

The Cup

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[0 : 0 0] And if you'd like to turn to the same passage as last Sunday evening, which is Matthew 26, beginning at verse 36. So it's Matthew 26, beginning at verse 36.

So Matthew chapter 26, beginning at verse 36. Now hear God's word.

And Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, sit here, while I go over there and pray. And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me. And going little further, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And he came to his disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, so could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, my father, if it is possible, sorry, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.

And again, he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for a third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.

[2 : 1 5] The Lord is with you. Please open them again to Matthew 26, beginning at verse 36 through to verse 46.

If you're there already, you'll remember that last week we looked at the prayer of Jesus, and we're going to be looking at the words of Jesus, in particular over these next few Sunday evenings.

Words matter, but the meaning of that those words carry matter more. And Jesus here is speaking to his father in prayer. And last week we went digging into the text, and instead of just listening to the prayer, we came to the conclusion that it was a comforting conclusion that there are some things that God cannot do. And we skipped over the surface ones, like, well, God cannot lie, and therefore we can always hear the truth from God, and that's kind of comforting. Well, it's very comforting, but it's a surface level understanding. Jesus took us down to the very depths and presented us with, what if the suffering that you go through cannot be done any other way? That what if the purpose that God is achieving in your life cannot be achieved in any other way other than what you go through all the time?

And we looked at a couple other passages in Scripture and concluded that even if God wanted to perhaps hurry the process along and get us to be more mature, a little bit more quickly than what we are, that he can't do that either, it seems. That God is incredibly careful with us, as though we were incredibly fragile, and he handles us with just immense care because of the things that can't happen. So we ended up admitting, or seeing, admitting with the text, that salvation is one of those things that cannot happen any other way, that not a single man, woman, boy, and girl in this world can be saved if Jesus didn't die on the cross. And not just if somebody didn't die on the cross, but if God the Son didn't die on the cross. It's important that it's him. And so if the Son decided not to do the will of the Father, but that's not what he was asking, he was asking that could not the will of God be done in a different way? Not that I don't want to do the will, but I'll do the will, but can it not be done in a different way?

And the answer came back, no. And so either salvation happens this way, or salvation doesn't happen at all.

[5 : 16] And hopefully from that, your appreciation of Jesus, even your love for Jesus, begins to grow and begins to deepen, that Jesus willingly obeyed his Father in a moment where salvation could not be done any other way, because the Father and the triune God of Scripture chose to love you. If God did not choose to love us, then Jesus wouldn't have had to go through it. But the moment God chose to set his love upon us, the cross was inevitable. It was the requirement, it was the demand, as we have sung already this evening. And so there's a strange kind of comfort, but it is a comfort to know that what you go through, okay, is not just used by God, but actually it couldn't be done any other way.

See, some of us believe that what we go through is used by God. In other words, God just so happens to be using this, but he could be using something else. But that's not what we learned last week. What we learned last week was that it's not just used, but it's necessary that it's to be done this way.

And that's a lot for us to take in, and it's a lot for us to accept, because naturally, like Jesus humanly, we would shy away from the pain and the struggle and the difficulty, asking God, can it just not be done another way? Can you not achieve the same purpose, but in a different way? And the answer is no. Well, this evening, our focus is actually on the cup.

Now, of course, when we make reference to the cup, we're really making reference to what the cup means, what it signifies, what it symbolizes. And so I have three parts to this. The first is the cup, the second is to drink, and the third is the taste. So imagine it in these three ways.

The cup, to drink the cup, or the contents of the cup, and then the taste. What does it taste like? And these are all images and descriptions that the Bible uses about the death of Christ, and of course, Christ drinking the cup. So firstly, the cup. Why is it so terrifying to drink?

[7 : 51] Jesus is asking the Father, can it not be done another way? What is it about drinking this cup that is, one, necessary? Well, we understand why it's necessary, because salvation can't happen any other way. Christ has to die on the cross. So we understand why it's necessary, but why is it so terrifying?

Why is drinking this cup so terrifying? Well, obviously, because it can't happen any other way, but more importantly, the cross speaks about more than just salvation.

The cross speaks about how God deals with sin. The cross speaks about how much God loves you. The cross speaks about what God thinks about sin, not just how he deals with it, but what he thinks about it.

