

# Matthew 26:36-44 - Thursday's Other Cup

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, Sit here while I go over there and pray. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.

Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour, he asked Peter? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. He went away a second time and prayed, My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done. When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy.

So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Thus far, God's holy word, pray with me. Father, it is sobering as we read these accounts, as we remember the passion, the suffering of our Lord. We know as we read them that the cross is coming. We also know there's an empty tomb coming, that Easter is just around the corner. Father, would that hope encourage us to face the painful realities that are before us honestly? Make us more grateful tonight, Jesus, for what you have done for us. We ask it in your name. Amen.

As we prepare to come to the Lord's table tonight, I want us to think for a few minutes about the cups of Maundy Thursday. One we read about earlier is, for good reason, the more famous cup. There have been movies made about it, lots of talk about it, the cup from the Last Supper, the cup that is the new covenant in Jesus' blood that He extends to His disciples. We'll partake of that cup together here in a bit. But the passage I just read for us twice refers to another cup, one that is not so pleasant to drink. I remember when I was a kid visiting the World Coke Museum in Atlanta. It's a really neat place if you've never been. You can learn as you walk through it all sorts of things about the history of Coke and bottling and how it was developed. Any tour, though, is not complete without a trip to the tasting room. This wonderful tasting room with dozens and dozens of different Coke beverages from around the world. All sorts of Coke products. There's Coke, classic the way you know it and love it. Diet, of course, and then all of the things you can put in it. I don't even know them all. There's cherry and lime and whatever else you want in your Coke, you can try it there. All of the ones you know and love as well as Coke products from around the world. The one that usually gets the most discussion and talk from tour groups is an Italian beverage called Beverly.

You probably haven't had

[ 4 : 12 ] Beverly unless you've been to the World of Coke Museum. It looks like yet one more soda on a range of sodas from the machines there. I assure you it's not. It should have a different classification all its own.

I still remember the bitter taste that hits you like a ton of bricks when you drink it. If you've never had it, most American mouths are not used to this kind of drink. It is much worse than cough syrup. It hits you much more strongly. It is so bitter. Typically what you do if you're like me and if you have younger siblings, I'm an oldest child, so I've done this more than once, is that you hide your reaction to it when you taste it the first time until you've been able to take a full cup of it over to your younger siblings and say, have you had this one yet? You've got to try it. And then you wait to watch their reaction as their faces contort, as they yell out or spit it out, and you delight in seeing them suffer just a little more than you did a few minutes ago. The contrast between Beverly and the many other drinks you've been sampling is quite stark. The sugary sweetness of Coke that has just been there on your lips in one cup, and then the bitterness of Beverly in another cup.

We see a stark contrast like that between the cup of the Lord's Supper and the cup Jesus speaks of in this passage. We leave the upper room for a moment on that Thursday evening and go with Jesus and his trusted friends to the garden of Gethsemane. And Jesus, overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, it says. So distraught at what he's facing that he could die, turns to his father and he prays, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. And then when he prays a second time, if it's not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done. Here's the perfect Son of God who suffered all sorts of things, now facing a cup that he speaks of, sweating drops of blood, sorrowful to the point of death as he contemplates drinking this bitter cup. What could it be that would make him feel that way? What makes him wonder at facing this cup that he's about to drink?

The cup Jesus was contemplating is the cup of God's wrath that he will drink. The cup of suffering often referred to in the scriptures. It's the just punishment of God due unto sin. The full weight of God's righteous justice poured out on someone. Isaiah 51 describes the effects of this cup being poured out on God's people because of their sin. Isaiah says it this way, Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath.

