

# “The Second Cup”

Mark 14:32-42 <sup>1</sup>

Last night our focus was on the series of betrayals that Jesus experienced on the night of His arrest. Tonight, we focus on the Battle in the Garden. We begin once more in the Upper Room.

What we call “The Last Supper” was, of course, the annual Passover Meal that Jesus and each of the disciples had observed every year of their lives. We call it “The Last Supper” because it was Jesus’ last meal with His disciples before His crucifixion, and His last meal with them in His purely incarnate state.

According to Jewish tradition, the four cups of Passover symbolize what God told Israel before the Egyptian plagues began: “**I am the LORD**, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **I will free you** from being slaves to them, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **I will take you as my own people**, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:6-7).

Looking at these words again, the first cup of Passover is the **Cup of Sanctification** or preparation to approach God: “*I am the LORD.*” The second cup is the **Cup of Judgment**, representing the ten plagues as God’s judgment on Sin: “*I will free you from your slavery.*” The third cup is the **Cup of Redemption**: “*I will redeem you with mighty power.*” And the fourth cup is the **Cup of the Kingdom**: “*I will make you my own special people, and I will be your God.*”<sup>2</sup>

With this as background, here is Matthew’s account of part of that meal: *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”*

*Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom”* (Matthew 26:26-30).

At this point in their Passover observance, Jesus and the disciples had already drunk the first cup, the Cup of Sanctification. They had noted and commented on the second cup, the Cup of Judgment, but that cup is not actually drunk at Passover. The cup Jesus gave to His disciples in this passage, the one with which we’re familiar, was the third cup, the Cup of Redemption.

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on April 19, 2019. Good Friday. Parallel passages are Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1.

Sources for this sermon include: Barclay, William, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); Culpeper, Alan, “Mark,” *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); Garland, David E. “Mark,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lane, William, “The Gospel According to Mark,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Turlington, Henry, “Mark,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969); Wessell, Walter, “Mark,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Digital Version; Williamson, Lamar, Jr., “Mark,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, digital version.

<sup>2</sup> A fifth cup was added by the rabbis after the time of Jesus. It’s called **the Cup of Elijah**, the forerunner of the Messiah, whom the Jews still expect. But Jesus told us that John the Baptist actually fulfilled this prophecy (Matthew 17:12), and you and I know that the promised Messiah is Y’shua—Jesus—our Risen & Coming King!

The custom of filling a fifth cup of wine for Elijah the Prophet at the Seder table is relatively recent. Some families set a place at the table for Elijah and pour into a goblet called “Elijah’s cup” to symbolize that Elijah would be a welcome guest at the Seder (*Elijah never died. He was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire*). Another custom is to open the door during the Seder for Elijah, symbolizing welcoming the Messianic age.

But at this particular Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples did not drink the fourth cup, the Cup of the Kingdom, as would normally have been done.

When Jesus said “*I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom,*” He was referring to this fourth cup and to that Great Celebration still to come, when the world we know has ended and the Father’s Kingdom has at last come on Earth as it is in Heaven. When Jesus next drinks the fourth cup of Passover, the Cup of the Kingdom, you and I will drink it with Him!<sup>3</sup>

So it was that when the band of twelve left the Upper Room, the Cup of the Kingdom remained on the table, and the disciples were surely puzzled as Jesus led them out into the night with the Passover incomplete. The disciples had a very basic understanding of the Passover’s commemoration of the spiritual Truth that “*without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness*” (Hebrews 9:22), but they did not *begin* to imagine what was about to happen.

Jesus led His little band of confused disciples across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane, as He had done many times before. While His disciples were clueless about what was about to happen, Jesus was quite aware that Judas was busy gathering the arresting posse. He knew that Judas would take the arresting officers first to the Upper Room, and failing to find Jesus there, that Judas would come next to Gethsemane. Jesus went to Gethsemane anyway.

Jesus was preoccupied as they arrived at the Garden, but since He and His disciples were often in this garden together, the eleven may not have noticed His mood. There was a three-stage movement into the Garden. Jesus first brought all eleven within its borders, but then He took Peter, James, and John farther in. Finally, Jesus went deeper into the Garden, alone. Here in the agonizing darkness of the Garden, we’re allowed a brief and intense glimpse of what the Incarnation was really like.

Before He left them, Jesus told Peter, James, and John that His soul was crushed “*with grief to the point of death*” (26:38). Being fully divine, Jesus knew what was ahead; and being fully human, He was afraid of what was coming. But Jesus said that His soul was crushed with grief, not with fear. Jesus’ concern wasn’t primarily about physical suffering. His agony had to do with the awful price of the redemption He was about to purchase . . . for us.

The hours of Jesus’ torture and crucifixion were unspeakably horrible; but a more significant battle was fought—and won—before the sun ever came up on Good Friday. The Bible says that alone in the garden, Jesus fell face down on the ground and cried out in anguish, “*My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine*” (26:39).

