

Written Copy: Mark 10:38-45 “A Cup? A Baptism? For Who?”

5th Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 17th, 2024

Text: Mark 10:38-45

³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”³⁹ And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The text’s intent

Jesus gives His third and most complete passion prediction in answer to the disciples’ excitement, worry, and dread about what lies ahead in Jerusalem. This moves James and John to ignore this disturbing portrait and focus on the glorious victory they expect Jesus to attain, ruling from a throne in Jerusalem. Jesus points out that what lies ahead for Him and for them is a cup of wrath and suffering, and a baptismal death. It is the reason He has come, to serve as the ransom price paid, our atoning sacrifice for sin that will free us from sin, the devil, and eternal suffering. He has called them not be Gentile type rulers in His kingdom the Church, but to serve as slaves who sacrifice their time, talents, and treasures on behalf of proclaiming His Gospel to the world.

Focus Statement:

God the Son came to earth not to be served in glory as He deserved, but to serve as the Lamb of our atoning sacrifice, paying the ransom price for mankind by becoming our sin and accepting the full cup of God’s wrath poured out in our place. His baptism into death is our baptism where we die to our sinful nature and rise to serve Him first place and others second with all the gifts He gives us as His children.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Like James and John, we want to see our life in Jesus’ kingdom as one of reigning in glory, having all our needs met. We also downplay and ignore the cup of opposition and the baptismal dying that marks our life of service in His kingdom.

What the hearer should do as a result:

See our lives in His kingdom not as one expecting to live in glory now, but in service through the indwelling power of the Spirit, sharing His Gospel so those around us will join us in the glory of eternal life to come.

Subject Sentence: Focus on serving in His kingdom now, glory to come

Introduction

You can't blame James and John, even though what they do seems to be cold, uncaring, and totally disregarding what Jesus has just laid out for them. He has just told them what must happen to Him in Jerusalem: **Mark 10:33-34** **"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."** Doesn't sound too pleasant, does it? And how do James and John react? They come up to Jesus by themselves and say, ***"Jesus, we got something we want you to do for us, okay? Here it is: When you sit down in Your glory, and rule from Jerusalem over the restored kingdom of David, we want to be Your right- and left-hand men; okay?"***

We do the same thing too. Sometimes when people start telling us of the suffering that they are going through right now, or what is to come, such as an operation, hospitalization, long road to recovery; don't we sometimes skip right over that? We go right to, "Well, after it's all over you will feel so much better!" Or "You got this!" Or "Just remember, God's got a plan." Now all those things may be true. And we mean well by them. But in saying all these things are we not skipping over the uncomfortable parts that we'd rather not focus on, just like James and John?

It's important to note the setting of Jesus giving this, His 3rd Passion prediction. He, His twelve Disciples, and host of other followers are on the road to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jesus is leading the way out front. He has His eyes resolutely set on what lies ahead; on what must come to pass. Those following Him are experiencing a complex set of emotions. There is the excitement and amazement that we sometimes feel just before something important is about to happen. But along with this they are feeling fear and trepidation. Why? Regardless of how much of Jesus' previous Passion predictions they have held on to, they realize that trouble lies ahead. The Pharisees, Scribes, and Religious Leaders have become increasingly hostile toward Him. They feel that a showdown is coming. Perhaps this is the time that Jesus as Messiah will take control and overthrow Roman rule and reestablish the Kingdom of David here on earth, ruling from David's capital city: Jerusalem.

If this is what the disciples are hoping, and at the same time fearing is about to happen, then in their minds there is bound to be bloodshed. Maybe some people will die. But they've got Jesus on their side. They've seen the supernatural power He has. He can heal anyone, even those who are mortally wounded. And they've seen Him raise a widow's son from death. He has God-like power over the natural elements. With this kind of power, no matter how bad the struggle initially seems, and maybe there won't be any struggle at all, they know Jesus will win through and victory will be theirs. In all this these two are thinking only of themselves. And lest you think the other 10 Disciples are choirboys, the reason they are upset is that they didn't ask Jesus for these #1 and #2 positions ahead of James and John. Are we ever guilty of doing the same, putting our own self-interests before that of others?

The Cup Jesus Must Drink and His Baptism

Mark 10:38 ³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

Jesus wants to set James and John straight on what exactly is going to be His lot. Rather than go back over His Passion prediction slowly, piece by piece, Jesus talks about a cup and a baptism. What exactly are these? And what do they have to do with the suffering and death He has described must happen?

The idea of the cup goes back to Old Testament imagery. Those who were enemies of the LORD and His people would eventually end up drinking the cup that was filled with His wrath, figurative for the suffering that the LORD visits on His enemies in judgement. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus will pray and ask the Father if it be possible to remove this cup that He is about to drink. That cup is God's wrath over sin. But it's not His wrath over Jesus' sin, He has no sin. He is the sinless, perfectly obedient Son of God. This cup that Jesus will drink is filled with God's wrath over James and John's sin, over the sins of the other ten disciples, those who will arrest Him, make Him suffer, and put Him to death. But not just them. In that cup is God's wrath over your sins and mine.

All of this suffering and abuse: the mocking, the spitting, the scourging with whips where metal shards on the ends of the whips tear at the flesh, the striking and hitting, the nailing to the cross and His hanging there experiencing indescribable pain; all that is Jesus drinking the cup of God's wrath over sin, your sin and mine. And in drinking this cup it wasn't as if God was looking at you in your sinfulness while venting His anger on someone else. It wasn't as if God was looking at you while whipping His Son saying, "This is how furious you make me feel!!!" In His Passion suffering, Jesus took your sin, He became your sin. He took it and He owned it. God is a just and fair God. He would never punish an innocent man. Sinless Jesus took the cup of wrath over your sin by taking it all upon Himself, suffering, and dying. The cup then is what Jesus must submit to in order to fulfill the ministry that the Father sent Him to do, a ministry done out of love, for you and me.

