

Are You Drinking Of The Master's Cup?

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How would you like to be an old fashioned cupbearer to a real king? Perhaps you are! In a short time we will be drinking a small portion of red wine at Passover. At Jesus' last Paschal service, He refers to it as drinking from His cup. What does that mean?

In days gone by, monarchs feared that those around them would poison their drinks, so they employed the services of a cupbearer to sample the drink first. If it was poisoned, he died, sparing the king's life. If it was safe, he shared in its refreshing qualities and remained in the king's presence and confidence.

In the book of Genesis, Pharaoh's "chief butler" was actually the cupbearer (Genesis 40:20), a very influential position. Later, Nehemiah had that role as cupbearer to the king of Persia (Nehemiah 1:11). A cupbearer was frequently in the presence of the king, participating in whatever the king did.

The phrase "drinking of the cup" eventually symbolized sharing the consequences of what was in that cup. It also came to mean accepting what the king dealt out. The whole world drinks of Babylon's cup, full of the wine of her fornications and abominations (Revelation 17:4; 18:3). Since "drinking of the cup" means accepting whatever is appointed for one to experience—both good and bad, joyful or sorrowful—all who drink of Babylon's cup will share in her future.

Choosing a Cup

In the Bible are numerous references to this cup of God's wrath and how Babylon and other nations will drink from it, symbolizing the divine punishments being inflicted (Revelation 14:10; 16:19; Psalm 11:6; Isaiah 51:17, etc.). Revelation 14:10, for example, speaks of drinking "of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation." Drinking of a cup means participating in whatever that cup contains.

Those whom God is calling out of Babylon are asked to drink of another cup. The psalmist writes, "I will take up the cup of salvation" (Psalm 116:13). This cup has far more positive ramifications for us than the curses boiling within God's cup of indignation! The cup of salvation contains all the blessings of God, especially those of eternal life and reward in His Kingdom.

At Jesus' final Passover service (Matthew 26:27-29), He poured wine into His cup, blessed it, and passed it around to His disciples. Each disciple took a sip from it. Though nowadays we pour wine into many separate vials, the principle is the same since the wine comes from one source, all of it is blessed together and all of it pictures the same thing—drinking from the cup of the Lamb. Perhaps the meaning is more poignant and easier to grasp by recalling Jesus' Passover service, when the disciples literally took a sip from *His* cup. When we commemorate this in our Passover service, we are also drinking from the cup of Christ, blessed by our Savior.

Have we consciously rejected the cup of this world, of Babylon, in favor of the "cup of the Lord"? God will not mix the contents of these two cups; they are totally incompatible. We must choose one or the other. Paul says, "We cannot drink of the Lord's cup and of the cup of demons" (I Corinthians

10:21). We must totally reject this world, this Babylon, and that awful cup of the false church, full of her abominations and of the blood of the saints (Revelation 18:6).

If we have lived in this world—and we all have to some degree—we have sipped from that awful cup and have been affected by its contents. We must now unconditionally reject it, empty it, discard it and replace it totally in favor of the new cup of blessing from God.

Notice, Christ *commands* us to drink of His cup! "Drink from it, all of you," Jesus says (Matthew 26:27). He does not say "drink the wine," but to drink of the cup. We know the red wine symbolizes the blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sins (verse 28). We know we need to remember that it took the blood of the Son of God to forgive our sins, and we certainly rehearse that aspect of this service every year. We know that by drinking the wine, we accept His shed blood in our behalf, forgiving our sins and wiping our sinful slate clean. Thank God for that! But drinking of *His* cup adds so much to the meaning of the Passover wine.

The Cup of Christ

In I Corinthians 10:16, Paul refers to this cup as "the cup of blessing." He asks, "Is it not the communion [margin, *fellowship, sharing*] of the blood of Christ?" In the Jew's Passover meal, several cups are consumed. Notice what *Vine's Expository Dictionary* says under article "Cup":

The cup of blessing, I Corinthians 10:16, is so named from the third (the fourth according to Edersheim) cup in the Jewish Passover Feast, over which thanks and praise were given to God.

So as we drink of the cup of the Master, we should understand that it is a wonderful "cup of blessing," thanksgiving and praise that we offer to God as we drink it!

According to tradition, when a young Hebrew man and woman were to be betrothed, the groom poured wine into his cup and invited the woman to drink of it. It was up to her. If she drank from it, she was considered betrothed to him. If she did not, no marriage would take place. Paul tells the church in II Corinthians 11:2: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." When the bride drank of the cup, she drank of the marriage covenant or contract, accepting it.

Understanding this symbolism, it is no wonder that Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 26:28, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." As we drink of His cup, we accept His invitation to be betrothed to Him and to be forgiven of our sins so we can be like He is—sinless, spotless and without fault in His presence at the Marriage Supper.

Yet it means far more! Remember that "drinking the cup" meant to accept whatever that cup represented. When the mother of James and John approaches Jesus with her request to have her sons sit on each side of Jesus when He came into His Kingdom, Jesus replies with a question:

But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you [James and John] able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." (Matthew 20:22)

They do not take the cue from Jesus that they may have to drink more than they care to swallow! They answer affirmatively before they realize what Christ's cup contained. Jesus continues in verse 23:

So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."