What cup was it Jesus didn’t want to drink? It was the second cup of Passover, the Cup of Judgment. As a man, Jesus definitely did not want to face the cross. It was too horrible, too humiliating, too unspeakably painful. But as God, Jesus recoiled from the cross for an even more terrible reason, because only God’s perfect holiness understands the absolute horror of Sin.

Try to remember some of the evil things you yourself have done. Recall some of the evil things that have been done to you. Try to imagine the horrors of war, famine, earthquake, and tsunami. Add to this the devastation of Hiroshima, of Nagasaki, of Auschwitz and Dachau, of all the wars and rapes and murders and hatred of all the ages, and compress all of that into the space of a few hours on Calvary’s Cross.

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<sup>3</sup> As it is written, “*Blessed are those who are invited to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!*” (Revelation 19:9).

Why was Jesus crushed with grief? Jesus was crushed because although He himself was completely without Sin and was perfectly holy, He was about to experience the concentration of all the Sin of all the ages in His own being. The Bible says that as Jesus considered this prospect, *“he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood”* (Luke 22:44).<sup>4</sup>

The central sacrifice of Passover was always a lamb without any blemish or defect. And the Bible says that Jesus is the Eternal Lamb to which the Passover lambs point. He is *“the Lamb who was killed before the world was made”* (Revelation 13:8). But though this sacrifice had been God’s plan before our universe ever came into being, Jesus still had the option of backing out.

Oh, my friends, evil threw itself at Jesus with a fury that we, who collapse before its smaller efforts, cannot begin to comprehend. Jesus had never been disobedient, but He could not become *“obedient unto death”* (Philippians 2:8) until and unless He was genuinely tempted to save His own life by rejecting God’s will.

As Jesus came to that moment of choice, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed with an agony that was far beyond anything you and I can ever know. Because we live on this side of the Resurrection, you and I may sometimes come to consider death a friend, particularly if we pass through extended and painful illness. But for Jesus, Death was no friend. Death was an ugly enemy to be conquered, a trail of blood and tears with its source in Eden. The choice was stark: *would He save Himself, or would He or save us?*

Jesus faced the choice of whether to follow redemption’s plan to the end, or whether to opt out at the last moment, and He could not avoid the overwhelming loneliness of that choice. Jesus knew that the worst part of what was coming would be the awful separation that our Sin would bring between Himself and the Father, as *“God made him who had no Sin to be Sin for us”* (Matthew 27:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

In just a little while, Jesus would tell Peter, *“Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?”* (Matthew 26:53-54).

After having prayed for some time, Jesus returned to His disciples, whom He had asked to be praying on His behalf . . . only to find them sound asleep. Jesus understood that *“the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,”* but in spite of that He must have felt great disappointment: *“Couldn’t you stay awake and watch with me even one hour?”* (Matthew 26:40-41). His awful aloneness found no relief.

Jesus was preparing for the battle He knew was ahead through agonizing conversation with His Father. The disciples, though, were not praying. They were not preparing. They didn’t see the storm coming. And they would not be ready to meet it.

Jesus returned to prayer for the second time, but now His prayer changed. Rather than simply asking to escape the Cup of Judgment, Jesus now prayed, *“My Father! [Daddy!]<sup>5</sup> If this cup cannot be taken away until I drink it, your will be done”* (26:42). The fact of the matter was that there was no one to whom the cup could be passed. Jesus had to drink it Himself. He returned to His disciples a second time, but once more they were snoring. He did not wake them.

As Jesus returned to prayer, He could probably see the small army leaving the city with the light of their torches glinting on cold steel. The Bible says that Jesus returned to pray a third

<sup>4</sup> This is a description of a rare medical condition called hematomidrosis.

<sup>5</sup> Abba! (Mark 14:36).

time, “*saying the same things again*”; and the Father’s provision for His need was enough. The Cup would not be removed; but strength to drink the Cup was granted.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout His ministry, Jesus had made references to that hour of decision for which He had entered our world. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus told His mother that “*My hour has not come*” (John 2:4); but as Jesus returned from prayer the third time, His “hour” had begun. “*Still sleeping? Still resting?*” Jesus asked. “*Look, the time has come. I, the Son of Man, am betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let’s be going. See, my betrayer is here*” (26:45-46).

Preparation was over. The hour of our redemption had come.<sup>7</sup>

**I don’t think I could believe in a God of love in a world such as this . . . were it not for the Cross.** To put things in a nutshell, the Bible tells us that natural evil such as floods, earthquakes and tsunamis is ultimately the result of moral evil. Moral evil is the result of the exercise of human freedom. And human freedom originated in God’s decree. So, while we humans make evil actual, God made it possible, and all of human suffering is therefore the indirect result of God’s decision to create us as genuinely free moral beings.