[ 7 : 30 ] You who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger. These double calamities have come upon you. Who can comfort you? Ruin and destruction, famine and sword. Who can console you? Your sons have fainted. They lie at the head of every street like antelope caught in a net. They are filled with the wrath of the Lord and the rebuke of your God. That's just one description of this cup. The afflicted one is the one who drinks it. Made drunk but not with wine. The cup that made you stagger the goblet of my wrath as Isaiah describes it. That's why it's often referred to as a cup of suffering. The just judgment of a holy God unleashed, poured out beyond what a man can take so that he's drunk but not on wine. Staggered, reeling physically, emotionally, spiritually overwhelmed. When you drink the bitter cup, you're beyond help. You're beyond help. This passage says no one can console you. You can't deliver yourself like an antelope trapped in a net. Do you have that picture in your mind struggling to get free and all you do is get more entangled? It's fair to say the wrath of God is the cup that will supply the flames of hell forever. The point of all these images is that when the wrath of God is poured out upon sin, the results are utterly devastating. And Jesus knows this. Look back at Matthew 26 where he's there in the garden. Jesus who has repeatedly told his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem because he must suffer and he must die. Now on the night of his betrayal is overwhelmed at the thought of drinking the bitter cup. He wonders aloud to his father if there's another way, if there's not perhaps a different cup from this one. Isn't it poignant how he goes to the father three times?

Three times to his father as he wrestles with the thought of tasting the father's wrath, the intense pain of crucifixion, the utter agony of drinking the cup of God's wrath.

And yet Jesus chooses to drink the cup, not my will, but yours be done the first time. Your will be done. And then the third time, the same thing it says, your will be done.

He chooses the bitter cup. And the question for us is not so much which cup would we choose, but which cup do we deserve? There's actually only one cup within our reach. What does every sin deserve?

Our kids know. The catechism tells us every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God, both in this life and in the life to come. We deserve for all those descriptions of staggering, inconsolable, overwhelmed people to be true of us for all eternity. Beyond help, by birth and by action.

[ 10 : 57 ] The bitter cup is ours. But Jesus takes the bitter cup of God's wrath and offers to us the cup of life in His blood.

In doing so, He actually fulfills the promise of Isaiah 51, the part I didn't get to last time. Listen to what God says to His staggering people. Therefore, hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk but not with wine.

This is what your sovereign Lord says, your God who defends His people. See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger. From that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.

Children, child of God, from that bitter cup, you will never drink. In Isaiah, it's because God takes that cup and gives it to the wicked nations.

Someone else begins to drink His wrath. On Maundy Thursday, it's because Jesus takes it for us and drinks the cup of God's wrath, do our sins so that we never will.

[12:12] I have taken that cup out of your hand. You will never drink it again, He says. Never. Jesus takes the bitter cup of God's wrath and offers to us the cup of life instead.

What does He say to His disciples earlier in Matthew 26? Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them saying, drink from it, drink from it, all of you.

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The cup He offers to you and me is His blood. It would require His death for Him to extend it to us, for Him to offer to us the sweet cup instead of the bitter one.

Someone had to drink the bitter cup because of your sin. Someone had to drink the bitter cup because of my sin.

[13:12] And Jesus, the one who knew no sin, becomes sin for us. On the cross, He drinks the bitter cup so that He can extend to us the sweet cup instead of the bitter one.

The cup of peace with God instead of enmity and hostility. The cup of forgiveness of sins, He says, instead of punishment of sins.

The cup of warm welcome from the Father rather than abandonment by the Father. The cup of blessing and life instead of curse and death.

That's the good news for us tonight. Jesus has taken that cup for us. Do you appreciate the contrast between the two cups?

Between the one you deserve and the one you will drink in just a moment? Jesus knew better than any other, in fact, the sweetness of the cup of life, didn't He?

[14:16] Fellowship with His Father. Peace. Blessing. He knew what it tasted like. It was so sweet. And Jesus also knew better than any other the pain and the agony of the cup He was choosing to drink for us.

He wasn't tricked by an older sibling into drinking the bitter cup. He took it willingly. So the good news of the gospel is not that the choice between the two cups is yours.

It's not. The good news of the gospel is that the choice was His. The choice between the two cups was His. And dear ones, you know what He did.

