



**Title: Christ's Crucifixion Part 2**

**Text: John 19:23-30**

**Date: April 3, 2022**

**Main Idea:** Jesus is the Lamb of God who fulfills the scriptures and takes away the sin of the world.

## Personal Study Guide

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**READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 19:23-30**

## **Highlight – What stands out?**

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1. What is interesting to you about the text? Are there phrases or verbiage you have not seen before?
2. What questions do you have about the text?
3. What did you learn about the Holy Spirit, Jesus and God in this text?
4. Are there any repeated words or phrases in this text? What about words or phrases repeated before in the Gospel of John?

## **Explain – What does this mean?**

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1. How does the purpose statement from John 20:31 explain what is happening in this text?
2. This text is divided into three scenes (Scene 1: Verses 23-24, Scene 2: Verses 25-27, Scene 3: Verses 28-33). What does each scene say about Jesus' deity, heart, and what he came to do?

3. This text speaks to a lot of fulfilled scriptures. Look up: Psalm 22:18, 69:21, Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, Zechariah 12:10, and John 1:29. How do these texts link to John 19:23-30 and how does Jesus fulfill these scriptures?
4. What does Jesus mean when he says “it is finished” in verse 30? What do his words and actions in this verse tell you about his role in the crucifixion?

## **Apply – How does this change me?**

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Think about how life is different for us now that Jesus completed this selfless step that God had planned all along. Let’s take a look at how it affects us personally and how we see it is used in the world that surrounds us.

1. Personal: We can have eternal life with God through belief in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior! His love for us is ever present and the acts of love he shown throughout this passage relate to His ultimate love for us in dying on the cross to bear our sins. How did this act of Jesus change your life and make you new?
2. World: When Jesus died, the path to salvation was changed forever. Looking at Matthew 28, our takeaway from this selfless act is that we are to share that “it is finished” with all who will listen. How are you allowing Christ to work in your life to make disciples for His glory?

## **Respond – What’s my next step?**

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1. Think about those in your life that you do not know their spiritual status. Write down 5 individuals you want to reach out to and strike up a Gospel conversation. I know this can seem like a daunting task, so spend time in prayer over how the Lord wants you to seek them out.

2. How has spending time in John in church service over the past few months molded your heart to share the truth of Jesus in your city, in your job and in your home? If you haven't felt called to action, take time now to pray for God to reveal that in your life.

## Commentary

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### Taken from *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson

**19:23–24.** By custom the clothes of an executed criminal were the perquisite of the executioners. Suggestions that this episode was created out of whole cloth in order to 'find' a suitable 'fulfillment' for Psalm 22:18 are therefore unwarranted. The division of the spoils shows that the execution squad was made up of four soldiers (*cf.* Acts 12:4). Normally a Jew in Palestine wore a tunic (*chitōn*) next to the skin, and an outer garment, something like a robe (*to himation*, always in the singular). Here John tells us that they divided Jesus' clothes (*himatia*, *i.e.* the plural form) into four parts. If, somewhat anomalously, we are to think this plural form refers to the outer garment, then presumably the soldiers divided it into four parts, probably at the seams. But it is more likely that the plural expression refers to Jesus' clothes, including a belt, sandals and head covering. These three plus the outer robe gave the soldiers one item each. That left the tunic (*chitōn*, NIV 'undergarment', but it was not equivalent to our undergarments, even though it was worn next to the skin, but to our suit, over which an outer garment might be worn), and it was decided to gamble for that item so it would not have to be dismembered—a sad loss since this garment *was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.*

However customary this merciless bit of byplay was at ancient executions, in the case of Jesus' death it was nothing less than the fulfillment of prophecy: it occurred *that the scripture might be fulfilled.* This does not mean that the soldiers wittingly complied with Scripture, but that God's mysterious sovereignty so operated in the event that it occurred, and occurred just this way, in order to fulfil Scripture. Indeed, it has often been remarked that John deploys more and more 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled' statements the closer he gets to the passion. Of the four Evangelists, only John adduces Scripture here. It is as if he is saying that, whereas all of the details of the Messiah's life, ministry, death and exaltation are in conformity with the Father's plan and frequently in fulfillment of revealed Scripture, it is especially important that this be seen to be the case in the substance and details of his passion. So the point will not be overlooked, John adds, after the quotation from Scripture, *So this is what the soldiers did.* The concern to tie the sufferings

of this messianic claimant to the will of God would be especially urgent in the evangelization of Jews and proselytes.