Before Creation was ever spoken into being, God knew the poison that would enter Creation by our choice, and God the Father, Son, and Spirit willed the Cross as the antidote to that poison. It is true that Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself paid the price that redeems you and me from death. But more than this, deeper than this, more profound than this, **in the agony of the Cross, God absorbed into God’s own Being all of the horrors that have come from human freedom. On the Cross of Jesus, God took responsibility for all the Hell that has resulted from choosing to make us truly free.**

Where was the Father on Good Friday? The Father, too, was at the Cross; though in the unspeakable agony of the moment, Jesus could not perceive it. *Through the Cross of Calvary and Resurrection’s Empty Tomb, God has taken the very WORST thing that has ever happened in the history of the world and transformed it into the very BEST thing that has ever happened in the history of the world.*

That’s the core of the Good News; but let me mention two more things. First, the Bible tells us that Jesus “*was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward*” (Hebrews 12:2). Have you ever wondered what joy could have possibly become available to the Creator of the universe on the far side of the cross that was not available without it? What could the agony of Calvary possibly gain for God that God did not already have? Well, let me tell you what I think.

God’s absolute holiness and righteousness are a consuming Fire that destroys all that is not holy and righteous, just as surely as fire consumes paper. But because God loves us, God took the awful destruction that rightly belongs to us into God’s own Being. The Joy on which Jesus fixed His eyes as He hung on the cross, that Joy for which He did not push “eject,” was the Joy of spending eternity with you. Let me say that again: **the Joy for which Jesus endured the cross, despising its agony and shame, was the Joy of spending eternity with you.**

My friends, when God absorbed the penalty for your sin and my sin into God’s own Heart, it then became possible for us to be in the Presence of God’s holiness without being consumed. This protection is available to every one of us, “*no matter who we are or what we have done*”—if we admit that we need it and if we ask God to place us under the protection of Jesus’ sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup> And angels came to minister to Him, as they had done after the first temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43).

<sup>7</sup> And this hour had been fixed from the very moment of Creation. See [www.bethlehemstar.net](http://www.bethlehemstar.net).

Somewhat like Jesus in the Garden, you and I, too, are sometimes overwhelmed to the breaking point. Following the death of a loved one or after some other tragedy, we have to face the question of whether to reinvest ourselves in life. Is life worth living anymore? The answer to this question is ultimately found in solitary anguish before God. No matter how earnestly others may wish to decide for us, they cannot do it.

There is no prayer more difficult to pray than this: *If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.*” In the first place, to pray for God’s will to be done means that we must give up the struggle to achieve *our own* will and desire . . . and our lower nature rebels at the thought of submitting to a higher power than ourselves. Further, to pray for God’s will to be done requires that we put ourselves at God’s mercy. And we will only do that if we are truly convinced that God is Love.

The Good News is, as John put it, that “*We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us*” (1 John 4:18, LB). The Cross of Jesus is, always and forever, the answer to the question about whether God is Love.

And here’s the last thing: because God is beyond what we know as “time,” all of human history—even the future—is eternally present to God. This means is that each and every sin that you and I commit—right now, today—whether thought, attitude, action, or rejection, really *does* add to Jesus’ suffering on the Cross.

Let me say that again: **because all of human history—even the future—is eternally present to God, this means is that each and every sin that you and I commit—right now, today—whether thought, attitude, action, or rejection, really *does* add to Jesus’ suffering on the Cross.**

If you and I understand this, it will change how we look at Holy Week. It will change how we look at the Cross. And it will change how we live our lives.

Holy Week reminds us that the road to Resurrection’s transforming power always passes through Gethsemane, the place of spiritual testing. And knowing what I’ve just told you, you can perhaps see more clearly that you and I are at the place of testing now.

The only effective preparation for crisis and spiritual decision is found in developing the kind of relationship with God that Jesus had. Jesus wasn’t really alone while His disciples slept. His Father, the great Companion of all His years, was there. Jesus didn’t have to improvise a fellowship or strain for words. Jesus came to—and came through—Gethsemane in the strength of a long-established relationship of Trustworthy Love.

The power that sustained Jesus through the agonies of His passion was won in the lonely inner agony of the struggle to decide. Jesus chose to submit His will to the will of the Father, and in that submission, the Power that spoke Creation into existence became fully available to Him. It is so with us as well.

Preparation for such submission is not made when the storm is upon us, but in those apparently ordinary days that precede the time of testing . . . and we never know when crisis will come.

Do not pray for an easy life, my friend. Pray to be a stronger person. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle.<sup>8</sup> Pray on!

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<sup>8</sup> Phillips Brooks, in "Quotes and Idea Starters," *Christianity Today*, vol. 41, no. 3.