And what of this baptism Jesus mentioned? Jesus had already been baptized by John in the Jordan River in order to fulfill the Father's good and righteous plan for Him. In the **Nicene Creed** we confess our faith in "**one Baptism for the remission of sins**". Jesus had no sins that needed remitting, but you and I do. Paul in **Romans 6:3** says, "**Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**" Jesus in taking our place as sinners took on our baptism, and in doing so took on our sins, they were all washed onto Him. And He suffered the consequence for our sin, our death, separation from God our Creator. He suffered our death and then rose again on the 3rd day as testimony to you and to me what our fate will be on Judgement Day. Just as Jesus rose again never to die, so will you and I. Thanks be to God.

What About Your Cup and Your Baptism?

Mark 10:39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "**The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized**"

Jesus had asked these two disciples if they thought they were ready to drink His cup and undergo His baptism. They foolishly said "We are able" even though, as Jesus pointed out, they had no idea what they were asking for. Now if the cup means suffering God's wrath over their sins, then they most certainly are not able to take that. If they did it would mean physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering for eternity in hell. That's what the punishment for sin is. But keep in mind that for Jesus, He would drink this cup as the result of His obediently following the Father's will and plan, which is for Him to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. To do that He must undergo the persecution and suffering He describes to the disciples at the beginning of this reading.

So, what is the cup that James and John, and the other disciples must drink? It's the suffering and persecution they must submit to as Apostles as they carry the Gospel testimony out into the world. They will be asked to do what you and I will never be asked to. All of them will undergo pain and suffering at the hands of unbelieving leaders and rulers as they proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection. Their cup will be suffering such things as being boiled in oil, being burned alive at the stake, being beheaded, having their skin flayed off their bodies. In all these things they become martyrs who submit to these tortures rather than recant their testimony about Jesus. They become witnesses and prove their testimony to be God's Words of testimony that Jesus indeed is Lord and Savior who died and rose again to forgive the sins of the whole world.

While this is a cup that you and I will never have to drink, we will face persecution in our lives lived out as Christians in service and witness to our Lord and Savior. We will increasingly face persecution for our Biblical stance on such hot button issues as: Abortion as murder, Same Sex marriage as being a sinful lifestyle, and Transgenderism as violating God's description of creating mankind male and female and not leaving us the option to change what we are born as. In all these things we seek to love the sinner while opposing the sin.

But for us there is also the cup for us to drink that involves the opposition from our sinful self interest in how we live our lives. Jesus points out how the unbelieving world lives. They desire to be in charge so that they might impose their will on others and get their way. Do we ever live like that as Christians in Jesus kingdom? Jesus describes our life lived in His kingdom as being **Mark 10:43-44** ⁴³ **But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,** ⁴⁴ **and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.** Jesus is describing a life lived in service to His Father and to others. A life lived where we use those things and gifts He has given us: our time, our talents, and our treasures in service to our Lord God. Now since He is the One who gave them to us, He really doesn't personally need them. But those around us do.

Here Jesus is talking about living sacrificially. We sacrifice our time, talents, and treasures for the good of those around us who need them. It means helping out others when we don't really want to, using our talents to fix something of theirs that is broken, or make dinner for them when they struggle to do for themselves. It means giving of our time by giving someone a ride to the doctor, or to Church, when we'd rather be doing something else like working around our house, or relaxing in front of the TV, or not have to leave early to get to Church on time, or just stay home and livestream. In these things our cup is the opposition from our sinful self to put ourselves first, and our unwillingness to sacrifice our self-interest to serve our Lord and Savior in His kingdom.

This is not easy. In fact, on our own this is impossible. That's where the baptism that Jesus says we will undergo comes in. Paul helps us with this in **Romans 6:5-6** ⁵ **For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** ⁶ **We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.** We are so intimately united with Jesus in baptism that His death becomes our death to the control our sinful nature has over us. We die to that demand that we serve ourselves first place and make God and others second. We confess that we've lived like that, and we ask Jesus' forgiveness knowing that He has already taken care of it. He took that sin and became that sin for us in His suffering and death. And just as He rose again on the 3rd day, each time we repent, we rise to a new life. We rise to a life where we become servants of others. We become slaves, as Jesus puts it. Slaves are those who serve not to earn a wage, they serve out of obedience to their master. And in Jesus we have the most loving Master who served us as our atoning sacrifice for sin.

Conclusion

When James and John, as well as the other disciples heard Jesus' prediction of how badly He would suffer at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities, they took it as something bad that they wanted to push away from their mind and focus on something else. But when we hear it, we think differently. We hear Jesus telling us why He, God the Son, came and walked the earth as Jesus of Nazareth, **Mark 10:45** **For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** That terrible suffering and death was the ransom price that Christ willingly paid for you and for me. It was His gift of love, and it covers all the times that we refuse to drink the cup that is ours as His children who are to live as His witnesses in opposition to the world. It's the cup we refuse to drink when we refuse to put Him and others before ourselves. Through His gift of baptism, we die to that sinful self that refuses to drink it, and rise again to the new nature who begins to obey out of love and obedience to Him who gave His all for you and for me. Amen.