

He Suffered, was Crucified, Died, and was Buried

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Date: 03 April 2026

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[0:00] While there's very early descriptions of the essence of Christianity, the most famous, the earliest is the Apostles' Creed after the Bible. It was moving around the Mediterranean! being sung and recited in worship as early as about 130 AD.

So it's become probably the most famous succinct statement of what Christianity is. And in line 6, it says, Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. And so when you read about the earliest statements of what is Christianity, it's not first a philosophy, it's first stated as a history. He suffered, he was crucified, he died, he was buried. It's just what happened in the story that we just read. It's not a mythology, it's what Pontius Pilate did to him. It's what the soldiers and the Pharisees and humanity did to him that is the essence of Christianity. And so we read this long chapter describing the last, the second trial of Jesus into his crucifixion and his burial. Every sentence in that chapter is worth reflecting on for a long time. But we only have a few minutes today. And so I will only, I want to, with you, just consider the three things Jesus said when he was hanging on the cross in John's gospel. And nothing more today than that. When you read the three things John says that he said, it tells you so much about what the cross means and what it means for us today. So let's just do that briefly first. In verse 26 and 27, while Jesus is hanging on the cross, he looks up and he sees his mother, Mary, and he says, woman, behold your son. And then to John, behold your mother. Now Jesus at that point is hanging on the cross. He's been scourged, beaten twice. The first was the beating of the common criminal, fairly light. But the second was the most severe beating for somebody condemned to death. And it was an excruciating moment, a hideous moment. And I won't describe in detail today what it looked like.

Thorns were twisted into his brow because of medieval art. We think of the crown of thorns as just a thin wreath. But it was very likely, the historians think, a full head of thorns. So it would have gone over the top as well. Probably 40 to 60 wounds created by the thorns in his brow. And he was paraded, you'll remember, we read, up to Golgotha with the cross beam on his back that he had to carry part of the way. He was too weak to go the whole way. And there were nails, Roman nails, driven through his hands and his feet. And Pilate, all that happened, this torture happened after Pilate had said, I don't see anything wrong with him. There's no fault in him. The Roman governor who had the right of judgment declared him innocent. But the people overwhelmed Pilate. And in fear of the crowd, he declared him guilty and sent him to be crucified. And so they took Barabbas, you remember, the guilty one, the terrorist, went free. And the innocent one, Christ, was condemned. And you'll all probably know that the major issue in crucifixion is asphyxiation. It's just difficult to breathe. And so typically, someone being crucified dies by being unable to breathe. Now, this is the central event of all of human history. And Jesus Christ has been tortured, and he's been physically bruised.

And in the last moment of his life, he finds enough ability, breath, to draw, to look up and see his mom and say, mother. He sees his mom and he says, mother, this is your son. And one of the reasons for that is because she was a widow. And in the first century, being a widow meant a very difficult life for a woman. And so he wants her to be cared for. And so I just want to say that at the very last moment, Jesus had personal love for his mother. And that means that Jesus Christ at the cross did indeed have personal love for every one of you. Christ, God, became human, knows us, all people. And he went to the cross in personal love for you by name. And he looked at his mother, and he looked at John, and he expressed that in that moment. But that's not all the only reason he says this. Another reason is that in John's gospel, the very first sign, his first miraculous deed at the beginning of his public ministry was the turning of the water to wine at Cana at that dying wedding feast. And you might remember that the very first thing that Jesus did in his public ministry was his

mother came to him and said, this party is dying. Can you do something? And he said, woman. And so here at the end of his life, he says woman. And at the beginning of his ministry, he said woman. And that was not a title that we hear today. It sounds sort of like a lack of respect. But in the first century culture, it was honorific title to say that he was honoring her. And you see, you have the same thing at the beginning of his ministry and in the last moment of his ministry. And at the beginning of his ministry, he said, woman, it is not my hour. And so when she said, would you turn the water into the wine? He said, it's not my time. It's not my hour. Why? Because the wedding feast at Cana, the wine that had run dry, made him think about his own wedding, the crucifixion. It made him think about his hour.

And now the woman, he says woman, because it is the time for the wedding. You see, in that first miraculous deed, the wine that he gave to the people was the wine of festival joy, but it pointed him straight to the end of his life where he knew giving up his blood would be the wine that would bring the wedding feast to the people. And so what he's saying in this moment at the bookends of his life, of his ministry, is woman, you are my mother, but you're also my people. You are to be my bride, my family, just as much as everybody else in this room can be. He was saying today, I am purchasing with the wine of the feast, my blood, a new family. And woman and John, you are that new family. It's bigger than biological blood. Jesus Christ at the cross had personal love for you, and he came and died on the cross to give you a family that would never leave you. Secondly, he says in verse 28, I thirst. And so they brought him sour wine on a hyssop branch with a sponge. And this is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Psalm 69, where the psalmist writes of the one who would come and say, my throat is parched, and they would bring sour wine. Now he's being crucified. So of course, he's thirsty. He's dehydrated. He's been beaten and tortured. And it's this horrible scene. But he never complained one time in the story of what he had received. And Isaiah 53 says that he would receive these wounds, yet open not his mouth. So he never complains about the most horrific things here.

[7:26] But the one thing he does say is, I thirst. Why? Why that? Why is that the one thing? Because something more physical, more, I should say, more than physical thirst was happening in this moment. And so the Bible, from Old Testament to New Testament, is clear on this. Think of Psalm 42, as the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for thee, O God. So across the Bible, thirsting is this metaphor for spiritual life, for wanting spiritual life that you've never found satisfaction for, excuse me, in this life. And remember what Jesus said. He said, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink, and I will give them water that will satisfy them forever. Now he, the one that came to give the drink that would satisfy true spiritual life to humanity, he is the one now who sits here and says, but I thirst. What does this mean? This is something more. The physical is pointing to something more, and it's pointing to the fact that in this moment he's experiencing spiritual agony.