The cross is something that has to deal with God's judgment. The cross is something that has to deal with death. To put it another way, Jesus Christ on the cross must be victorious.

Death cannot afford to win. If it wins, it's over. And so Christ must die, but he must live again. And so the cup, which is the cross, Christ drinks this cup on the cross, which we will get to see in a minute, speaks of more things than just saving us.

[9 : 12] It has so much more to say about what God actually does for us. So we're not to think of this cup in the same way as a child not wanting to drink this 10 or 15 mls of medicine.

You know, where they put it to their lips and, you know, they hardly open their mouth and they get a taste of it and that's disgusting. I just don't want any more. Even though it be the very thing that could make them better, it's the very thing that they don't want to drink.

Okay? Even though it's the very thing, even though it's the very remedy, the solution, it's the very thing that the child wants to avoid to drink. Why? Because it's horrible.

Now, for a child, it's just the taste. For Jesus, it's so much more. But even for Jesus, drinking this cup carries with it a horrible taste, as Hebrew puts it.

So how are we to think of this cup? Well, the cup means several things in several different ways throughout the Old Testament. In the Psalms, the cup is referred to both as a cup of blessing and a cup of salvation.

[10 : 22] In other words, while salvation is a blessing, the cup is a blessing in and of itself. There's other blessings that come along with this cup. And we know, having known that Christ drunk this cup for us, that we get more than salvation when we get Jesus.

When we get Jesus, we get everything. So we understand that behind this cup, there's not just salvation, but there's huge blessing for us. More than we could ever get thankful for in a lifetime.

But elsewhere in the Bible, in Isaiah and in Jeremiah in particular, the same cup or this same symbol of a cup is referred to as the wrath of God or the judgment of God upon the people who disobey him, who don't want anything to do with God.

And so we begin to understand that this cup that Jesus is actually going to take and to drink, the cup that he has in mind is both salvation and blessing.

But for us, for him, it's judgment and the wrath of God. In the same cup, there is both blessing and wrath.

[11 : 34] But it seems that we get the best parts and Christ gets the worst. And so this is what is happening when Jesus Christ is considering what it will mean to drink this cup.

But as we've said that Jesus does accept the will of the Father, he accepts the will of the Father willingly to drink the cup. And it's not just one of those meanings.

He's just drinking a cup of blessing or a cup of salvation. It's all of those meanings. It's blessing, it's salvation, it's wrath and it's judgment. And so we begin to understand what Jesus is understanding as he's praying this prayer, can this cup not pass from me?

And the Father's saying no. And it's not the salvation and the blessing as such, the blessings of salvation. But it's actually the wrath and the God. And here's why. Because Jesus understands more than anybody else what the wrath of God meant for the enemies of God in the Old Testament.

What the judgment of God meant for the enemies of God in the Old Testament. What the cup of judgment meant in Isaiah. What the cup of wrath meant in Jeremiah. He knew exactly what that meant for the other nations.

[12 : 47] And now he's being asked by his Father to drink it. So this judgment and this wrath which is normally meant for the enemies of God, which is poured out on the enemies of God, the Son is being asked to drink this cup.

And so you can begin to understand exactly what Jesus Christ, hopefully at least in part, of what he's going through when he's considering can it not be done another way? And the Father's answer is no, it cannot be done another way.

It's not as if it could be drunk by somebody else. It had to be drunk by Jesus. Remember the disciples who said, you know, can we sit on one on your right side, one on your left?

And Jesus says to them, well, can you drink the cup that I have to drink? And what do they say? Yeah, sure. That they have no idea. They have no idea of what Jesus is going to have to do.

And so much so that they think they can do it themselves. And in Luke 22, this is how Luke puts it. Being in agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.

[14 : 03] You see, Jesus knew that this is no small thing. That as he looked at us 2,000 years later, and as he looks at all of those souls 5,000 years from now, of all the people that he's going to save, he understood that as he drank the cup, that though it was for all of those and for all of us, it meant judgment.

It meant wrath. And so no wonder he's praying. And in extreme agony, his sweat became drops of blood, which, as I'm told, medically is a sign of severe agony and torment of what you're just about to go through.

So Christ drinks it to drink. Well, the place where Christ actually drinks the cup, or the symbol of drinking, is the place where he receives the wrath. If the cup is salvation and blessing, and judgment and wrath, where does the cup get drunk?

