

He Took the Cup and Blessed It

I would hate to commit to paper and ink anything that may label me as a racist, bigot, or anti-Semitic; but no matter how I try to guard myself against profiling, I just can't help myself from calling Zebedee's wife a stereotypic "Jewish mamma." After all, who else would have come to Jesus asking for her two sons to be granted positions of authority on His right and left hands? It might have been a logical idea that the only two siblings in the Master's entourage be given those two prominent posts, but it certainly was presumptuous on her part to be the one who suggested it. Well, all that aside, Jesus really threw her a curveball when He answered her petition.

But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. (Matthew 20:22-23, Mark 10:38-39)

Perhaps it isn't too difficult to interpret His reference to being baptized with the baptism He was to endure. The Apostle Paul gives us a clear expose' in Romans chapter six defining the baptism as symbolic of Christ's death.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. (verses 3-5)

However, the reference to drinking the cup may be a bit more veiled unless we go back into the Old Testament to understand what was in that cup. According to the words of the prophets of the Lord, that cup was filled to the brim and sloshing over with the wrath of God.

Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. (Psalm 11:6)

Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. (Psalm 73:10)

For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. (Psalm 75:8)

Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his **fury**; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of **trembling**, and wrung them out. (Isaiah 51:17)

Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of **trembling**, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again. (Isaiah 51:22)

Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. (Jeremiah 51:7)

Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be **drunken**, and shalt make thyself **naked**. (Lamentations 4:21)

Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister; therefore will I give her cup into thine hand. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to **scorn** and had in **derision**; it containeth much. Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and **sorrow**, with the cup of **astonishment** and **desolation**, with the cup of thy sister Samaria. (Ezekiel 23:31-33)

Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and **shameful spewing** shall be on thy glory. (Habakkuk 2:16)

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of **trembling** unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. (Zechariah 12:2) [emphasis added]

Even in the concluding chapters of the Bible, the imagery of the vile contents of the Lord's cup is again conjured to portray the wrath of the Lord toward the wickedness of rebelliousness of mankind. The Lord even declares that He will fill the cup of

Babylon double with all the wickedness she thrust upon the nations and force it back into her own hand.

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his **indignation**; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. (Revelation 14:10)

And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the **fierceness of his wrath**. (Revelation 16:19)

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of **abominations and filthiness** of her fornication. (Revelation 17:4)

Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: **in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double**. (Revelation 18:6) [emphasis added]

Knowing that the cup He was ordained to imbibe brimmed with the unmitigated wrath of God against the totality of past, present, and future sinfulness, transgression, and iniquity of the whole human race; it is no wonder that Jesus agonized before His Father, petitioning for an alternate plan. In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Savior went through what was certainly the three longest and most agonizing hours of history--foreshadowing the three longest, most agonizing hours of eternity which were to come the next day as Jesus' cross would be raised at noon and lowered again at three o'clock. The Garden of Gethsemane and the Rock of Agony themselves symbolized this epic event. "Gethsemane" is the Aramaic word for "olive press," an instrument for tearing, shredding, squeezing and pulverizing the olive until the last drop of the precious oil is extracted. Just as the fruit of the olive is crushed until it releases its valuable juice, so also Jesus was pressed and squeezed until out of Him flowed the treasured life fluid of His very spirit, soul, and body.

When Jesus first approached the rock of agony, He left His disciples behind with the words, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:40) The word "temptation" to the people of Jesus' time meant "a fork in the road." Temptation was the point where you had to decide your own destiny. It was an opportunity to fail or an opportunity to succeed. It was as Robert Frost put it: "The place in the yellow wood where two roads diverged." Jesus was warning His disciples of the challenge and the

agony of coming to the place in life where you have to decide to take the path “less traveled by.” Jesus had arrived at this point. He had to choose to follow through with the eternal plan of redemption or to abort the divine mandate of the cross. That first hour of prayer was the struggle of His spirit: “Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from me.” (Luke 22:42) Here, the Savior had to settle once and for all the certainty of God’s will. He had to know without a shadow of a doubt that there was no other way to complete His mission. He had to remove even the faintest specter of question from His mind that the cross stood smack in the middle of His road of destiny. Time and again He had spoken of it--saying that He, as all prophets, must die in Jerusalem and that He would be “lifted up.” He had determined to fulfill God’s plan and “had set His face” resolutely to go to Jerusalem to play out that divine drama. Yet, His spirit man--the part of the human being that communes with God (here symbolized by the term “Abba,” the intimate word for “Daddy,” which Jesus used to speak of God in Mark 14:36)--still had to remove any question that there was no other option--no Plan B.