The Scripture cited is Psalm 22:18 (LXX 21:19), following exactly the words of the LXX. The psalmist is afflicted by both physical distress and the mockery of his opponents, and apparently uses the symbolism of an execution scene, in which the executioners distribute the victim's clothes, to elaborate the depth of his sense of abandonment. Davidic typology, a central motif in early Christianity, assures that this will have final reference to Christ, a connection made all the easier in this instance by the fact that Jesus himself drew attention to the relevance of Psalm 22 by citing the first verse on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34).

The language of the quotation has generated no little discussion as to whether the Evangelist has manipulated the text. Both the LXX and John read:

'They divided my garments (*ta himatia*) among them,  
and cast lots (*ebalon klēron*) for my clothing (*ton himatismos*).'

The parallelism of the underlying Hebrew poetry means it is probable that the 'garments' in the first line refer to the same thing as the 'clothing' in the second. But John, it is argued, apparently *distinguishes* the two, the first referring either to the *himation*, the outer robe, or to the clothes apart from the tunic, while the second line refers to the tunic, the *chiton* for which the soldiers drew lots. He thus preserves the integrity of the eyewitness evidence (cf. vv. 25–27), but demonstrates his ignorance of Hebrew poetry and misapplies Scripture. By contrast, Lindars (NTA, p. 91) argues that 'John must not be held ignorant of the most common characteristic of Hebrew poetry'—to which Barrett (pp. 550–551) responds by saying that, judging by the misapplication of the Psalm, the view of Lindars 'comes near to accusing [John] of saying what he knew to be untrue.' Moo (pp. 256–257) simply says that, granted John's knowledge of what actually transpired, 'not unnaturally, he sees in this incident a fulfillment of the other half of the psalm verse and accordingly records it'.

In fact, the problem thus erected may be a false one. Several important studies in recent years have pointed out that Hebrew synonymous parallelism is frequently far from exact in its equivalencies, even in its referents. This enables the second or third line to do more than say more or less the same thing in different words; subsequent lines may say something complementary in more or less the same words. Even before these studies, Hoskyns (p. 629) pointed out that the psalm verse allows itself the possibility of being divided into two parts, since the LXX switches from the plural (*ta himatia*) to the singular of another word (*ton himatismos*), a distinction that could conceivably be taken of outer and inner clothes respectively.

Better still, if the parallelism is quite tight, and *ta himatia* and *ton himatismos* both refer to the inner tunic, by the same logic 'divided' (line 1) and 'cast lots' (line 2) refer to the same activity. After all, how would the executioners

decide to 'divide' the clothes of the criminal? An outer robe, a belt, and a headpiece would not all have the same value; the fairest form of division might well be to cast lots. Thus John may be applying the Old Testament text in its entirety *only* to the *second* part of the division at the foot of Jesus' cross. Alternatively, even the four soldiers who crucified Jesus may have carried out the initial division of clothes by means of casting lots (*cf.* Hengstenberg, 2. 412: 'As the value of the four parts was unequal, the first distribution was probably by lot.'). In that case, the seamless garment is treated differently (vv. 23b–24) not because it was the only garment of clothing to have its ownership decided by lot, but because, since it was seamless, the soldiers thought best to use the lot to assign it to *one* soldier instead of distributing it amongst themselves. In this view, the Evangelist sees in the *entire* distribution of Jesus' clothes a fulfillment of *both* lines of Psalm 22:18, but mentions the peculiarity of the decision about the tunic because he was an eyewitness, and possibly because he saw something symbolic in the seamless garment.

But what symbolism? Two views have dominated the interpretation of this passage.

(1) From the fact that Josephus (*Ant.* iii. 161) describes a high priest's robe (which he calls a *chitōn*) as 'woven from a single length of thread', Jesus' seamless tunic has been taken as a symbol for his high priestly ministry (e.g. Macgregor, p. 346). But the priestly garment was not an inner 'tunic' but a robe. Further, *chitōn* was not the normal word for referring to it, and, unlike the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Fourth Gospel does not dwell on Jesus' high priestly ministry.

(2) From the fact that Philo (*De Fug. et Inv.* 110–112) can use a robe as a symbol of the *logos* ('Word'; *cf.* notes on 1:1) which binds all things into a unity, Jesus' seamless tunic has been taken to represent the unity of the church (e.g. Hoskyns, p. 630). Certainly the unity of those given to Jesus is an important theme in John (*cf.* esp. ch. 17), but John's use of *logos* as a Christological title (1:1, 14) is conceptually far removed from Philo (*cf.* notes on 1:1), and in any case there is no transparent reason in the Gospel of John for making this association. Moreover, here Jesus has his tunic (= church?) taken from him!