He chose the bitter cup. Knowing better than anyone in the whole world the difference between the two cups, He chose the bitter one so that He could place the sweet one in your hand.

Hallelujah. What a Savior. Let's pray. Jesus, thank You.

[15:35] Thank You for the cup that we will drink in a moment and the one that we will never, ever drink. Because You have drained the penalty due our sin forever.

Thank You, thank You. Might we celebrate as those who understand what has been taken away from us and what has been given to us in Your death in our place.

We ask in Your name. Amen. As we come to this table, we're going to do so considering our sin.

From Matthew 26 at verse 20. When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the twelve disciples. While they were eating, He said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray Me.

Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, Am I the one, Lord? He replied, One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with Me will betray Me.

[16:45] For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays Him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born.

Judas, the one who would betray Him, also asked, Rabbi, am I the one?

And Jesus told him, You have said it. Join me with the bold print. Lord, for how easily we betray You. Lord, for how often we assume that betrayal comes only at the hands of others.

Lord, for how often we have set our hands upon the bowl of betrayal. Lord, for not considering that our birth was yet one more sinner whose burden You would have to bear.

On the way, Jesus told them, Tonight, all of you will desert Me. For the Scriptures say, God will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.

Peter declared, Even if everyone else deserts You, I will never desert You. Jesus replied, Let's confess together.

[18:05] Jesus, we like Peter have denied You. We like Peter have made false promises of allegiance.

We like Peter have deserted You in times of trouble. We like Peter have assumed our commitments to You would never waver.

We like Peter are hypocrites. We would call all men traitors before considering the same of ourselves. Spend a few moments now in private confession.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

I think one of the most striking aspects of Jesus taking the bitter cup for us is that it comes right after these passages we've just read on betrayal and denial.

[ 19 : 59 ] It comes right in the midst of His closest followers falling asleep at His greatest hour of need. When Jesus made that choice between the two cups, He knew what He was doing.

He didn't take the bitter cup for good, faithful, loyal, always alert followers, did He? In the midst of knowing exactly who they were and what they were like, Jesus took the cup, faced God's wrath, for sinners like you and me.

Hear the kind of people the Father invites to this table. From Luke chapter 14. Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

After the servant had done this, he reported, there is still room for more. So his master said, go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come so that the house will be full.

Poor. Crippled. Blind. Lame. Doubting. Failing.

[ 21 : 19 ] Hopeless. Without Him. He says, come. Come. Come to the feast. He invites you, trusting Him, to come.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for this table. Thank You for such a gracious invitation to people who could never come on their own.

Thank You that You've not only set the table, but that this table is itself, the body and blood of Jesus is what actually qualifies us to even be here.

Father, You know well that we were without hope apart from that, apart from Your making us fit to sit at this table. We would never have a seat.

Thank You, thank You for the cup that we are about to take and for Your love to us that we celebrate in our Lord Jesus. Would You set these elements apart from their common use to one that would encourage our hearts spiritually and where we would feed on Jesus by faith and trust Him more tonight than we did this morning.

[ 22 : 41 ] Would You strengthen our faith? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, took the bread and He broke it and gave it to His disciples.

As I, ministering in His name, give this bread to You. And He said, Take, eat. This is My body broken for You. Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner, after supper, He took the cup. He said, This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which was shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it, all of you.

This cup, this cup, He said, is the one I want you to drink from. The one that's sweet. The one that's My blood poured out from You rather than the one that deserves to be filled with Your blood for Your sins.

Jesus says, This cup will be sweet because later tonight, I'm drinking the bitter one for You. I drank the bitter one for You so that I could put this one in Your hands.

[ 23 : 49 ] Brothers and sisters, when you take this cup tonight, rejoice. Rejoice that He's taken the bitter cup for you and placed the sweet cup in Your hand and drink.

Drink with great joy and thanksgiving to Jesus. Let's come and partake together. Ushers will bring you both forward and back to the tables. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](http://southwood.org).