

After 6:Before 7

1- Drinking the cup [John 18.11]

[1] A cup of suffering God gives

[2] A cup of anger, or wrath.

2- From two perspectives

The perspective of the Father and the Son

From our perspective

3- A theology of the cross

The faith of Christ

The cross destroys natural, sensual preconceptions of God

The cross is a revelation of God in which He is, at the same time, also hidden.

1- Drinking the cup [John 18.11]

Jesus' command to Peter to put his sword away implies that Jesus is not to be delivered from drinking this cup. He must be arrested so as to go forward to meet the occasion of the Father's appointment.

John, throughout his narrative, has prepared us for this 'hour' of Jesus' appointment, so we might be right to think that when, from the cross Jesus says, "It is finished" [John 19.30] he means the drinking of the cup is done and over.

Jesus' command to Peter also makes clear that the conflict between Jesus and his own enemies are not to be confused with the conflict between them and the disciples. The latter is yet to come, but the former is Jesus' work alone - albeit done on our behalf and for our sakes. What do we understand this drinking of 'the cup' to mean?

[1] In the Old Testament, 'drinking the cup' is a **metaphor for suffering** which has been rightly dealt one. The cup is put into one's hand, to drink it right down and drain its dregs to the full.

Psalm 75.7-8

"7 For God is the Judge;

He puts down one and exalts another.

8 For a cup is in the hand of the Lord, and the wine foams;

it is well-mixed, and He pours out of this;

Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs."

Ezekiel 23.31-34

The prophet Ezekiel pictures two cities Samaria [Oholah] the elder, and Jerusalem [Oholibah] the younger, as two daughters of the one mother [1-3]. Both of them have played the harlot when each already belonged to the Lord. Samaria as a harlot with the Assyrians, her neighbours, and Jerusalem with the Chaldeans, or the Babylonians.

The Lord, through the prophet, pictures their lovers coming to them - as armies would come to a city - with weapons of destruction and hurt. They judge them according to their own customs [24].

Yet the real motivator of their punishment, a fact hidden to their lovers, is the jealousy of the Lord for His relationship to them [25]. These alien lovers leave the cities bare and naked. So the nakedness of their harlotries is uncovered and their lewdness known.

Ezekiel, speaking of Jerusalem, continues in this way;

30 "These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols. 31 You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand" 32 Thus says the Lord God, "You will drink your sister's cup, which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision: It contains much. 33 You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister, Samaria 34 And you will drink it and drain it, then you will gnaw at its fragments and tear your breasts; for I have spoken," declares the Lord.

[2] The cup as an image points to *the righteous anger of God*, expressive of the jealousy of the relationship that He has with his own covenant people. It tells of his righteousness; his maintaining his own faithfulness to the covenant He initiated with his people and also a recognition, by contrast, of their unfaithfulness - indeed, harlotry - of Israel in relation to the covenant they share.

Isaiah 51.17-23

After Jerusalem's exile in Babylon, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord begins to comfort her.

17 Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise Jerusalem, You have drunk from the Lord's hand the cup of his anger; the chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs....21 Therefore please hear this you afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine: 22 Thus says your Lord, the LORD even your God Who contends for his people, "Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of reeling; the chalice of my anger, You will never drink it again. 23 And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, "Lie down that we may walk over you". You have even made your back like the ground, and like the street for those who walk over it.

Jeremiah 25.12-16

Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah notes that after 70 years the Lord will punish the king of Babylonia and that He will bring upon that land all the words that He had spoken against it.

15 For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from my hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send you, to drink it. 16 And they shall drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them."

Revelation 14.9-10; 16.19

The apocalypse of John, even using Babylon as a cipher for the great

harlot who makes the nations drunk with the wine of her immorality, records the words of a second angel who announces that she is fallen.

14.9 And another angel, a third, followed them saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Later, the fall of Babylon is again discussed and we learn that:

16.19 The great city was plit into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath 20 And every island fell away...."

So far we have noted the Old Testament texts as they applied to Israel of old and a couple in the New Testament that echo these images.

2- From two perspectives

From the perspective of the Father and the Son

Here, in John 18.11, we have to note that Jesus thinks of "this cup" as given to him by the Father. So, for Jesus, we understand that drinking the anger of God is something taking place between the Father and the Son, something transacting within the Godhead.

At the same time, it is a 'drinking' being enacted in a public place in history; at the time when Israel is "under Pontius Pilate" and when the Word of God has taken flesh in space-time.

That Jesus drinks this cup - normally only appropriate for the wicked - indicates that for him, upon whom Satan has no claim/hold [14.30], the cup is not a punishment. Rather, it is something done for the wicked: substitutively in their place and representatively on their behalf. At the same time, it is the Father's cup given to the Son, which the Son humbly receives.

This 'drinking of the cup' is accepted by the Son of God as a 'right' thing to be done, for he who alone knows the meaning of sin from God's side; he knows it is right that there should be a cup and that it should be drunk. The Son of God he has no quarrel with that.

Because he is the 'holy one' of a holy Father, He can accede to the rightness of this as a sacrificial action - again from God's side - and so draw the wrath of God and absorb it truly and rightly. So, as God's Lamb, he voluntarily lays down his life [John 10.17-18] as a sacrifice acceptable to God. He is in such a relation to the Father that he knows the deep satisfaction that a propitiatory sacrifice has for God, as only the Father and the Son can know, by the Spirit.

From our perspective

We are sinners, who, by God's grace through the Spirit's conviction, know our own guilt. So we understand the liability we have of a just punishment for our sins. These are not matters we would dispute with a righteous Father; no child of such a father would! But if we would be free from deep fear of the punishment - what God can and ought do with us - then such freedom from fear can only come to us by knowing that the matter has been dealt with in a way that is satisfying to God.