Still other suggestions have been made, but when commentators admit, as they frequently do, that 'we have no way of knowing whether such references were in the evangelist's mind' (Brown, 2. 922), it is an admission that *the text itself* does not sanction such associations, since that is the only access we have to the Evangelist's mind. The one association that has some merit, precisely because Jesus' clothes and Jesus' death come together in both passages, is the one that ties 19:23–24 to the footwashing (13:1–20). Jesus laid aside his garments, his outer garments, when he washed his disciples' feet, in an act that anticipated the cleansing that would issue from his death. So here he loses his clothes, all his clothes. The same self-humbling operates, but here to the last degree, as he lays aside his glory, and by this act, in the divine paradox, is glorified. Yet while his last earthly possessions are stripped from him, he

remains under his Father's sovereign care, even as his tunic is not torn and destroyed (*cf.* Schnackenburg, 3. 274).

**19:25.** The Greek syntax suggests a contrast between the soldiers (v. 24) and the women here introduced. While the soldiers carry out their barbaric task and coolly profit from the exercise, the women wait in faithful devotion to the one whose death they can still understand only as tragedy.

How many women John enumerates has been disputed. It is possible to read the list as two, three or four: (a) Two: his mother and his mother's sister, namely 'Mary of Clopas' (which probably means *Mary the wife of Clopas*, as in the NIV) and Mary Magdalene. This is highly unlikely, for it would mean not only that Mary had remarried after the death of Joseph, but also that there were two women with the name 'Mary' in the same family. (b) Three: In this view Jesus' mother's sister is 'Mary of Clopas', but this too presupposes two women with the same name in one family. (c) Four: This is more likely, and assumes that John has listed two women without naming them, and two others by name.

The Synoptists mention several women at the cross, but they are standing afar, and they are introduced only after Jesus has died (Mt. 27:55–56; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49; the latter mentions no names). That John should introduce them earlier is not surprising: he is preparing for vv. 26–27, which necessarily takes place while Jesus is still alive. Nor should John's 'Near the cross' be seen as a contradiction of the Synoptic witness. It was natural, perhaps inevitable, that during the long vigil some who loved him would venture closer, and, revulsed by the suffering, drift away again—only to return. E. Stauffer has adduced evidence that crucified persons were often surrounded by friends, relatives and enemies. Barrett's objection (p. 551) that the concerns for military security at the crucifixion of a rebel king outweighs such evidence, his insistence that the soldiers would keep people away and therefore that vv. 25–27 must be judged inauthentic, cannot bear much weight. True, there are recorded instances of people taking a friend down from a cross, the victim surviving, and the presence of the soldiers was to ensure security against such an eventuality. But apart from the fact that four Roman auxiliaries were unlikely to be terrified by a few women in deep mourning, the Roman authorities, if we are to judge by Pilate, were well aware that neither Jesus nor his disciples posed much of a threat. More important, the 'notice' (v. 19) was meant to be read. If people could be close enough to the cross to read a sign, close enough (according to all four Gospels) to hear some of Jesus' utterances, it is difficult to see why vv. 25–27 should be assessed so negatively.

If we attempt to correlate the four people to whom John refers with the three listed in Matthew and Mark, Mary Magdalene (*i.e.* Mary of Magdala, a village on the west shore of Galilee two or three miles north of Tiberias) appears in all four lists. John has not mentioned her before, but she figures prominently in the resurrection accounts (20:1ff.). Only Luke 8:2 offers additional information: she was one of those women who ministered to Jesus, and seven

demons had gone out of her, presumably in consequence of Jesus' ministry. The mother of Jesus appears only in John's list. Of the other two women in John's list, there is something to be said for supposing that Mary the wife of Clopas is to be identified with Mary the mother of James and Joses. That means that Salome (Mk. 15:40) is the mother of James and John the sons of Zebedee (Mt. 27:56–57), and is none other than the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. The primary reason why these identifications cannot be certain is that Mark tells us, 'Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there' (Mk. 15:41), and therefore the lists should not necessarily be mapped onto each other. In favour of the traditional identification, however, are two details: (a) assuming that John is the beloved disciple (*cf.* vv. 26–27) who stands behind the Fourth Gospel, it is remarkable that he alone of the Evangelists mentions neither his own name nor the name of his brother—which makes it unsurprising that his mother, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, is also unnamed; (b) Jesus' assignation of a connection between his mother and the beloved disciple (vv. 26–27) becomes somewhat easier on the assumption that John is his cousin on his mother's side, his mother's nephew.

