

Bitter and Sweet Cup

Sermon #1049

Study given by W. D. Frazee—October 17, 1959

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" Matthew 26:26-28.

There is one great church which has presumed to take from the members the cup entirely. The wafer is supposed to cover everything. This is only one of the things the church of Rome has presumed to change. The Pope considers himself able to change times and laws. But in Jesus' original plan carried out in His church today, all of us are to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. It is the drinking of the cup I would like to study.

Notice that Jesus invites His disciples to drink of the cup, and says that this cup is His blood which is shed for many. The blood, as given in the Bible, represents life. We are told this in Leviticus. It is Bible teaching. So it is Jesus' life we are to share.

But it is the life in sacrifice, for it is blood poured out as an offering. If the blood of Jesus had remained within His veins, if His life had been kept and preserved to Himself, we would have been without hope.

This juice we are partaking of today comes from a crushed grape. It is grape juice, but it is juice which comes from crushing the grape. It is juice poured out of the life of the grape into the cup that we may drink it. So the blood of Jesus made available for our atonement is life that is poured out. The prophet says in Isaiah 53 that He poured out His life unto death. He gave His whole life. He held back nothing.

When we take this grape juice today we are to receive the life of Jesus poured out as a sacrifice for us. Was that sacrifice accompanied with a great deal of suffering? Oh, yes.

Think of what it means to the grape. Think of the way the grapes were prepared for wine in the ancient winepress. The clusters were gathered and brought in and put into great stone vats. People got into those vats barefoot and trod those grapes until the juice ran out. That is a picture of the winepress. Trampling out the vintage.

When Jesus went to Gethsemane and to Calvary, the sins of men were placed upon Him, and His soul was literally crushed beneath that load. He suffered.

Oh, how much He suffered. Blood was literally forced from His pores there in Gethsemane. He was in the winepress. And how pressed He was under that awful load.

We have pictures that artists have drawn of Jesus kneeling in prayer in Gethsemane. I think the pictures are beautiful, and doubtless many times Jesus was in that position and posture during His life on earth. So I would not in any way criticize the pictures. But on that night Jesus was prostrate on the ground. He fell, pressed under an awful load.

The Bible says He fell on His face. For awhile He could not raise Himself. He was under a load that caused Him to stagger and fall, and there on the cold ground, prostrate, He was crushed. He suffered. I would like to have you notice something interesting about this cup:

"Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of 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 shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father" Matthew 20:20-23.

There are many precious lessons there. Jesus asked them if they could share the cup with Him. They said they were able. He said they would indeed drink of His cup. I want to ask you something. Do you think they got the idea from what He said that it was something hard, or easy? It must have been they thought it was something hard, for otherwise there was no point to the question.

If He had asked if they were able to take a glass of orange juice or lemonade, or a glass of grape juice, a person could smile and say they could do that. But that isn't the question. Here is something very difficult, very bitter. Jesus says you would like to be close to Me, but can you take what I take? Can you drink what I must drink? Can you go through what I must go through? That is the question.

So I ask you this afternoon, can you take that which enables you to share with your Lord in pain, in discipline, in suffering, the fellowship of His sufferings? That is included in taking the cup of fellowship. And as the deacon passes from seat to seat and the glass is offered to you, it is as if Jesus stood there and said, Are you able to drink the cup with Me? Can you take the suffering?

"God has shown me that He gave His people a bitter cup to drink, to purify and cleanse them" *Early Writings*, page 47.

What? God gave His people a bitter cup to drink? Oh, you say, I thought this was a sweet cup. I thought this was a cup of blessing. I thought this was a cup of joy.

It is. We will come to that. But oh, how many times God is seeking to teach us to get things in order. We need to learn the same lesson James and John needed to learn. Their eyes were on the kingdom, on sitting down with Jesus on His throne. Did Jesus want them to sit with Him on His throne? He said to that very same John years later on the isle of Patmos, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne." Oh, yes. But before the throne must come the cross.

"God has shone me that He gave His people a bitter cup to drink, to purify and cleanse them." Are there some medicinal properties in suffering? Apparently so. There are some kinds of treatment people will gladly take. Some people like hydrotherapy. If you would offer some people carrot juice they would say they just love that. They would take several glasses because they like it. Other people would say, Do I have to take that?

But here is something that nobody would like to take as medicine. It is a bitter cup. Have you had any of it? Have you had any trials, any disappointments, any pain, any suffering?

I tell you, there is more ahead. I dare not withhold it. It is the truth. Concerning the fiery trial of the great time of trouble we are told that the most vivid imagination cannot picture the severity of the ordeal. Those who thus enter into the fellowship with Christ in His sufferings will know a fellowship in glory such as none of the angels know. And even most of the redeemed of this world will never enter into those most inner experiences that belong to the 144,000 thousand.

They have drunk most deeply of Christ's cup of suffering, of self-sacrificing love. As the result, they will share an eternal fellowship with Him closer than any others can know. Are you able to drink of the cup? Can you take it?

"It is a bitter draught, and they can make it still more bitter by murmuring, complaining, and repining" *Ibid*.

If you do nothing to it at all, it is bitter, but if you wish to you can make it still more bitter. How? Put some murmuring in. Put some complaining in. Put some repining in.

"But those who receive it thus must have another draught, for the first does not have its designed effect upon the heart. And if the second does not effect the work, then they must have another, and another, until it does have its designed effect, or they will be left filthy, impure in heart" *Ibid*.

