...Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but 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.”**

Here on the cross, the one who described himself as one who gives “living water to all who thirsts” is thirsty. In John 7, Jesus is at the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles. There were three primary feasts...parties...holy observations/ceremonies that Jews were expected to attend each year and participate in.

You had Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Each carried significant meaning to the Jews and reminded them of God’s faithfulness in the past...what they went through and experienced as a Hebrew people.

This Feast of Tabernacles/Booths was a reminder to the people of how God delivered their ancestors from slavery and led them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

As in all of these religious, holy days there was a lot of rituals and symbolism taking place. And on the last day of the feast, the “great day” one of the rituals was for the priest to bring water from the Pool of Siloam through what was known as the “Water Gate”.

Think of it almost like a parade. The congregation of people are watching this...following this.

The priest would take the water and pour the water around the altar - this symbolized and celebrated how God provided water for the people of Israel when they were in the wilderness...it was moment of prayer and expressing their utter dependence upon God.

It was a big deal for ...it was the climatic event of the Feast of Tabernacles. And most scholars believe because of what Jesus is saying here in John 7 that he may be saying it at the exact time this event was transpiring. Look at what he said:

**John 7:37-38 – “On the last day of the feast, the great day Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”**

Incredible, isn’t it?! Here Jesus during the middle of this great ceremony...the people are celebrating and remembering how God provided for them Life-giving water! He states come to me anyone who is thirsty, and I’ll give you that water!

And then here on the cross the one that provides LIFE-giving water thirsts! The irony of what we are seeing and hearing here! The very person from which living water flows is thirsty!

We see the intensity of the cross. We see irony on the cross. Let’s conclude with a final word to describe what’s taking place here in on the cross and that is the word: **Inclusivity**

Think about all that Jesus experienced on the cross. Darkness. Abandonment of loved ones. Separation from God. Mockery and celebration of shame and death. Agonizing thirst. You know what that sounds like? Hell.

**illus. Doctrine series** – After Easter – talk about some of these major doctrines that we see played out right here on the cross. The substitutionary, vicarious death of Christ. The humanity of Christ. Here's one – the doctrine of Hell.

The Bible teaches the reality of Hell. And it's a place that is described as essentially what Jesus experienced on the cross – separation from God...darkness...agonizing thirst!

There's a story Jesus shares in Luke 16 about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus that dies. You can read about it, but the rich man dies and goes to a place called "Hades" – hell. And he looks up from this place of torment and begs:

**Luke 16:24-26** – “And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’”<sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’<sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’”

Jesus experienced hell so that you don't have to! He experienced separation from God and an agonizing thirst, so that you don't have to!

While Jesus is the only way to heaven – in that he is exclusive. He died thought for the sins of the world – and in that, he is inclusive. The cross is a sign to the world of God's love – and his love is meant for you – make it personal!

**Illus. Invitations** – Don't you love getting invitations in the mail? Come on?! Whether it's to a birthday party? A graduation (okay, maybe not a graduation!) Debbie got an invitation in the mail this week to a luncheon. Invitations show that you are INCLUDED!

In John 7, he cried out, “If ANYONE (key word!) thirsts, let him come to ME and drink. WHOEVER (Key word!) believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of this heart will flow rivers of LIVING water.”

WHOEVER! The offer to come and eternally satisfying water is totally inclusive! The invitation is to you!

**Isaiah 55:1** – “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

The last invitation of the Bible echoes this word from Isaiah:

**Rev. 22:17 – “The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty (inclusive!) come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”**

This is the invitation of all invitations...this is an invitation to never thirst again. Incidentally, where hell is described as being so bad, a drop of water is begged for, heaven is described as a place where there is no thirst!

**Rev. 7:15-17 – “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. <sup>16</sup>They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup>For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”**

The invitation to never thirst again is for ANYONE. It is for EVERYONE. WHOEVER will leave their life of sin and come to Jesus by faith!

You know what I have found people are thirsty...and they are looking everywhere but to Jesus to have their thirst quenched. People are thirsty for friends and attention...thirsty for needs to be met and emptiness to be filled.

And yet we are like the woman at the well, trying all these different things (for her it was relationships) for our thirst to be satisfied. And what we find out whenever we try to have our thirst quenched spiritually from someone or something besides Jesus is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah spoke:

**Jer. 2:13 – “for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”**

- That relationship...is that what you are looking for to fill you? I’m telling you it’s a broken cistern!
- That job...
- That promotion...
- More money...

You fill in the blank...whatever it is that you are holding out for, thinking that when I have this or when I gain that, THEN I will be satisfied, if it’s not a personal relationship with Jesus, I’m telling you it’s a broken cistern and it holds no water!

We need to lean in and listen to the invitation of Christ today! It is inclusive - WHOEVER is thirsty, let him come!



Here is the thing about invitations though. They come with an RSVP! You have to RSVP to a certain person, and you have to do it by a certain time! It's true with the invitation Jesus offers as well.

See, there is an urgency to this invitation! You have to RSVP to a certain person...his name is Jesus. The way you RSVP is by receiving Christ into your life. You have to do it by a certain time though and the Bible says, "Today is the day of salvation."

So much to this one word in Greek, two words in our English, "I thirst". And if you are here and need eternal satisfaction today...you need your thirst to be filled, I encourage you to take Jesus up on his offer today.

RSVP to heaven today...no more waiting...no more hesitation...no more putting it off. Come and drink today.

Let's pray together.

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*