

THE TRANSFORMED CUP

Maundy Thursday, 2014

Text: Psalm 75

We just sang, “’Tis midnight; and on Olive’s brow the star is dimmed that lately shone. ’Tis Midnight in the garden now, the suffering savior prays alone.” On the Mount of Olives is the Garden of Gethsemane. Literally, the word “Gethsemene” means “an olive mill;” it is a place where olives are pressed, crushed, put under unbearable pressure, to produce olive oil. I remind you of the Call to Worship from Isaiah 53:5 - “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was *crushed* for our iniquities.”

Jesus prayed three times in Gethsemane that a particular “cup” be removed from Him. This is not the first time Jesus spoke of this cup. Five days earlier, as we noted Sunday, the mother of two of the disciples, James and John, had asked for a special honor to be bestowed on her sons when Jesus would come into His kingdom. When she asked her question, Jesus looked at her and her boys and replied, “You really don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” With all the naïve confidence of their youthful years, James and John replied, “We can!” Jesus replied, “You shall indeed drink from my cup.” Now, in Gethsemane, Jesus chooses these same two disciples, James and John, along with Peter, to accompany Him. Jesus tells them He is so overwhelmed, so full of foreboding and sorrow, that He was at the point of death. Three times Jesus prays that a “cup” be taken away from Him. Other Gospel accounts tell us He was in such great anguish that His sweat was like great drops of blood. What kind of cup is this?

In some fifteen different Old Testament passages there are references to a particular cup, a terrible cup, a cup that contains the wine of God’s wrath. Psalm 75:7 -- “In the hand of the Lord is a cup, and the wine foams in it, hot with spices; he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.” All the prophets refer to this cup of fiery, foaming wine, the wine of God’s wrath and fury, a cup that is reserved for the wicked to “drink.” It is a cup which the sinful must drain to the dregs. Now there isn’t a person here, myself included, who doesn’t deserve to drink a portion of the wine of God’s wrath. Jesus Christ was the one man who had ever lived on this earth on Whom that dread cup had no claim. He was sinless. There was no need for Him to taste the cup reserved for the wicked. The prophet Jeremiah, though, spoke of a time when the innocent would taste the wine of God’s wrath. And here is Jesus, the only innocent One in all human history, and He is about to drink the cup ... for God’s wrath is about to be poured out on Him.

There is a sense in which the crucifixion was the most obscene event in human history. On this night Jesus knows that He is about to become an obscenity. Think of it ... when He is on the cross on Friday, the sin of the world will be *imputed* to Him. The obscenity of the murderer, the liar, the adulterer, the abuser ... all these sins and more that violate the people of this world and grieve a holy God will be at one point focused on one man. The Scriptures tell us He who is the incarnation of God is about to become the incarnation of sin ... the absolute paradigm of obscenity. In and of Himself, Christ was pure, sinless, perfect, holy, even majestic. However, once He embraces our sin on the cross, all of the ugliness and all the dirt of human corruption will be focused, concentrated on His person.

A nineteenth century pastor and author, George MacDonald, wrote this: “It is with the holiest of fear that we should approach the terrible fact of the sufferings of our Lord. Let no one think that those were less because He was more. The more delicate the nature, the more alive to all that is lovely and true, lawful and right, the more it feels the antagonism of pain ... the more dreadful is that breach of the harmony of things whose sound is torture. He felt more than man could feel, because He had a larger feeling.” Like a musician who is especially sensitive to tonal discord, the sinless and pure Jesus must have been *acutely* sensitive to the harsh discord and ugliness of human sin. He who knew no sin was about to become the Cup into which the filth and the weight of the world’s sins would be poured. And He dreaded it, He felt it; that is why we call these events the Passion. He prays that the cup may pass from Him. “If there be any other way for salvation to be accomplished, let it be so. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” But there was no other way. On Good Friday, God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. There is a nice touch by John in his Gospel; he tells us the *very last act* of Jesus Christ on the cross was to receive a drink of sour wine, a drink of vinegar, a drink of *wine gone bad*. It was lifted to Jesus’ lips, when He had received the drink, Jesus then said, “It is finished.” The cup reserved for the wicked is now finished. It is drunk to the dregs by Christ.

On this night, just moments before going to Gethsemane to pray about that dread cup He faced, Jesus had met with His disciples in an upper room, and He offered to them there a new cup. “Take and drink,” He said. The cup of the new covenant is now a cup of *blessing*. No longer is this the cup of God’s wrath, this has become the cup of God’s grace. No longer is it a cup full of the wine of God’s wrath, but it is a cup of God’s grace, full of the wine of Jesus blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sin. The cup of wrath has been *transformed* into a cup of blessing. This cup is now filled with the blessing of God gained through the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

There is one final place in Scripture where the cup of God’s wrath makes its appearance, in Revelation 14:10. Revelation 14 makes clear that those who don’t serve God will one day taste the cup of God’s fury; they will drink the cup of God’s wrath. So, the Bible intimates that every human being is going to drink a cup: as Jesus said to James and John last Sunday, “You shall indeed drink!” The question is, which cup is it going to be for you? The cup of the fury and wrath of God, or the cup of the forgiveness of sin? We do have a choice. For all who earnestly repent of their sin, to all who seek to follow Jesus Christ as Lord, as Host of this Table He now offers you this gracious cup, a cup transformed from the cup of God’s wrath into the cup of God’s blessing.