**19:26–27.** The disciple whom Jesus loved (*cf.* notes on 13:23) was not mentioned in the previous verse, but is here introduced. The Greek behind *Dear woman* (*gynai*) is as difficult to translate as at 2:4, the only other place where Jesus' mother appears in the Fourth Gospel (except for brief mention at 2:12; 6:42).

The words Jesus uses, *here is your son ... Here is your mother*, are reminiscent of legal adoption formulae, but such formulae would have been cast in the second person (e.g. 'You are my son'). If Jesus was the breadwinner of the family before he embarked on his public ministry, and if every mention of Mary during Jesus' years of ministry involves Jesus in a quiet self-distancing from the constraints of a merely human family, and this not least for his mother's good (*cf.* notes on 2:2–4), it is wonderful to remember that even as he hung dying on a Roman cross, suffering as the Lamb of God, he took thought of and made provision for his mother. Some have found it surprising that Jesus' brothers did not take over this responsibility. But quite apart from the fact that they were at this point quite unsympathetic to their older brother (7:5), they may not even have been in Jerusalem: their home was in Capernaum (*cf.* notes on 2:12). Barrett (p. 552) objects that their lack of faith (7:5) 'could not annul their legal claim'. True enough, but this is not a legal scene. Jesus displays his care for his mother as both she and the beloved disciple are passing through their darkest hour, on their way to full Christian faith. *From that time* (*hōra*, 'hour') *on*, from the 'hour' of Jesus' death/exaltation (*cf.* notes on 2:4; 12:23; 17:1), *this disciple took her into his home*.

The more difficult question is whether this relationship that the dying Jesus establishes between his mother and the beloved disciple is symbolic, and if so, of what. There have been any number of suggestions, most of them anachronistically tied either to later developments in historical theology, or to



an unlikely interpretation of 2:1–11, or to both. Roman Catholic exegesis has tended not so much to see Mary coming under the care of the beloved disciple, as the reverse; and if the beloved disciple is also taken as an idealization of all true disciples, the way is cleared to think of Mary as the mother of the church. For some scholars, this theme is tied to ‘new Eve’ typology—Mary as the antitype of the first woman, who can say, ‘With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man’ (Gn. 4:1). Indeed, for Brown (2. 925–926), this is virtually the climax of Jesus’ mission, since the next verse (v. 28) discloses that Jesus now knows that all things have been completed.

Apart from the question of the meaning of v. 28, however (for which see below), the fact that the beloved disciple took Mary into his home, rather than the reverse, rather favours the view that he was commissioned to look after her. Thus, the *theological* reading favoured by many Catholic exegetes tends to move in a direction contrary to an *historical* reading of the text. Certainly it is true that John uses history to teach theology, and that both Jesus and John use historical events, institutions and utterances in symbolic ways to teach deeper truths to those with eyes to see. But such theological readings are *in line* with the historical reading. In this instance, however, the Fourth Gospel focuses on the exclusiveness of the Son, the finality of his cross-work, the promise of the Paraclete as the definitive aid to the believers after Jesus has been glorified, and correspondingly de-emphasizes Mary by giving her almost no part to play in the narrative, and by reporting a rebuke, however gentle, that Jesus administered to her (2:4). With such themes lying on the surface of the text, it is most natural to see in vv. 26–27 an expression of Jesus’ love and care for his mother, a thoughtful provision for her needs at the hour of supreme devastation (*cf.* Dauer, pp. 322–326). To argue, then, that this scene is symbolic of a continuing role for Mary as the church comes under her care is without adequate contextual control. It is so anachronistic an interpretation that is difficult to imagine how it could have gained such sway apart from the developments of centuries of later traditions.

Others have taken the beloved disciple to represent the ideal Christian, and Mary to represent the faithful remnant of Israel that accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah. The remnant of Israel is thus the ‘mother’ from which the church is born. But it is hard to see how the remnant comes under the care of the church, or vice versa. Bultmann (p. 673) sees in the beloved disciple a representation of Gentile Christianity, and in Mary a representative of Jewish Christianity: thus that part of the Jews that tarries by the cross overcomes the offence of the cross and learns to feel at home in the increasingly Gentile church, while Gentile Christianity is charged with making the Jewish remnant feel at home.<sup>1</sup> But this ill suits the thrust of the narrative. The beloved disciple is himself a Jew, and at this stage of the Gospel he has not yet come to believe in the resurrection (*cf.* 20:8). When most of these interpretations are canvassed, it is hard not to sympathize with Dodd (IFG, p. 423), who dismisses the lot as ‘singularly unconvincing’ (similarly Schlatter, p. 351).

