

Sunday, November 13th sermon: "The Lord's Bitter Cup – Christ's Love Drank It Up!"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

1 Corinthians 10; Luke 22:7-23

Can you believe that some false teachers dispute what the Lord's Bitter Cup was, which He described on the night that He was betrayed unto death?

Christ told His disciples, and the mob that came to take Him away, "The cup which My Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

This was in response to Peter's attempt to use violence to block Jesus from being taken, falsely accused, found guilty and crucified. Jesus declared He would do His Father's Will, which was to drink that bitter cup of wrath and judgment to save His people.

The reason false teachers object to Christ's clear teaching, is that they reject substitutionary atonement. They refuse to believe God's Word, that Jesus was punished by God for the sins of His people that were laid upon Him at the cross.

Heretics don't like the idea that God's wrath fell on Jesus in our place. Therefore, they will not believe that the cup pictured wrath and judgment poured out by God upon His Dear Son.

Instead, these false teachers try to claim that the cup Christ refers to is somehow a joyous cup, perhaps "Elijah's Cup" of the Passover, which is left for Elijah, when he comes back to announce Messiah.

Often in Scripture, the metaphor of a cup is used to describe God's wrath poured out on sinners. Several times in the Revelation, and also in the

prophets, judgment for sin from the hand of God is pictured as a cup of wrath.

The Greek word "poterion" means literally, a drinking vessel, but metaphorically it means "what God has given to people for good or ill to suffer." It is similar to the phrase "our lot in life."

In the immediate context, Christ had several times made explicit references to His imminent suffering and death. "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover before I suffer." "The Son of Man goeth, as it was determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"

Then of course, at the Lord's Supper, Christ declared, "this is My body, which is given for you," meaning His physical body, which was sacrificed at Calvary unto death.

Jesus followed up immediately, "This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for many for the remission of sin."

These statements clearly describe Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, to take away the sin of His people whom He redeemed! Jesus is God's Lamb, slain in the place of sinners.

Christ next warns that God would smite Him, and His sheep would be scattered. He is referencing the prophecy by Zechariah, in which God ordered His Sword to awake against His Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, and smite Him.

Of course, the deniers of substitutionary atonement gnash against these texts also, but they are unambiguous statements of God's judgment against the Lord Jesus on the cross.

The very same cup from the Father which Christ said He must drink, was clearly the subject of Christ's tears and prayers just moments before in Gethsemane.

It was no happy cup at all, but rather, a cup of terror to Jesus, a cup of great suffering and wrath, something to be avoided if at all possible. He "sweat as it were great drops of blood," and cried out to His Father, to let the cup pass from Him, if it be possible.

But Christ immediately submits to His Father's will in the matter – "not my will, but Thine be done!"

As John Gill pointed out, Christ knew what God His Father had ordained, and what must be done by Himself at the cross. He knew the cup was wrath He must suffer in the place of His people whom He must redeem. The cup was the horror and experience of God's wrath and the curse of judgment.

The possibility of the cup being withdrawn was raised due to Christ's human revulsion at enduring all these things, and while it was hypothetically possible for God to withdraw the cup, yet it was actually impossible, given God's Word, Christ's teachings to His disciples about the death He would die, and His determination to save His people by drinking it.

So that cup was what God the Father had ordained for His Son to go through: the cruelty of the cross, the bogus and unjust trial and condemnation, the mockings, the shame, the crucifixion, His being numbered with the transgressors, being treated as guilty by God, under the curse, condemned by God in our place, being forsaken by God unto all this judgment, being crushed by God and made an offering for our sin, to die for His sheep!

But the cup also rose in triumph at Christ's lips when it concluded with His burial and resurrection the third day!

All of that was the very cup that Christ must drink.

And that is why Christ insisted, just moments later, in drinking that bitter cup. His Father delighted in seeing Jesus drink that cup, because it was the saving of His beloved, helpless, sinful people.

No wonder that false teachers who deny the substitutionary atonement of Jesus must lie about that bitter cup, what it meant to Jesus, and why He was so distressed at the prospect of drinking it, while yet rebuking His disciples when they tried to stop Him!

These heretics mock God's providence and working of all things after the counsel of His will. Scripture teaches that everything that happens does so through God's determination beforehand, and yet men are judged for their sins.

But these blasphemers mock us when we pray for deliverance, sneering, "well, if you believe that whatever God ordained will take place, then why do you pray for deliverance, or consider why men sin, or rebuke error and falsehood?"

"Why do you complain about wicked men, when according to your doctrine, God decrees the acts of all wicked men?"

The answer is, that we look to the example of Christ in the garden. He knew the eternal will and purpose of God, that He should lay down His life as a sacrifice, and bear all His people's sins, and yet Jesus prayed for deliverance, He mourned and wept over that bitter cup.

Scripture must not be read so as to deny Christ His right to come to His Father in complaint, and sorrow, and terror, seeking relief, even though He knew that all things concerning His sacrifice were ordained by God, and firmly fixed in their certainty.

Those who mock these Biblical teachings about God's absolute power, sovereignty, and control over all things, would clap their hands across

Christ's mouth in Gethsemane, to shut Him up, because He already knew what God's purpose and outcome would be.

Even so, believers have a right to come before God in prayer, to rebuke sinners, to cry out for rescue, and plead with God to change hearts, even as we understand that God determines all things beforehand.

We are simply following Christ's example: God determines all things, AND we are perfectly correct to wonder why, ask questions, plead for help - those two views are perfectly consistent for the Lord Jesus, and are also for His people.

We are following after the example of Jesus. His example proves there is no incompatibility between God's eternal decree as to all things, and His people's desiring that He might work salvation for poor sinners, and rescue His people from trouble and oppression.

Those who mock God's people for holding to these twin realities are blaspheming Jesus, because He is our example in all these matters.

But have you noticed, that Christ's bitter cup which He drank dry to save us, has become for us a cup of blessing! At the Lord's Table, we partake of the cup which represents the awful sacrifice of body and blood that Jesus made to save us!

"Death and the curse were in our cup,
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee!
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop—
'Tis empty now for me.
That bitter cup—love drank it up;
Left naught but love for me!"

Ours is a cup that displays Christ's love for us, and His salvation perfected for us, when He drank that bitter cup the Father gave Him.

The bitter cup for Christ has become a cup of blessing and rejoicing for His people. The same things done to Christ that were bitter at the time, are now received by us, through faith, as matters of the highest shouting and rejoicing!

" For me, Lord Jesus, Thou hast died,
And I have died in Thee;
Thou'rt ris'n: my bands are all untied,
And now Thou liv'st in me.
The Father's face of radiant grace,
Shines now in light on me!"