What happened to them? James the son of Zebedee was the first apostle martyred, early on by Herod (Acts 12:2). Though John was the longest-lived of the twelve, apparently living nearly 100 years, he certainly suffered greatly at the hands of persecutors. Not only did he spend many years in exile on the Isle of Patmos, one tradition says he miraculously survived being boiled in oil! Beyond this, he had to watch the church disintegrate through apostasy and persecution.

Part of what Jesus' cup entails is suffering. When we drink of His cup, we are saying we are willing to suffer with Him and experience with Him whatever He ordains for us. We symbolically pledge that we are willing to walk down the same path He walked, with similar consequences.

Jesus' Drank His Cup

Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, just a short while after urging His disciples to drink of His cup. As He prayed fervently and emotionally to His Father in heaven, the symbol of the cup was fresh in His mind. Just as He had given His disciples a cup from which to drink, so had the Father placed a cup before Him! Notice Matthew 26:39: "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'"

In the Old Testament, the cup is also a metaphor for the divine punishment of sin. Hence, Jesus' death would involve *far more* than just physical torture and death. Christ would become the target of untold divine wrath, as every sin that had ever been committed would be heaped on this one sinless Being! He who had sought to always do the will of His Father perfectly, He who had heard His loving Father exclaim, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," would now experience His Father's overflowing wrath for all sin, including all the worst sins! Some of what He suffered was for our sins—yours and mine.

Jesus knew that death and incurring God's wrath for sin comprised the climax of His mission on earth as the Messiah. But now, as that hour approached, His awareness of God's wrath against sin became even more intense! The Bible explains this in detail in Romans 1:18-3:20. To Jesus, it was an unimaginable horror!

The second and third times He prays in the Garden, He changes His words slightly, as He realizes He definitely has to drink of that cup: "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42, 44). He now fully accepts the fact that the only way to get past this ordeal is to go through it.

The cup is still on Jesus' mind even after the soldiers from the High Priest come to capture Him. When Peter tries to defend Him physically with a sword and misses Malchus' head, cutting off his ear instead, Jesus says to Peter: "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My

Father has given Me?" (John 18:11). Indeed! And shall *we* not drink the cup which *our* King has given us?

It should be clear by now that we do not just drink the wine at Passover—we drink "of the cup" of Passover, meaning we are proclaiming our willingness to share in similar trials as Jesus did. We proclaim we are willing to endure whatever He has appointed for us as our lot.

We are also identifying ourselves with Him exclusively: We are cupbearers to the King of kings and to Him only. Psalm 16:5 says, "O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; you maintain my lot." The Eternal is our cup! Do we grasp the meaning of this? We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). We cannot simultaneously identify with Christ and Satan. Our lives, our actions, our words, our thoughts, continuously announce which is our father, God in heaven or Satan. Drinking of Jesus' cup means to live His way of life and renounce Satan's ways.

The Cup of Salvation

There certainly is a very bright side to all of this too. If we share in His shame and suffering, we shall also share in His glory. If we struggle in the battle of overcoming with Him, we shall certainly savor the victory by Him (II Corinthians 2:14). If we die with Him and for Him, we shall be resurrected in His likeness and in His image at the seventh trumpet of God. For us, the "cup of the Lord" is also the blessed cup of salvation (Psalm 116:13).

If we endure, our cup is to also reign with Him (II Timothy 2:12). This is a certainty if we stay the course! God sees us as already having been saved, justified and glorified with Christ (Romans 8:30), as long as we endure to the very end (Matthew 24:13). Once in His Kingdom, our cup will be to reign with Him forever and ever (Revelation 22:5).

Our present sufferings "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). First the submission of the cup, then the glorification that follows. On that last evening, Jesus first introduces the cup of trial, suffering and overcoming, then later asks His Father to "glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (John 17:5). We tread the same narrow path.

We will soon meet to eat and drink of the Passover symbols at the table God has set before us. What an honor to eat of the Bread of Life and to be His cupbearer and drink of His cup!

How important it is to ponder these things before the Passover! Paul advises us to examine ourselves, our mental state, prior to taking of the cup (I Corinthians 11:25-31). We should be careful not to eat the bread and drink of the cup in an unworthy manner, lest we bring judgment or condemnation on ourselves (verses 27, 29).

We are also to avoid the extreme reaction of some, who after self-examination determine they should not drink of the cup at all! Paul says clearly one should "examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (verse 28). For a Christian, it is vital to participate in this godly act with the proper attitude before God.

Jesus said He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He could drink it with us in His Kingdom (Matthew 26:29). It will not be long now before we witness with our own eyes our great Savior blessing His cup at a future Passover, asking us to "drink from it, all of you." And we will understand

what a different kind of cup His is from the one Babylon offers. We will soberly and thankfully lift the cup to our lips and drink of it—the cup of forgiveness, the cup of blessing, the cup of salvation. God really blesses when He blesses!

When we really understand "drinking of the cup," we can say with David:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; *my cup runs over*. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:5-6)

Amen! May God speed that day.