His thirst is the pronouncement physically of what he's going through spiritually. This is the moment where he is undergoing the wrath of God. God is pouring his wrath upon him. His ultimate thirst is him getting what our sins deserve, complete spiritual destitution and separation and forsakenness from God, his Father. And so they take this hyssop branch, and they stick a sponge on it, and they dip it in sour wine and put it to his lips to give him some relief. And I wish we had time to look at the hyssop branch and the sour wine and the sponge because all three of them have a history, but I'll just do the hyssop branch only. The hyssop branch that they use has a history. Why this hyssop branch? And back at the Passover, when the Israelites were in Exodus, God said to them, the angel of death is coming to every home and taking the life of the firstborn for your sins. But if you will take a hyssop branch, and you will wipe the blood of the lamb across the doorpost, the angel of death will pass by, and no one in your household will die. You will be forgiven. Even more than that, in the Levitical law, if a leper or diseased person was cast out of the city in order for them to be welcomed back into the community, what would they do? They would take a hyssop branch, and they would cast hyssop upon them.

And it would be a public pronouncement that they were clean, acceptable in the eyes of the community. We sang Psalm 51. Have you ever noticed that the verse 9, Psalm 51 says, cleanse me with hyssop. Purify me that I may be clean, that I may be washed. Why this hyssop branch?

And the people would have said all throughout the Old Testament, what is going on? Why does God keep saying, use a hyssop branch to pronounce cleansing and purification and the blood to be poured as a substitute symbolically for us? Why the hyssop branch? And well, the basic answer is God was saying, hey, just wait 1,500 years, and you'll find out. Because in this moment, we see that this metaphor of the whole of the purification system, of what it means to be cleansed by the blood of the lamb is being used. You see, just like the Israelites would have put the hyssop branch to the wooden doorpost with the blood of the lamb, saying, the lamb is our substitute. So in this moment, the hyssop branch reaches up and touches the blood of the lamb, the lamb himself on that wooden post, saying, this is the substitute. This is the lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world. This is the one who thirsts in spiritual agony for our sins in this moment. Not only does the cross say that you are personally loved, the cross says you are washed in the blood of the lamb. It says you are cleansed by his blood. He drank the sour wine of the dregs of God's wrath all the way to the bottom so that you could have your spiritual thirst quenched forever. Lastly, verse 30, he says, it is finished. Now, this is that famous statement of Christ on the cross, tetelestai in Greek, and I mention that only because it comes from the word telos in Greek, or goal, or purpose. So what is Jesus saying when he says it is finished? And it's the word, my telos is fulfilled. My mission is the word telos. And so in this moment, he's effectively saying, I've done it. I've experienced the agony of spiritual, of being forsaken by God. I've done it. It's complete. I've done it for them. That's what he's saying in this moment. So it's him saying, the thing I was always meant to do, the goal of my entire earthly incarnational existence, the mission given to me by the Father, has been brought to its completion in this moment of my agony. And now the effects of this completion will go forward into world history forever for my people. That's what he's saying. It's, see what he's saying? He's saying, it's finished. I've done it.

Mission complete. And he's turning to you in that and implying this. I did it all. Don't dare think it's you. Don't dare think that you can save yourself. I did it all for you. I did every bit of it for you. You can't do any of it. And so when he says, it's finished, he's saying, I've left no unfinished business when it comes to salvation. There is nothing left. You can't do anything.

I've done everything. You know, notice he didn't say, I am finished. I am spent. I've got nothing left. He said, it is finished. And in John's gospel, John calls the cross his glorification, his lifting up. This is a moment where he's shouting victory. He's not crying defeat. He's shouting victory. It's finished. I've done every bit of it. So let me invite you as we finish.

[13:21] Come to the Christ of the cross today in your soul, in your spirit, in your mind, in your heart, in your emotions, in your thought life. And if you are saying today, I do need spiritual life that I've never had before. I've been left thirsting for something to fulfill me that I've never quite captured in romance and work and achievement and relationship and everything else this world has to offer. I've never had it. If you want to come today and find spiritual fulfillment, it's in the Christ of the cross, and you need do nothing but what the man in the gospel said. Just pray, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. That's it. And the spiritual life of the cross is your life, your fulfillment. He thirsted for you. That will be true. And believer in the room, as you come today on this good Friday, and you say, the most evil, so good for us, leave today hearing, it is finished. He did it all.

You can't save yourself. There's nothing you can do. And so go Christian from here, and don't beat yourself up every day. Don't self-flagellate and saying, I wish I were better. I wish I could do more. I wish I could do something. I need to achieve more. Don't go do that. No, hear the words say, he said to you today, it is finished. You can say, I know I'm forgiven. I know there is nothing I can add to this. Jesus' death was not just a contribution to your salvation. It was the verdict of who you are in Christ Jesus. And so if you're saying today, like we do every day, I've got to be better. I've got to do more. That is not the essence of Christianity. The essence of Christianity, it's already been done. Look at the bloodied man on the cross, personally undergoing spiritual agony for your sins. Listen to him. Listen to him. Listen to him say to you today, it is finished. You are forgiven. Let's pray. Father, we ask that we would hear, uh, tetelestai. It is finished that we would believe that today. And I pray for someone in this room, maybe who is searching for spiritual fulfillment, a thirst that's never been satisfied. They, they look to the waters of this life and have not found them. And so they see today,

maybe they were made for another life. And I pray, oh Christ, that you would help them to hear that you thirsted for them. And so draw our hearts towards the Christ of the cross as we sing this final hymn. And we pray that in Christ's name. Amen.