



Three Drinks

Examining the drinks offered to Jesus
at His crucifixion, according to Scripture

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There are some elements to examine before one can truly appreciate the significance of the drinks offered to Jesus on the day of His crucifixion. The drinks offered to Jesus were comprised of different ingredients, and offered at different times throughout the crucifixion in order to achieve varying purposes or effects.

First, let's examine the "sour wine" that comprised the base for each of the three drink offerings. The sour wine that is described in this text was a common drink for Roman soldiers. "Posca" is an old, stale wine that was beginning to sour & had been watered down. It is the ancient equivalent to cheap 3-2 beer of today. Holding little intoxicating value, it was an inexpensive & readily available drink that would not spoil over long periods of time. Commonly, a mixture of myrrh was added to the wine to provide a more favorable aroma, making its stale condition more tolerable to the drinker. This was typically done as a cover-up once the wine had become very stale. In this condition, the wine wasn't very pleasant to drink, and was sometimes called wine vinegar.

Myrrh was a gum resin that was derived from a shrubby tree, prominent in the region where Jesus lived. It had several uses, most commonly used as a type of perfume, often added in anointing oils. This would have been the offering that the "wise men" brought to Jesus when He was a little boy. Other uses included purification for women, embalming and as a mild pain killing drug. When ingested, it had a bitter taste, so the Roman soldiers had to be careful with the mixture of wine & myrrh, so as not to add too much and make the wine intolerable.

Gall is the second ingredient added to the wine, as listed in Matthew's account. This ingredient has a similar use to myrrh, in that it was also bitter to the taste and worked as a pain killer. When mixed with wine & myrrh, it was known to cause a hallucinating effect, causing the victim to talk out of his head. The use of both myrrh & gall suggests that they soldiers were not wanting to relieve Jesus' pain, but that they were wanting to increase the suffering by causing Him to be out of his head from the effects of the drugs. When the mixture of gall is too great, the effect is the same as hemlock... a violent & painful death.

Because of the severe blood loss and exhaustion which Jesus was enduring, His body would have been racked with severe thirst. This physical drive for something to relieve His thirst underscores His humanity and would have only aided the soldiers in their attempt to drug Him. This leads us to the three drinks offered to Jesus on the day of His crucifixion.

Drink #1 was the bitter wine mixture of old wine, myrrh and gall. This was offered to each victim of crucifixion and was mandated by Roman law.

Both Matthew & Mark's Gospel accounts record this offering, and history teaches us that this was always done before the victim was crucified. It is important to understand that both accounts record that Jesus tasted, but refused to drink.

And when they came to a place called Golgotha,
which means Place of a Skull,
they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall;
and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink
Matthew 27:33-34, NASB'95

Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha,
which is translated, Place of a Skull.
They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it.
Mark 15:22-33, NASB'95

Although He has endured severe suffering, Jesus chose to remain in control of His mental faculties while receiving the penalty of mankind's sin.

Drink #2 is recorded by Luke as being offered while Jesus is on the cross. Crucifixion is a terribly humiliating death and the victim was low enough that everyone who was near had the ability to slap, hit or spit upon them. The victim was in constant ridicule, being mocked over and over for their crimes. The humiliation was further increased by the fact that the victims were always naked when crucified.

It is in this scenario that the second drink is offered to Jesus. This time, the Roman soldiers in charge of watching over Jesus were documented as casting lots (gambling) for Jesus' clothes at the very foot of His cross. No doubt, they were drinking the stale wine, but this time the wine is referred to by Luke as sour wine, and there is no mention of myrrh or gall. Many have taken this out of context, and project a "contradiction in the text" so that they can throw out the account all together. This is due to poor research, and a bias against Scriptural record.

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals,
one on the right and the other on the left.

But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him,
saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One."

The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,
and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

Luke 23:33-37, NASB'95

Context reveals that the scene was one of mockery. We can envision it clearly upon careful examination of the text. The soldiers have offered the wine, gall & myrrh mixture to Jesus at an earlier point, as they were preparing to crucify Him... and He refused. The crucifixion has gone on and the soldiers are now mocking Jesus, gambling for His clothes and adding insult to injury by drinking wine and mockingly offering it to Him on the cross. This is equal to the soldiers saying "You refused to drink because you were so strong... how strong are you now that we are drinking in front of you & you are thirsty?" Offering Jesus a "regular drink" of wine... wine the soldiers would have been drinking... would have been pure mockery of His torment. Clearly, this was a part of the soldiers mocking Jesus, and is separate from the initial drink offering.

Luke holds the distinction as being the only Gospel writer who includes this in his account. Being a physician, Luke would have understood the depth of pain that this would bring to Jesus. Luke

understood the terrible physical suffering that Jesus was enduring, compounded by extreme blood loss & nearly unbearable thirst. The fact that Luke is the only writer to include this in his account does not provide contradiction in the text, it merely provides a further view from a perspective that a doctor could appreciate. Luke's further distinction of "sour wine" designates this as not containing the myrrh or the gall mixture contained in the first drink.

Following the first & second offering of something to drink comes **Drink #3** by some unknown or un-named bystander at Jesus' crucifixion. It is unknown what the motive for this offering is... the text allows us the idea that it was in a compassionate response to Jesus' statement "*I am thirsty*" as recorded by John. However, the record in Matthew & Mark suggests that it may have been motivated by a desire to see if Elijah was going to come to His aid.

This could be taken as mockery, or as a fascination to see what was going to happen. Whatever the motivation, it clearly follows Jesus' statement "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" as He senses the presence of God leave Him while He bears the weight of mankind's sin. Each writer records that Jesus did receive this drink before giving up His spirit, and this is clearly recorded as occurring at about the 9th hour... or the 6th hour upon the cross.

As debilitating as thirst can become, one can only imagine the torture that Jesus endured while being offered something to drink during His crucifixion. He was entirely unable to get something for Himself, and totally reliant upon his assassins to show compassion & meet His physical needs. One should note that victims of crucifixion often lingered on the cross for days... up to six days have been historically recorded. The fact that Jesus lasted 6 hours underscores His severe physical condition, and the torment of thirst.

And when they had crucified Him,
they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.
And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.
And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read,
"THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."
At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.
And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads
and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,
save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."
In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders,
were mocking Him and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself.
He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.
"He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"
The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.
Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.
About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,
"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying,
"This man is calling for Elijah."
Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge,
he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.
But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."
And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.
Matthew 27:35-50, NASB'95

And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves,
casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.

It was the third hour when they crucified Him.

The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.

[And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."]

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying,

"Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,
save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes,

were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself.

"Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!"

Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.

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?"

When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying,

"Behold, He is calling for Elijah."

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 uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.

Mark 15:24-37, NASB'95

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished,
to fulfill the Scripture, *said, "I am thirsty."

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.

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!"

And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

John 19:28-30, NASB'95

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