

A Reflection on John 19:28

“And so that the Scripture would be fulfilled”

One of the themes of the Gospel author’s, and especially John’s account of the suffering of Jesus is how it fulfilled God’s promise in Scripture. In John 19:28, the evangelist (Gospel author) points out that as Jesus declares His thirst from the Cross, He is doing just that, fulfilling Scripture.

Sour Wine

The guards offered Jesus wine vinegar known as *posca*. This was a diluted, non-alcoholic drink used by Roman soldiers because it was inexpensive, considered more thirst quenching than water alone, prevented scurvy, killed harmful bacteria in the water, and the vinegary taste made bad smelling water more palatable. John possibly saw in this a connection to Psalm 69:21, “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.” This is not to be confused with when Jesus was offered and refused wine mixed with myrrh which would have numbed His senses (see Mark 16:23).

A Hyssop Branch

John also tells us that the *posca* was delivered via sponge hoisted on a hyssop branch. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the branch is merely called a “stick.” But John was present and took note of this detail. In the Old Testament, hyssop was used to sprinkle blood on the doorposts and lintels on the first Passover (Ex. 12:22). It was also associated with purification and sacrifices in the tabernacle (Lev. 14:4, 6; Num. 19:6, 18).

Our Great High Priest

Later, the author of Hebrews speaks to how Jesus, in His humanity, became our great High Priest (Heb. 4:14-15). It was the role of the High Priest to act as a mediator between God and man. He communicated to God on behalf of the people. But first he had to be made pure. The image of the hyssop branch calls upon the process of purification under the Old Covenant. However, Jesus had no sins from which to be purified. Instead, He is the perfect mediator between us and the Divine, being Himself both God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Heb. 12:22-24, NIV)