Well, it gets drunk on the cross. Christ on the cross is the place where he takes the wrath of God upon himself, where he takes the judgment of God upon himself. And that same place is where, as the judgment comes down upon him, every blessing flows from his life to ours, called the great exchange.

Every blessing of salvation in Christ just comes straight to us. It's just remarkable. Now, in John chapter 3, which we looked briefly at last week, I alluded to it.

[15 : 40] I want us to pay a little bit more attention to it this week. John makes reference, sorry, Jesus makes reference in John 3 that he's going to be on a cross, that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up.

But why does Jesus, this is the question, why does Jesus liken his salvation of the world to the very thing back in Numbers 21 that was killing people?

Okay, Moses put a serpent, made a bronze serpent to put on a staff, on a pole, and to lift up. But the serpent in Numbers 21 was the very thing that was killing God's people, was the very thing that was destroying God's people.

It was the judgment for their own disobedience. And this is how it happened. If you go back in your Bibles, you'll read that the people are complaining to God, as they normally do, through Moses often.

They're having to go at Moses, and God has to remind Moses, look, they're really not having to go at you. It's me that they've got it in for. And they say things like, well, it was better off back in Egypt, you know, as if.

[16 : 53] And through their disobedience, God sends these fiery serpents amongst them. And the people get bitten by these serpents, and they die. And the solution, the solution to it, is God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent, or a serpent out of bronze, and to stick it on a pole.

So here we have an image of the very thing that is killing the people, the very thing that is judging the people, is now being lifted up on a pole. And God tells Moses that if you get the people to look at it, they will live, that they will not die.

And here we have Jesus in John 3, likening himself on the cross to the serpent that was killing everybody as a form of judgment in the Old Testament.

Why does he do it? Why is that the image of the cross? Well, because Jesus wants you to understand that he's the judge. Jesus is the judge.

And what we're seeing on the cross is the judge taking his own judgment. In the same way the serpent being lifted up on the pole in Numbers was the very thing that was judging the people of God, that as they looked to that, they were then healed and did not die.

[18 : 14] In the same way Jesus says, as people look to me, because I am the judge of the world, but as people look to me, as I take the judgment upon myself, they will live.

What we're meant to see in the cross of Jesus is that salvation can only happen through judgment. But instead of you being judged, Jesus gets judged.

The judge takes the judgment. Okay, the judge takes the judgment. In other words, if you're to have a real view of what substitution is, substitution is not standing in the dock having your sentence passed of life imprisonment at the end of which you will die, and then somebody else from the jury or from the crowd saying, I'll step in for you.

That's not substitution. That's immoral. Because the guy who's stepping in for you hasn't been sinned against, hasn't committed any sin, hasn't broken the law, hasn't done it, right?

What you're meant to see here in John 3 and with the serpent in the wilderness and Jesus is the judge coming down out and standing in the dock, passing the judgment upon himself because it was his law or the law of the land that was broken.

[19 : 34] And so the only reason why Jesus can take the judgment in our place is because it's his law that was broken. That's why he can take it away. That's why nobody else can remove it.

And so that's what it means for Jesus to drink the cup. It is to take the wrath of God upon himself. That is, the judge is the one who normally administers the judgment.

Here, the judge is the one receiving the judgment. And he receives it for us. Salvation happens through judgment. And so what you're meant to see, instead of death being the victor, right, most people look at the cross and go, Jesus died.

Death won. No, on the cross, death is the victim. On the cross, death is the victim. How do we know that death is the victim and not the victor?

Because when Jesus died, death died. How do we know that? Well, this is why Jesus refers to the serpent in the wilderness. The very thing that was killing everyone, when it's looked to, they live.

[20 : 44] Nobody can die anymore. The death is destroyed by the very thing that's creating the death. And so Jesus is saying that his people look to me, that I'm killing death on the cross.

But most people look at the cross and see a man who dies. Death won. Death didn't win at all. Death was the victim. Death died in the death of Christ.

And so in the same way, the people of God could look back and understand that the serpent, the very thing that was taking their life away, was the very thing that could, if they looked to, give them their life back.

It's the same thing that we have with Jesus. Remember when Jesus is speaking about who to fear? He says, don't fear man, but fear him who could not only deal with your body, but throw your soul into hell.

