

Shall I Not Drink the Cup the Father Has Given Me?
John 18:11
Good Friday: April 18, 2014

Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Jesus asked many well-known rhetorical questions – questions which needed no answer. For example, after telling his disciples about the high price of discipleship, telling them it meant taking up their crosses each day and following him, the Savior asked: “*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (Mt 16:26). These questions don’t require an answer because the answer is obvious.

The question in tonight’s text is also rhetorical. Even though the answer is no mystery, the question still has value. Jesus’ question: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* is valuable because it not only quells objections to his suffering, it also answers objections to our sufferings.

Let’s set the scene. It’s Maundy Thursday and Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane wrestling in prayer with his heavenly Father. Jesus is asking if the cup might be taken from him. The idea of the cup may not be familiar to us, but the prophets of God often spoke about people and nations who had experienced God’s anger as having to drink the cup of God’s wrath.

Now, here was Jesus in Gethsemane, praying. He knew he was the chosen lamb of God. He knew he was carrying the sins of the world. He knew the cup of God’s anger was being lifted up to his lips. He knew he would soon drink it and face the wrath of the holy God, whose anger burns like fire against sinners and their sins.

Because Jesus was true man, because he knew how great the wrath of God is, he prayed for an alternative. He never rebelled against his Father’s will, but he prayed for another way to be found to redeem the world. A way that didn’t call for him to fall under God’s curse against sin.

While we hear our Savior pray, we hear nothing from the Father. Did you ever wonder about that? Did you ever wonder what the Father’s silence meant? Jesus didn’t wonder. Jesus knew what the silence meant.

Jesus submitted to his Father’s will and went forward to drink the cup of suffering the Father had prepared for him – the cup of suffering that was filled with our sins and rightfully was ours to drink. Jesus stepped forward and offered himself to his enemies – the human instruments through whom God would carry out the sacrifice of his Son.

The fact that Jesus was willing to obediently submit to his Father’s will and face such great suffering didn’t mean his disciples were ready to see that happen. When Jesus

steps forward to offer himself to his enemies, Peter also steps forward and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus scolds Peter and tells him to put away his sword. Then he puts Peter's objection to rest with the question: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?*

The question didn't need an answer. Our Lord answered the question by healing the damage Peter had inflicted. For a while, it may have seemed the sorrow and grief had blinded Jesus to the great necessity of his suffering and death, but now we see he had the resolve to put that cup to his lips and not only drink from it but drain it of its bitter contents.

But Peter objected. Even though the disciples had been with Jesus for three years – following him, listening to him, and learning from him – Peter and the other disciples would not grasp the fact their friend and teacher had come down from heaven to give his life as a ransom for mankind.

An earlier scene shows us their misunderstanding of Christ's mission. Jesus had described his suffering, death, and resurrection. At this, Peter took him aside and said: *Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!* (Mt 16:22). Peter couldn't see why Jesus should have to suffer and die. What good is a Messiah who dies? Like many others of his time, Peter envisioned an earthly Messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom where earthly peace would reign.

Peter's attitude is still popular today. Many people object to Jesus' suffering and death. The outcry against Mel Gibson's movie, "*The Passion of the Christ*," makes that quite clear. Many people have no problem with Jesus as long as you leave the cross out of it.

Give people a Jesus who will cure the world of its problems with war, hunger, poverty, and crime and you might get their interest. But a Savior who suffers and dies to remove God's wrath? What good does that do?

Give people a Jesus who is a great prophet, who came into the world to teach people how to live good lives so they might live good enough lives to earn eternal life for themselves. That's fine with them.

Give people a Jesus who came to live a holy and God-pleasing life to give people an example to follow so living as he lived, they can save themselves. That's okay, too. But a Savior who suffers and dies under God's curse of wrath to free people from that wrath, there's not much interest there.

At this point, we should take account of ourselves to see if any of that thinking has infected our thinking. Do we ever feel embarrassed about the so-called "blood theology" of Christianity? Do we feel ashamed to confess a God who punishes sin with death and whose wrath can only be satisfied by the sacrifice of the life of his sinless Son on a cross? If so, then our Savior turns to us as he turned to Peter and asks: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?*

Jesus answers our objections to his suffering with that question. He reminds us that God's way was the cross and there is no other way for sinners to be saved from the wrath that is coming except through the suffering and death of God's Son. Like it or not, the only God who exists is a holy God who demands absolute, perfect obedience from his creatures in thought, word, and deed, or he demands they die. Since no one has ever lived up to the requirements of God's law, all humanity was doomed to die forever in hell.

However, from eternity God planned the salvation of our dead world. His plan focused on his Son; his sinless Son who would live under the law and obey it as the substitute for all people; then die under the law and satisfy its demand for punishment.

That meant drinking the cup of God's wrath on the cross, which Jesus did and proclaimed with his cry; *It is finished!* (Jn 19:30). It was truly finished. Christ not only drank from the cup of God's wrath, he emptied the cup of God's wrath and, because of that, we are free – we are forgiven.

Understanding Christ's question and the answer to that question, we must look at that question and how it answers our objections to our suffering. Suffering is not something limited to our Savior. Jesus said: *A student is not above his teacher, or a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master* (Mt 10:24-25). As the teacher suffers the student suffers. As the master suffers the servant suffers.

Witnessing the suffering of Jesus, it isn't reasonable to assume we will have no suffering in our lives. As Paul writes: *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22). Yet, just as many people have no use for the suffering of Christ, many people have no use for suffering in their own lives. They can't see the good that came from Christ's suffering and they can't see any good would come from their suffering. They just can't reconcile the suffering of Christ or their own suffering to the concept of a loving God.

Again, we must check to see if we are part of the group who sees no purpose in suffering. When God allows suffering to come into our lives, when we have to struggle against sin and crucify our flesh, when we have to wrestle against temptation, do we accept it or do we question the will of God?

Perhaps suffering comes in other ways; sickness, loss of income, death of a loved one. Perhaps our suffering might be an unhappy marriage. Perhaps we find ourselves caught in battle with an addiction. When these things happen we find the cup of suffering pressed up to our lips, just like our Savior.

When these things happen do we refuse to drink from the cup? Do we refuse to deny ourselves and mortify our flesh? Are we unwilling to accept our lot in life without grumbling against God, or without flatly ignoring his will? Do we refuse to drink the cup the Lord has poured for us?

It's times like these we hear our Savior ask: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* That question answers the objections to our suffering. Jesus reminds us that our suffering is in the hands of our heavenly Father, who says again and again that he loves us and then demonstrates the height and depth of his love on the cross.

Even if the cup the Father gives us is bitter and brings us suffering, we know God works all things for good (Rom 8:28). Maybe our suffering will create patience and perseverance in our hearts. Maybe it's there to drive out pride and create a spirit of humility. Maybe it's meant to nudge us closer to God when we are in danger of straying. Maybe it is simply sent by God so, by helping us and delivering us, he will have an opportunity to reveal his glory in our lives.

When we face suffering as our Lord did, instead of grumbling and rebelling, we need to answer as Jesus answered: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* We need to join Jesus in obedient submission to the Father's will. We need to look past the obvious suffering and look for the blessing God has waiting for us on the other side of the suffering.

There's a poem I find comforting in trying times.

When does the thorn become a blessing
When does the pain become a friend
When does the weakness make me stronger
When does your love make me whole again
Lord, let me feel your arms around me
In the middle of my raging storm
So I can see the blessing in the thorn