

My Cup Runneth Over

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Psalm 22 | Hebrews 10:16-25 or 4:14-16, 5:7-9 | John 18:1-19:42

JOHN 18:1-11, 19:28-30

¹ After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' ⁵ They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁸ Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' ⁹ This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?' ... ²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

INTRODUCTION

There is little to add, by way of explanation, to the reading of the Passion narrative that we just heard. It is one of the richest, most well-known, and most profound stories ever told. And it provides a preacher dozens of options for a focus. Today, it was very tempting to take on the subject of Pontius Pilate and his astonishing question: "What is truth?" [And because my favourite coronavirus meme focuses on him: 'Love like Jesus, but wash your hands like Pontius Pilate.'] But for this evening, I am going to focus on two phrases of Jesus from our reading, one of the first things he said and the very last.

THE CUP GIVEN (JOHN 18:1-11)

Beginning where we left off last night, in the first eleven verses of our reading, we find a familiar scene: confrontation in the garden. Judas and a contingent of soldiers and police to arrest Jesus. Peter, in his exuberance, defends Jesus, even cutting off the ear of Malchus.¹ It's a dramatic conflict, now turned pointlessly violent. But in contrast to this fearful tension is Jesus. Notice how it starts: a battalion of soldiers show up with torches [and I don't mean flashlights] and weapons. But the narrator notes: "Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?'"² Jesus is not only resigned to what is about to happen, he calmly attempts to keep the peace. That is, knowing he is about to be taken prisoner and executed, he comes to the front, identifies himself twice, and immediately asks for the safe retreat of his companions. The narrator even notes this is to fulfil a promise—that he should not lose a single one.³ But Jesus's

¹ The significance of this moment is captured elegantly by Carson: "The blow was as clumsy as Peter's courage was great; the tactic was as pointless as Peter's misunderstanding was total." D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: IVP, 1991), 579.

² John 18:4.

³ John 18:9. This is not the kind of *prophetic fulfillment* we typically find in the Gospels. Rather, the *prophecy* cited here is the word of Jesus himself in John 17:12 (which is related to John 6:39 and 10:28). Jesus's words in these earlier instances are no less authoritative than any of the Scriptures. For more on this, see Carson, *John*, 578.

resignation is clearest in his final statement in this scene—a rhetorical question used to reason with an admittedly impetuous Peter: “*Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?*”⁴ Going back to the Hebrew Scriptures, *cup* is frequently used as a metaphor for *life*, particularly a life of sorrow.⁵ And when Jesus uses it here, and elsewhere in the Gospels, it specifically refers to the trajectory of his life that leads to suffering and death.⁶ And so it is essential to see two things from this first passage: 1) Jesus willingly embraces the coming suffering and death, and 2) he does so out of a loving concern for his people—doing all that can be done to protect them at every step.

THE CUP TAKEN (JOHN 19:28-30)

The second passage I want us to consider is nearly at the end of the reading. It is the moment of death, in fact, the darkest moment in human history. But notice how the narrator describes the few minutes leading to that moment.⁷ We see another reference to what Jesus knew and the fulfillment of prophecy. “*After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture)...*”⁸ But what is striking here is the mundanity of it. It’s easy to miss, but the second-to-last thing uttered by Jesus on the cross at the moment of the crucifixion is ordinary, perhaps even banal, and unexceptionally human. “*I am thirsty.*” And the narrator describes a predictably commonplace response—the offering of a nearby drink of sour wine. But the author of this Gospel, in his brilliance, has woven in that metaphor again. And it’s not even a cup from which Jesus drinks, but a sponge on a stick. In that act, Christ Jesus metaphorically drank from the cup of God’s wrath—the cup given him by God that necessarily brought us to this place—this moment of death.⁹

This becomes even clearer in his next words—his final words: “*It is finished.*”¹⁰ Finished. In one sense, this word notes completion. In another, it marks the chronological end. Again, in the brilliance of the author, it is also the completion of an idea noted five chapters earlier—a statement foreshadowed in the reading we heard last night.

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to *the end*.¹¹

The linguistic connection is important.¹² He loved his own to *the end*. When is the end? Jesus proclaims it from the cross. “*It is finished.*” The end has arrived. The fullest expression of Jesus’s

⁴ John 18:11.

⁵ See Psalm 23:5, for example. In the final stanza of this famous psalm, David describes the abundance of the Lord in his life as a *cup* that *overflows*. The King James (1611) translation of this verse, of course, is the origin of the common phrase: “My cup runneth over.” See also Psa 11:6, and 16:5. Paul specifically relates the imagery of *cup* to the shed blood of Jesus Christ in 1 Cor 10:16.

⁶ See Mark 10:35-45. Cf., Matt 20:20-28.

⁷ It’s worth noting that the narrator has slowed the story down. The first 11 chapters cover almost three years of Jesus’s life. The next seven chapters cover just a few days. The second half of chapter 19 covers but minutes.

⁸ John 19:28.

⁹ Beyond cup metaphors, wine is a common biblical metaphor for the wrath of God, culminating especially in Rev 14:10, 14-20; 16:19. See also Psa 60:3, 75:8, Isa 51:17, and Jer 25:17.

¹⁰ John 19:30.

¹¹ John 13:1b.

¹² In John 13:1, “the end” is translating the noun *τέλος* *completion*. In 19:30, Jesus proclaims the same word in its verbal form: *τετέλεω*, *to complete*.

love for his people culminates in this heart-stopping moment. *"It is finished. Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."*¹³

THE CUP TO BE PASSED

Don't miss the significance of these two passages. Jesus not only willingly came to this place, having suffered unimaginable torture, and giving his life, he did so out of a pure love for his people—his disciples, all believers, you and me. And so, I would urge you to two responses.

First, let the truth of this passage sink in. It is our sin—our rebellion against God and his ways, our turning away from what is right in order to do what is evil, our selfishness and our malice, our transgressions—that drove Jesus to the cross. This tragic moment is the responsibility of humanity. And what happened to Jesus that day is what is deserved by humanity—by you and me. And yet Jesus took on God's wrath that we might be saved, we might be spared eternal separation from God. Do not miss the significance. This, my brothers and sisters, is why we can call this day, the darkest day of our liturgical year, Good Friday. It is, without even a trace of irony, truly good.

Second, let his willing sacrifice be a source of inspiration for you. You don't need me to tell you how troubling these times are. Beyond the virus and its social and economic impact, the underlying sickness of humanity is being revealed. Divorce rates and domestic abuse rates are skyrocketing. Inherent racial and economic prejudice in how people are treated is now coming to the surface. Stores are emptied of goods. People are suffering from isolation in new ways, worse ways than we could have imagined. And much of it comes back to that first instinct, that very natural instinct, to look out for oneself. It is so easy to be consumed primarily with ourselves, our own wellbeing, our own household, our survival and our satisfaction during this time. Perhaps we have made a donation or picked up groceries for a vulnerable neighbour, but we too quickly return to a self-focus. This, my friends, is antithetical to the example of Christ Jesus, who loved others to the very end.

Remember what this day means, and let it guide you in the days to come.

CONCLUSION

As we find now, our way to the end, I will conclude with a verse from the writer and composer, Stuart Townend, who captures the significance of this night:

In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love, and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save.
'Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on Him was laid. Here in the death of Christ I live.¹⁴

Let me pray: *Heavenly Father, as we enter into this darkest night of our extended Lent, may we be reminded of the loving sacrifice of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

¹³ John 19:30.

¹⁴ Stuart Townend, "In Christ Alone," from *Lord of Every Heart* (2002).