If you're really gonna fear someone, fear someone like that. So here on the cross, Jesus Christ, by drinking the wrath of God upon himself, death dies.

[21 : 54] That's why, that's why as a believer, death has no sting. We can die, it's not a problem. Death doesn't even have a victory over us.

It's just something that happens to our bodies before we go to meet the Lord. So by Jesus drinking the cup, he's teaching us that we are saved through judgment and only through judgment.

That we pass through the judgment. Death is dead. Death can't hold us down. It can't keep us where we are.

Salvation only happens through judgment. And that's the cup that Christ drinks. And so thirdly and finally, the taste.

What does it taste like? Well, when we look at Jesus, we are meant to see, and it ought to be the case for all of us, exactly what Hebrews wants us to see.

[22 : 56] And this is what he says. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 2.9. What does death taste like? Well, here's the thing. You won't have to taste it.

The taste of death for you has been removed by Christ drinking the cup and tasting death for everyone. To speak of Christ tasting death, it's another way, I think, of referring to the fact that Christ would not only die, but that he would rise again.

In other words, Jesus didn't just put his lips to the cup, but that he drank it all. He drained every last drop so that we wouldn't have to drink a single thing, so that we wouldn't have to taste death at all.

In other words, every single bit was gone. But I think the reason why the writer of Hebrews uses the word taste is because of what it conveys. And that is, taste is something, especially if it's a horrible taste, is something that is horrible at the time, but soon forgotten.

[24 : 18] In other words, when you, you know, I can remember being poorly as a child, not very often, but it's amazing how you remember some of the bad things. Amoxicillin, banana flavored.

It was disgusting. And so here I am, drink it and you'll be better. You drink it. And now I had a sore ear, not just an upset stomach.

And so here I am, not wanting to drink it, but trying to be convinced that it's only going to taste disgusting for a moment. Okay, it may leave a horrible taste in your mouth, but it's not going to last.

And by drinking it, it is actually going to do you some good. And so what we have here with Christ is sort of this image of Christ tasting death for everyone, but in the same way, it will not last for him.

He'll taste it for everyone. He will take the horrible tasting, taste of death for every single one of us, but it's not a taste that will last for him either.

[25 : 25] And so even the most horrible thing that even we might drink, the taste doesn't last forever. And neither does death or the taste of death last for Jesus.

And so what Jesus goes through, though real and though incredibly horrible and painful, that on the other side of that is no lingering taste.

Death is dead. It is gone. As we wrap this up, I want you to consider this then, that as you look at the cross, remember death is not the victor, but the victim.

Okay? Death dies in the death of Jesus because Jesus rose from death itself. As Acts 2.24 puts it, puts to death, that Jesus Christ puts to death, was not able to hold Jesus.

He could not be held by death. It's destroyed it. It has no strength. It has no power. So let me read you this hymn.

[26 : 37] You'll know the author, Fanny Crosby. It's not a well-known hymn anymore. We might get to sing it in the future. But this is what it says.

Here's the first line. O Christ, what burdens bowed thy head? That's clearly a reference to the garden prayer. Second verse has this to say. Death and curse were in our cup.

Death and curse were in our cup. O Christ, was full for thee. But thou hast drained thus the last dark drop. Tis empty now for me.

That bitter cup, love drank it up. Thy bruising healeth me. She understood. She understood exactly what was happening in the garden.

Fanny Crosby understood exactly what drinking the cup meant, not only for Jesus, but she knew exactly what it meant for us. It was full for Jesus. And that's why it's empty for us.

[27 : 42] It was a bitter, dark drop for Jesus that was full. But for us, there's not a single bit to drink or to taste.

It was a bitter, dark drop for Jesus. It was a bitter, dark drop for Jesus. It was a bitter, dark drop for Jesus. So when Jesus asked his Father, can it not be done another way? And the answer comes back, no. It cannot be done in another way.

We also need to understand that it could not be done by any other person than Jesus. Everything that we have now in our life, everything that we have now in our life, the salvation, the blessings, and the future, all comes down to the Son accepting the will of the Father in the garden, which is in complete contrast to the first man on earth in the garden not to accept the Father's will, but to do the very opposite.

And that's why the world is in such a mess as it is. So Christ in the garden puts right what the first man made wrong.

Oh Christ, it was full for thee. This is Jesus, our Savior and our Lord. Amen.