Isn't God patient with us, friends? Now I want to read you the counterpart to this statement. I just discovered it the other day. It is something the messenger of the Lord wrote in 1912. Listen:

"God's children are always being tested in the furnace of affliction. If they endure the first trial, it is not necessary for them to pass through a similar ordeal the second time"
SDA Bible Commentary, book 4, page 1146.

Isn't that wonderful? Think of it. There are some trials we need to have only once. Somebody says, But I have had the same one a dozen times over and over.

Sure. This tells why:

"But if they fail, the trial is brought to them again and again, each time being still more trying and severe" *Ibid.*

As I look at that I think most of us are paying far more tuition in this school than we need to. I believe it. I believe we are having trials over and over again that God designed we should have just once, and have it over with. There will be some others of a different kind, of course, but it is too bad to never get beyond short division. Isn't it?

If we have never learned to do short division, there is only one thing for the teacher to do, and that is to keep giving us problems in short division. I know the reward of finishing short division is to get started with long division, but there is some satisfaction in making progress. Now I want to go back to *Early Writings*.

"I saw that this bitter cup can be sweetened by patience, endurance, and prayer, and that it will have its designed effect upon the hearts of those who thus receive it, and God will be honored and glorified" *Early Writings*, page 47.

I am inclined to think that unless people get it sweetened, they will not be able to hold it in their stomach. But if we will sweeten the bitter cup with prayer and patience and endurance, we will be able to take it, and it will have its designed effect upon our whole spiritual experience.

Every thorn that has pierced our feet has wounded His. He has gone over the way before us. He trod down those thorns and left fewer for us. He took the cup when He had supped saying, This cup is the New Testament of my blood. All of you drink it. And to those today who would share the cup of His glory, He offers first the cup of sacrifice; the cup of suffering. And to this He invites us today as we come to this table.

What shall we tell Him? Shall we say like John and James, Yes we are able? If we love Him, we shall want to be where He is. If it is in Gethsemane, we want to be there with Him. If it is in the judgement hall, despised and rejected, we shall want to be there with Him. If it is at Calvary, crucified, we shall want to be there with Him. And all of this is before us today as we take the cup.

I would like to have us think now of this sweetener. We read here how the cup could be sweetened by prayer and patience and endurance. Isn't it nice that the cup can be sweetened?

Were there any martyrs who went singing to the stake? Oh yes. I wonder why. Ah dear ones, that cup had been sweetened. It would be nice if some of our little bitter cups could get sweetened. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could come up to the little trial that has bothered us and causes us to lose our temper a hundred and one times, and find that God had sweetened the cup; that we are no longer afraid of the Devil.

Don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that He will take away the trial. The martyrs who went singing to the stake got burned up. And as long as the Devil lives in this world we are going to have to meet him and contend with him. Thank God the bitter cup of trial, the fiery trial of temptation can be changed in the way we react if we will enter into this experience of prayer and patience and endurance. Let's do it. Let's believe that this is possible, and that it is ours in Christ.

When we stretch forth the hand to take that cup, when we lift that wine to our lips, let our faith go out in the blessed expression of reality that from henceforth we shall accept every trial as something God has permitted as a blessing, and that we are going by faith to find it sweet. What do you say?

John the Baptist had that experience. He was having a bitter trial in the dungeon. He had been used to the open air, climbing the rocky cliffs, being out there in the desert with the multitude. He was not used to confinement. He had never had anything like that. Now he is in the dungeon of Herod. The days go by and lengthen into weeks and months. He gets no message from Jesus. Not a letter. Not a word. Nothing is brought to him. He wonders what it all means. Doubts tug at his heart. Wonder and fear comes to his soul.

Finally he sends two of his disciples to go and ask Jesus if He was the one who was to come, or should they look for another. Jesus lets them stand by hour after hour as He heals the sick and preaches the Gospel to the poor. Then He says, Go tell John what you have seen and heard today. Tell him about the healing of the sick and the preaching of the Gospel to the poor. Then tell him, "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me" Matthew 11:6.. The literal thought is, Blessed is the one who shall find in Me no occasion of stumbling. Nothing to stumble over.

They told John. He accepted the message and received it. He took the cup and drank it. From that hour until the hour when the messenger came and took of his head, the life of John was the life of peaceful trust as he waited in the hands of God, content to receive what providence ordered.

My dear friends, we cannot plan our life. We cannot chose whether we will be in the dungeon or in the caves during the time of trouble. Have you ever wondered about it? Have you ever thought where you would like to be? God knows where it is best for us to be. But I can tell you that wherever it is, we are going to have a trial.

And wherever it is, if we will, we can have the unseen presence that was with John the Baptist.

We are told that during the time of trouble there will be occasions when the prison itself will be like a palace. The rich in faith dwell there, and they will feel the presence of the angels. Oh, I would rather be in a dungeon with an angel than on the throne with the Devil.

We are learning those experiences in these little tests of life. Did you ever hear anybody say, Oh, that is the way it always happens to me? Did you ever say anything like that? If we will take the cup and sweeten it, we can get our lessons through in a hurry. The medicine can do its work, and we can go on from grace to grace, from glory to glory. Let's take the cup.

Dear Savior, as we gather at Thy table to eat the bread and drink the cup, we would chose to share with Thee the fellowship of Thy sufferings. We would no longer make bitter this cup of trial by murmuring and complaining, blaming our brethren or blaming the world, or blaming Thee for the difficulty. We would chose to have this cup sweetened by earnest prayer and patient perseverance, by accepting Thy loving providence.

Bless us as we enter into this service and make this choice and receive this cup, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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