If a symbolic reading is to be sanctioned, it must be constrained by the themes of the Fourth Gospel, and perhaps secondarily by possible parallels in the Synoptics. The suggestion of Gourgues is attractive. In John 2:1–11, Mary approaches Jesus as a mother and is somewhat rebuffed. If she demonstrates the first signs of faith, it must be the faith of a disciple, not a mother. Here she stands near the cross with other disciples, and once she has assumed that stance she may again be assigned a role as mother—but not as mother of Jesus, but of another fellow-disciple. The blessing she receives is a peculiar manifestation of a truth articulated elsewhere: ‘And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life’ (Mt. 19:29).

**19:28.** Others may unconsciously play their part in the divine plan of redemption (e.g. vv. 23–24; cf. Acts 13:29), but not Jesus. This does not mean his cry *I am thirsty* was a bit of manipulative histrionics: a man scourged, bleeding, and hanging on a cross under the Near-Eastern sun would be so desperately dehydrated that thirst would be part of the torture. But Jesus’ mind is so steeped in Scripture that he understands the relevance of the Davidic texts to himself. He knew that *all was now completed* (*ēdē panta tetelestai*). This cannot be taken so mechanically that there is nothing whatsoever left to fulfil in the divine plan, not even Jesus’ death. The very next line displays one more fulfillment, and v. 30 connects the moment of Jesus’ death with the final fulfillment. Rather, Jesus’ knowledge *that all was now completed* is the awareness that all the steps that had brought him to this point of pain and impending death were in the design of his heavenly Father, and death itself was imminent.

Although some have tried to connect the *so that the Scripture would be fulfilled* clause with what precedes (‘Jesus, knowing that all things had been accomplished in order to fulfil Scripture, said “I thirst” ’), it is best to read it with what follows (reading ‘Jesus, knowing that all things had been accomplished, in order to fulfil Scripture said “I thirst” ’; cf. Moo, pp. 275–278). Even if this is what is meant, the Old Testament passage to which reference is made is not obvious. Some have promoted Psalm 22:15, where the fact that the psalmist’s tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth presumably means he is thirsty. The suggestion has additional force because Psalm 22 has just been quoted (v. 24). Others opt for Psalm 42:2 or 63:1 (‘My soul thirsts for God’), but this means that John 19:28 must be taken in a highly symbolic fashion, since Jesus thirsts for water, not for God. Better still is Psalm 69:21 (‘They ... gave me vinegar for my thirst’). This Psalm has already twice been cited in this Gospel (2:17; 15:25), and the particular verse, Psalm 69:21, not only includes specific reference to thirst, but is apparently alluded to in John 19:29–30 (see below).

Indeed, it has been suggested that the link to Psalm 69:21 may be even tighter. If we grant that Jesus knew he was fulfilling this Scripture, presumably he knew that by verbally confessing his thirst he would precipitate the soldiers’

effort to give him some wine vinegar. In that case, the fulfillment clause could be rendered. 'Jesus, knowing that all things had been accomplished, in order to fulfil [the] Scripture [which says "They ... gave me vinegar for my thirst"] said "I thirst"'. Either way, John wants to make his readers understand that every part of Jesus' passion was not only in the Father's plan of redemption but a consequence of the Son's direct obedience to it (*cf.* notes on 5:19–30). And either way, the hermeneutical assumption is that David and his experiences constitute a prophetic model, a 'type', of 'great David's greater son'.

This truth may also be highlighted by the strange choice of verb for *would be fulfilled* (*teleiōthē*). In fulfillment formulae, John elsewhere uses the verb preferred by others, *plēroō* ('to fulfil'), but here resorts to *teleioō* (more properly 'to complete'). Almost certainly this is because he is drawing attention to the use of the same verb in the preceding clause ('that all *was now completed*', *tetelestai*) and in v. 30 ('It is finished', *tetelestai*). The completion of his work is necessarily the fulfillment of Scripture and the performance of the Father's will. Jesus' cry *I am thirsty*, the final instance of his active, self-conscious obedience in the Fourth Gospel, and so tied to 'It is finished', thus represents 'not the isolated fulfilling of a particular trait in the scriptural picture, but the perfect completion of the whole prophetic image' (Westcott, 2. 315; *cf.* Reim, p. 49).

