

## Scripture's Cup

Certain metaphors recur in Scripture. In these lessons, we've looked at a few of them from time to time. One metaphor that is seldom preached or taught yet is powerfully significant, is "cup." Jesus said when He was being arrested (John 18:11), **"Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"** What "cup" was He referring to? Let's explore the use of "cup" and try to understand its significance to us today.

Everything in the New Testament fulfills in one way or another the Old Testament Scriptures. To understand "cup" we need to get into the Hebrew Bible.

In Psalm 16, David rejoices over the fellowship he experiences with the Lord. He refers to the "cup" as an emblem of that communion. "Cup" here is shorthand; it stands for eating and drinking, as at a banquet. It's a cup of wine, and it stands for joy. In Scripture, banqueting refers to the fellowship of God's people with the Lord. Receipt of the covenant at Sinai was celebrated with a banquet. Banqueting refers to the fellowship we'll enjoy in the Messianic Kingdom. **"Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure"** (16:5). David is acknowledging God having chosen him for fellowship with Himself and for blessing.

Again, in Psalm 23, David calls attention to how richly God blessed him by making him king and the communion he had with God, **"You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows"** (23:5b). And in Psalm 116, it's explicit. "Cup" refers to the blessings of communion with God, **"I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord"** (verse 13). In goodness and mercy, God delivered the Psalmist from something, and he responds with praise by referring to the joy of drinking wine with Him.

But "cup" also has a dark meaning, something sinister and dreadful. It's this use of "cup" that Jesus referred to at His arrest. And it's this use of "cup" that's more important to us today.

David wrote in Psalm 11, **"The Lord, the Righteous One, examines the wicked, those who love violence and his soul hates; upon the wicked he shall rain fiery coals and burning sulfur – the portion of their cup"** (v. 5-6). "Cup" here represent God's fierce judgment upon evildoers and the suffering they will experience.

**"In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs"** (Psalm 75:8). The "cup" represents suffering due to wrath. God is angry at the godlessness, the utter sinfulness of the Gentile nations, and they will have to experience His fiery indignation. A staggering judgment from God awaits the wicked.

In Psalm 60, also by David, it's Judah that is suffering God's terrible wrath. **"You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry. Now restore us! You have shaken the land and torn it open . . . you have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger"** (vv. 1-3). Although the word "cup" isn't used, "wine that makes us stagger" clearly intends the idea of a cup. David's plea follows: **"Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered"** (v. 5). He ends with, **"With God we will gain the victory, and He will trample down our enemies"** (v. 12). Let's get this: God's "cup," His terrible anger, is also for His people, the Nation of Israel, due to their rebellions, idolatries, and rank disobediences. But after the discipline has run its course, the suffering will end, and God will once again restore the Nation to Himself for blessing.

Notice what Isaiah says about that cup. **"Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the cup that makes men stagger . . . 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 the cup the cup of my wrath, you will never drink again. I will put it into the hands of your tormentors . . .'"** (51:17, 22). The anger of the Lord against His chosen people will end, and it will be directed with ferocity against the Gentile nations arrayed against Israel. God's anger against His people is Exile. But when Jesus returns bringing that exile to an end, wrath and horrible judgments with unimaginable suffering will fall upon the peoples of earth.

Jeremiah 25 is a scary chapter. It's all about the "cup." Thru His prophet, the Lord promises dreadful judgments upon Judah, destruction and Exile, but it will be limited. It will end. And then . . . the cup will be given to the Gentile nations. **"This is what**

the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: **‘Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them’**” (vv. 15-16; also vv.27-28). It continues: God will **“shout against all who live on the earth. The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword”** (vv.30-31). All God’s enemies, the Gentile nations of earth, *must* drink from this cup.

Ezekiel also refers to the cup, the anger of the Lord, **“You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation”** (23:33). Zechariah too: **“This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: ‘I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling’”** (12:1-2). Zechariah’s oracle in this chapter anticipates Jesus’ return to earth to deliver His people, Israel, from the surrounding Gentile nations intent on destroying all Jews. **“On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem”** (v. 9).

These prophecies will be fulfilled. Revelation anticipates it repeatedly: **“A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries’”** (14:8; see also v. 10). Babylon’s spirit permeates all the Gentile nations. In this verse, Babylon is the agent which pours God’s cup, and suffers for it. [America is included in the “all the nations” of this verse.] **“God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath”** (16:19b). See also 18:3a and v.6.

The cup represents blessing and salvation, and it represents cursing and condemnation. The cup reminds us of the binary choice the first man and woman had in the Garden: eating of the tree that brought an intimate, experiential knowledge of good or evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Deuteronomy 30:11-19 makes vivid and stark this binary nature of all existence. Life or death; nothing in-between.

Now let’s think about Jesus’ use of the cup metaphor. He prayed, **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done”** (Luke 22:42). The wrath that the cup represented in all these Scriptures we looked at was borne by Jesus on the cross. We fully deserve the promised condemnation, but the Son came to earth purposely to take that judgment upon Himself to save us from it. And He accomplished it by suffering. So we who love Him, who belong to Him, who identify with Him, don’t experience God’s terrible fury upon sin. The cup that Israel had to drink from, the greater Israel, Jesus, identifying with rebellious Israel and we sinners, also had to drink. The cup is suffering.

Something else. Jesus said to His disciples, **“You will indeed drink from my cup”** (Matthew 20:23). Huh? What’s that all about? Here again, the cup is suffering due to wrath, but it’s Satan’s wrath. Do we meditate on the Word? If so, we’d realize that Calvary was about more than atonement for sin. It was also holy warfare, a power encounter: Satan against the Son, or more precise canonically, the Son defeating Satan. The Jewish leaders lusted for power and they had no intention of yielding it to Jesus—even though Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and those of the Sanhedrin knew it! The whole encounter with the high priest and the Sadducees and Pilate was Satan’s deliberate attempt to block the advent of the Kingdom of God. The fury of Satan however was (is) directed at all Jesus’ followers who faithfully continue His work of calling people to the Kingdom and preparing them for it. So persecution, intense fury at Jesus’ followers by the enraged Serpent because He knows that Jesus rose from the dead and lives to return to earth. And just as Jesus defeated the Serpent by his obedience, by trusting in God, *by suffering*, and then by the resurrection, so we do the same. Spiritual warfare is suffering, drinking from Jesus’ cup, and then experiencing vindication and unimaginably rich blessing on the other side of death.

I conclude with these (related) thoughts: Suffering on a scale that’s inconceivable is imminent on God’s timeline. We who know the Gospel dare not keep it to ourselves but share it with others. Indifference is hatred. And let’s not take for granted what Jesus did for us at Calvary. The intensity of His agonies was deep and severe beyond what we can imagine. He did it out of love. We’re obliged to love and serve Him in return. If we desire simply to pursue a soft, comfortable life, avoiding evangelizing and the persecution or other losses that follow, thus avoiding the suffering for Jesus’ sake that’s implicit in the Gospel . . . we’re not participating in the defeat of Satan. Rather, Satan has defeated us. The way to up is down. If we identify with Jesus, and if we understand the necessity of suffering, we will willingly drink from His cup.