For if He is to be satisfied in his dealings with us in these matters of his righteous anger, then, and only then, and only on His own grounds, could we dare to trust that we are relieved of our guilt and fear of punishment. It is for Him to be satisfied, not us.

This is what John means when Jesus was saying that it is necessary to be "drinking my blood" [John 6.53-58]. If Jesus drinks for us the cup of God's wrath upon humans, then we are to 'drink' down, deep into our own persons, by faith in God's Word, the sacrificial death of Christ - in shorthand, his blood - and to consider ourselves as standing before God with his wrath turned away from us.

If He says He is satisfied with the death of Christ as that which has turned away his wrath from us, then it is for us to accede to that. It is for us to trust his word; to accept that something has happened in God and on our behalf, that now means He is not counting our sins against us. Here is how Paul puts it.

..."Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation" [2 Corinthians 5.18-19 ASV 1960]

Further, in this matter of not counting sins - we see that the charac-

ter of God is not only that he is righteous, he is also merciful since He is gracious and compassionate. This is His 'glory' as He made clear to Moses, when Moses asked to see it [Exodus 33.17-23].

It is not that God forgives us because Christ has died for us; that could imply that He was not willing, and somehow the death of Christ has made him so. It is the other way around; it is because God is a forgiving God, and, consistent with his own person, He has found a way to express his forgiving heart in sending his Son to lay down his life for us. God's forgiveness is not extracted from Him by some change Christ has worked; it is rather that Christ's work has brought us the forgiveness that God always wished for us. It simply had to be done 'rightly'; that is, done it in a way that displays his righteousness and mercy.

So, as Paul also goes on to say to the Corinthians

" He made Him to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God, in Him. [2 Corinthians 5.21 ASV 1960]

This makes clear that a great exchange has taken place. God has made Jesus to be sin - the power, that men and women had served as a lord, who had dominated their lives and made them liable to die - death being the wages that sin pays. Then, in Christ, at His death on our behalf, God has judged sin for the coercive power that it is, condemned it and released us from its power to dominate our lives. In this way, in Christ, we can go on to live and become the righteousness of God.

3- A theology of the cross

The Faith of Christ

In the Gospel of John we are reading a presentation of the suffering - the passion - of Christ in which there are many hints of the control of God being shown, even as His Christ is arrested, tried twice, buffeted, mocked, scourged and ultimately crucified.

The awareness of the Lord Himself is that he trusts that this suffering, which he receives humbly and passively, is nevertheless a cup which He sees as coming from the hand of the Father. It is for him to drink it and

He will not tolerate the ordinary perceptions about his arrest and heroic interventions of Peter to save and protect him, to thwart his drinking this cup. For He knows it to be a drinking “for us” and that this is a matter that the Father and the Son have spoken of before [John 10.14-18].

He will meet this ‘drinking of the cup’ trusting his Father to keep him as he goes through it.

The cross destroys the natural, sensual preconceptions of God

Our ordinary preconceptions about God arise for every person who simply contemplates the creation and the works of God with their senses. God is powerful and his nature may be seen and known. As Paul states it, there is a culpability in humans, who

“...suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” [Romans 1.18-20 ASV 1960].

Yet, when we come to the cross, we notice that, as the Lord’s example indicates, to discern what God is doing here is hidden to the natural man. It certainly is to Peter. It is only open to the eyes of faith. For the cross itself speaks to us of a hiddenness of God in its process. Anyone looking at the situation as it happens in history, may find it hard to see how a crucified God makes any sense when we approach it with the natural understanding of God as powerful and wise, abounding with attributes that cannot be resisted by men and women.

Indeed, the cross actually destroys all the naturally known preconceptions of God. It is a work of God, who, having sent us his Son, Jesus, is seen here as humble, weak and submissive to the active persecution and oppression of politically motivated men. To all the works of God that the senses are open to understand, his seems alien and strange.

It is a revelation of God in which He is hidden.

This is what Luther meant when he spoke of the cross as an ‘alien work’, by which he meant a work God is doing, but a work which lies hidden within something that is so opposite/contrary to God’s already known

'proper work. Luther took his cue from the revelation of God that was given to Moses, after he had asked to see God's glory [Exodus 33.17-23].

Moses was permitted to see the 'back parts' of God - which is to say that God stayed hidden - while at the same time, the words God proclaimed as He passed by, spoke of his mercy and compassion - inner matters to God's heart, motives that drive his will, which were not discernable by simply looking at the created universe.

In this way, Luther was driven to speak of a God who acts according to his will, and is both 'revealed' as present in his actions and yet 'hidden' while He is present.

In this way, in relation to the cross, we are driven to think of the 'revealed God' and the 'hidden God' as found in precisely the same event of revelation; which of the two is recognised depends upon the perceiver.

For example, let's consider the wrath of God revealed in the cross. To natural reason, God appears wrathful; to faith, God's mercy is revealed in this wrath.

Notice that there is a no way to split them. God's mercy is not revealed independent - and separate from - his wrath, nor is there a subsequent revelation of God's mercy that contradicts his wrath. Such a dualism is not what the presentation of the Gospel allows us; we shall have to think dialectically.

In one event, the revelation in the cross of Christ, both God's wrath and his mercy are revealed simultaneously; but it is only faith that is able to recognise the 'alien work' as it lies hidden in the 'proper work'. Only faith discerns the real situation which undergirds the apparent situation. Only faith sees the merciful intention which underlies the revealed wrath. The faith of Christ sees this so clearly in his drinking of the cup.

To use an expression of Luther's, taken from a sermon given on 24th February 1517,

"Man hides his own things, in order to conceal them; God hides his own things, in order to reveal them" [Luthers Works 1.138.13-15].