**19:29.** The drink offered here is not to be confused with the 'wine mixed with myrrh' which some charitable people offered him on the way to the cross (Mk. 15:23). That was a sedative designed to dull the agony, and Jesus refused to drink it. He was fully resolved to drink, instead, the cup of suffering the Father had assigned him. The episode in John 19:29 finds its parallel rather in Mark 15:36. Far from being a sedative, it would prolong life and therefore prolong pain. The 'wine vinegar' (*oxos*) was a cheap, sour wine used by soldiers; the use of this word recalls Psalm 69:21, where the same noun appears. The use of a sponge to carry some to Jesus' lips is also reported in Mark 15:36 par.

Only John, however, mentions that the sponge was placed on a branch of hyssop (Gk. *hyssōpō*). The hyssop (NEB mg. 'marjoram') is a little plant, a sprig of which is ideal for sprinkling—the use to which it was regularly put in Old Testament times (e.g. the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts and lintel at Passover, Ex. 12:22). By the same token, the plant is frequently judged too small and light to serve the purpose assigned to it here.

This has prompted commentators to favour one of two other approaches:

(1) Some think that John chooses the term 'hyssop' even though some other stick was in fact used by the soldiers (Mk. 15:36 speaks of a 'stick', *kalamos*), in order to forge additional links to the Passover. But giving Jesus a drink of wine vinegar soaked in a sponge perched on a bit of hyssop that couldn't hold its weight is a remote parallel from a sprig of hyssop used to sprinkle blood. A rising number of commentators are now rejecting this view (e.g., Schnackenburg, 3. 284; Haenchen, 2. 194).

(2) Others have followed the suggestion of Joachim Camerarius in the sixteenth century. He conjectured that the original word was not *hyssōpō* ('on

hyssop') but *hyssō* ('on a javelin'); and two cursive manuscripts were later found to support his suggestion. Some therefore wonder if an error could have occurred early enough in the transmission of the Gospel that it affected virtually all the manuscript evidence. The fact that *soldiers* offer this drink to Jesus might be taken to support the suggestion. However, G. D. Kilpatrick has shown that the *hyssos* (Lat. *pilum*) was not any kind of javelin, but one at this time reserved for Roman legionary troops, not the auxiliary troops stationed in Judea, and therefore no *hyssos* would have been available.

Of course, an individual *hyssos* might have made its way to Jerusalem, but this improbability compounded with the weakness of the textual evidence makes for an implausible case. Meanwhile, others have argued that although a *branch* of hyssop would not support a sodden sponge, a *stalk* of hyssop could. Indeed, the branches of hyssop at the end of a stalk could form a little 'nest' to cradle the sponge. Roman crosses were not very high; the soldiers needed to raise the sponge barely above their own heads.

**19:30.** However the drink reached him, Jesus completed his part in fulfilling the prophecy. *When he had received the drink*, Jesus cried out once more—possibly the 'loud cry' of Mark 15:37, the content of which is not there reported. If the content is recorded here, it may be because the beloved disciple was close enough to hear it.

In the Greek text, the cry itself is one word, *tetelestai* (cf. notes on v. 28). As an English translation, *It is finished* captures only part of the meaning, the part that focuses on completion. Jesus' work was done. But this is no cry of defeat; nor is it merely an announcement of imminent death (though it is not less than that). The verb *teleō* from which this form derives denotes the carrying out of a task, and in religious contexts bears the overtone of fulfilling one's religious obligations. Accordingly, in the light of the impending cross, Jesus could earlier cry, 'I have brought you glory on earth by completing (*teleiōsas*; i.e. by accomplishing) the work you gave me to do' (17:4). 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them *eis telos*—not only 'to the end' but to the full extent mandated by his mission. And so, on the brink of death, Jesus cries out, *It is accomplished!*

With that, Jesus *bowed his head and gave up* (*paredōken*, he 'handed over') *his spirit* (cf. Lk. 23:46). No-one took his life from him; he had the authority to lay it down of his own accord (10:17, 18), the culminating act of filial obedience (8:29; 14:31). The suggestion that this means he handed over the Holy Spirit to his followers is contradicted by the flow of the argument in ch. 20.

One of the best summaries of the significance of Jesus' death, a little poem by S. W. Gandy, is particularly appropriate here, because it mirrors John's use of irony to help his readers see:

*He hell in hell laid low;  
Made sin, he sin o'erthrew;  
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,*

*And death, by dying, slew.*