



"The truth shall set you free, but first it will make you miserable."
—Anonymous

23-Aug-13

A Look at Christian Suffering (Part One)

When we partake of the [Passover](#) each spring, part of that observance is for us each to drink from a cup of wine. The wine is symbolic of the blood of [Jesus Christ](#), shed on our behalf, which accomplishes a number of tremendous things that we cannot do for ourselves. We do not tend to focus as much on the cup, but it, too, is a foundational part of the meaning of Passover.

When the Bible speaks of "drinking of the cup," it indicates that a person is also sharing in the consequences of whatever the cup contains. "Drinking of the cup" goes beyond merely partaking of the liquid; it implies accepting everything that happens as a result. Thus, when the mother of Zebedee's sons petition Jesus Christ to grant her sons positions of honor, Jesus asks James and John if they are able to "drink the cup" that He is about to drink ([Matthew 20:20-23](#)). He implies that, if they desire to reign with Him in glory, they have to be willing to also share in His whole experience, not all of which would be glorious.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks the Father to let that cup pass from Him, if it were possible ([Matthew 26:39-42](#)). The cup of which He speaks is the cup He had just drunk from at the Passover. At that meal, He had identified the cup as "the new covenant *in My blood*" ([Luke 22:20](#); emphasis ours throughout). By drinking from that cup, He had agreed to make the New Covenant, and that covenant required a perfect blood-sacrifice that only He could fulfill. When we drink from that cup at Passover, we, too, are agreeing to share in whatever results from that covenant, assenting to pay

whatever it costs to become fully unified with Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, there are priceless blessings and promises that come from that cup. But on the other hand, there is a price that must be paid in this life, and that price can perhaps best be summed up with the word "suffering." Suffering is not a concept that we like to think about, and our mind resists it, even as Christ prayed that, if possible, that cup would pass from Him. The fact is, however, when we become united with Christ through partaking of His blood, our lives with Him will involve suffering, just as His did.

In order to evaluate the depth of our convictions and the maturity of our [faith](#) honestly, it is necessary to understand what the Bible has to say about suffering. Because of the weakness of our flesh, we eagerly anticipate the Messiah's crown of honor but shy away from identifying with the crown of thorns that was thrust upon His head. We look forward to the white robes of glory, but we turn from the scarlet robe of mockery and ridicule that was placed on Christ. As one commentator put it, most Christians "would desire to share the glories and triumphs of redemption but not its poverty, contempt, and persecution." If we are merely seeking that crown of glory, hoping to skirt by the less enjoyable parts of Christ's experience, we must ask ourselves whether we really understand and accept the Passover cup.

Even a cursory reading of the epistles shows a clear sequence: *First*, there is suffering, *then* there is glory—and we cannot have the second without some measure of the first. Notice these examples:

- "Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have *suffered* these things and to *enter into His glory*?'" [\(Luke 24:25-26\)](#)
- ". . . and if children, then heirs—heirs of [God](#) and joint heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him*, that we may also *be glorified together*." [\(Romans 8:17\)](#)
- "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating, when He testified beforehand the *sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*." [\(I Peter 1:10-11\)](#)
- ". . . but rejoice to the extent that *you partake of Christ's sufferings*, that when *His glory is revealed*, you may also *be glad with exceeding joy*." [\(I Peter 4:13\)](#)
- In His letter to the church at Smyrna, Jesus says, "Do not fear any of those things which *you are about to suffer*. . . . Be faithful until death, and I will give you *the crown of life*." [\(Revelation 2:10\)](#)

Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of this sequence, because only He has both

suffered and been glorified. Nevertheless, we can also look at the record of the heroes of faith, as well as the apostles and prophets, and realize that, throughout history, being chosen by God meant that there was going to be some suffering involved. Just as day follows night, so our glory will not come until we have gone through darkness—and there is a reason for this, as we will see.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Persecution](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh acknowledges that although many in God's church have gone through sore trials and tests of sorts, virtually no one has gone through the nightmarish persecutions suffered by the early Christians in Imperial Rome. Because most of us have lived our lives in modern Israel rather than a Gentile culture, we have been—to this point—shielded from the kinds of persecution (being put to flight, pursued, or martyred from an external source) experienced by the early apostles. This message explores both a time factor and a righteousness factor, explaining why intense persecution has not yet taken place. Paradoxically (a big horse pill to swallow), persecution may be regarded as a reward for righteousness, a kind of favor and kindness toward us, preparing us for a better resurrection and greater service as priests in God's Kingdom, following in the footsteps of our Elder Brother.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Beatitudes, Part 8: Blessed Are the Persecuted](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Persecution is not a subject we normally like to think about, but it is a fact of life for a Christian. John Ritenbaugh explains why Jesus says we are blessed if we are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

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