After finding His followers--and supposed supporters--asleep, He awoke them and announced that He had won a victory in His spirit man when He had capped that first hour of prayer with the words, “Not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42) But He added that there was still more battle for Him to win. Even though His spirit was willing, His flesh was still weak and resistant. Jesus now entered into a second hour of prayer. This time, it was His soulful man that struggled. The scriptures describe this season of prayer with words like “troubled,” “sorrowful,” and “deeply distressed.” Jesus proclaimed, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.” (Mark 14:34 and Matthew 26:38) His total mind, will, and emotion (the components of the soul) were stretched to the limits--and beyond--as Jesus agonized that second hour. Finally, an angel appeared and strengthened the Master as He was ready to enter into His third period of agony. It is in this final period that the Scriptures record that He prayed more earnestly. (Luke 22:44) This hour of prayer was related to Jesus’ final segment of His personality, the fleshly man. This is symbolized by its conclusion when Jesus’ sweat burst forth like great drops of blood; His body was yielding to the great master plan in which the Lamb was to shed His blood for the remission of sin! When the incensed mob came to arrest Jesus and Peter tried to defend Him by pulling out his sword, our Lord’s response showed His resolve to accept the cup of the Father’s wrath, “Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11)

For me personally, the most amazing point of the whole story is found in Matthew 26:27, “And he took the cup, and gave thanks...” (also recorded in Mark 14:23 and Luke 22:17) Notice that this is the same chapter in which He will confess that His soul is sorrowful even unto death over having to take the cup and in which He will pray

that the cup be removed, yet He gave thanks over the cup as He passes it to His disciples. How can this be? How is it possible to reconcile the two diametrically opposed ideas of giving thanks for the cup while at the same time praying that this cup could be bypassed? Perhaps the answer can be found in Hebrews 12:2:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Yes, He despised the experience of taking upon Himself the sinfulness of all humanity; but, at the same time, He celebrated the fact that in doing so He was able to cleanse us and then be exalted to His rightful place at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. By drinking this cup, our Lord fulfilled the redemptive obligations spoken of by the prophet Isaiah and took upon Himself all of humanity's grief, and sorrows; He took the blame which everyone else deserved and was counted as if the judgment from God was His legitimate cup; He took every affliction and wound which mankind was destined to endure; He became a sacrificial offering for sin and disease; and in the process, He made a way for all of us to be redeemed, justified, and healed.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his

knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:1-12)

In His drinking the fullness of the cup, Jesus was able to transform the cup from the manifestation of the wrath of God to a demonstration of His redemption. Having emptied the cup to the very vilest of its dregs, Jesus was now able to pronounce that the cup was now the cup of the new testament in His blood which He had shed for our redemption. (Luke 22:20) It wasn't that He was giving thanks for the cup He was to endure; rather, He was rejoicing in that He could now present mankind with a new cup that guaranteed them that they no longer had to endure the wrath of a God who was angry at their shortcomings and misdeeds.

The Psalmist foresaw this transition when he penned the words of Psalm 16. In verse one, he cries out to the Lord for preservation (Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust) in the upcoming ordeal which we know from verse ten spoke of the crucifixion and burial of Christ. (For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.) In verse five, He declares, "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot," giving a new meaning to the cup. It is now the cup of promise rather than the cup of dread. The passage closes with a promise of eternal serenity as the result of drinking of this new cup. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (verse 11) One hundred chapters later, he gives a name to this joyous, life-giving cup, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD." (Psalm 116:13) In the most famous and well-loved chapter of all literature, he sums up the expression of his blessings with the simple phrase, "My cup runneth over." (Psalm 23:5)

According to the Apostle Paul, we must now recognize the cup as the cup of blessing. (I Corinthians 10:16) He goes on to explain to us the value of our recognizing what this cup symbolizes and how we should appropriate its benefits into our lives.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that

cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (I Corinthians 11:25-29)

His admonition that we eat and drink damnation upon ourselves if we do not accurately discern the significance of what has been done through the body and blood of Christ is often misinterpreted to mean that God will judge us for misunderstanding the communion. On the contrary, Paul is actually trying to communicate to us that if we do not comprehend the benefits of the cup and the loaf, we are doomed to live without them. In other words, we will be destined to continue to live in the dispensation of sin and sickness, failing to recognize that all the wrath and indignation of God have been emptied out of the cup when Jesus took it all upon Himself at the cross.

To gain a little insight into the associated issue of the broken bread, it would be helpful to revisit a story from the life of Jesus.

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:21-28)

Notice in this story that the young girl was "grievously vexed of the devil." She was not suffering from any mild or insignificant affliction; however, it only took a crumb to totally and completely cure her of all her maladies. Just imagine what healing provisions and benefits are available when we have the full loaf broken for us! Perhaps this is why Jesus so often challenged us to see the kingdom in the simple metaphor of life-giving bread.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9)

And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him...And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight...And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. (Luke 24:13-16, 30-31, 32-35)

Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst...I am that bread of life...This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:31-35, 48, 50-51)

God's blessings are truly released in crumbs, loaves, and cups; but the reality of His intended provisions for us is unimaginably greater--in the store houses filled with His provisions and winepresses bursting froth with His promises, "And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil." (Joel 2:24) God is no longer angry with mankind; rather, He is gracious to save and bless those who will drink of His redemption and partake of restoration.