

The cup that Jesus drank on our behalf

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[0 : 00] Well, do you want to hear one of the scariest verses in the Bible? You've already heard it this morning, in fact, but you probably didn't realize just how scary it really is. I'm going to read it to you again. Psalm 75, verse 8.

In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth will drink it down to its very dregs.

Now, let me explain to you why that is such a scary verse. You see, God is pictured here as the master of a great and terrible feast, and his guests are all the wicked of the earth.

Now, you'd wonder why would God hold a feast for all the wicked of the earth? Because that's what the psalm says is going on. Well, you see, this is not a feast that you want to go to, because there's only one thing on the menu, and it's wine.

Now, I know some of you are thinking, well, what's so bad about that? You know, what's so bad about a party with only wine? Sure, it would be nice to have some snacks, you know, some nuts or some crackers, but a party with just wine, it's not that bad, is it?

[1 : 05] Well, you might think, you know, it's not that bad. Until you discover what this wine actually is. And this cup of God with his wine is actually an image that's appeared throughout the Old Testament.

Because later on, through the prophet Jeremiah, God reveals just exactly what is in this wine, what it's made of, this wine that the wicked will one day drink.

And I want to read that to you. It's Jeremiah, and you don't have to turn there, but he says this. Now, that doesn't sound like very nice wine to drink.

You see, throughout the Old Testament, God's wrath for evil, for wickedness, for sin, has been pictured as this cup of wine that the wicked people of the world will sooner or later have to drink. And that is a scary thought, isn't it? God's wrath upon people in this earth. Now, that wine has, from time to time, been sipped by various nations.

[2 : 28] We look in the Old Testament and we see the histories of God's wrath coming on the earth. But, for the most part, throughout human history, it's sat in the cup waiting. And it's this psalm, Psalm 75, verse 8, that tells us that one day it will be poured out.

And it's an aspect of God we don't like to talk about. I'm sure it's not the first thing, you know, that you want to raise at the water cooler with your work colleague on a Monday morning. You don't want to talk about the wrath of God, God's anger for sin.

We like to talk about God's love and forgiveness and mercy. But this is something we need to get right in our minds, especially as we're going to Easter. We've got to understand this aspect of God that his wrath is real, that the Bible talks about it.

That his anger for sin doesn't just disappear because we're not comfortable with it. It's there in Scripture. But the thing is, it's also right and good, isn't it, that God is angry with sin.

God says earlier in this very psalm, Psalm 75, When the earth and all its peoples quake, it is I who hold the pillars firm. Now, what does he mean by that? Well, when it seems like everything is unstable in this world, when evil seems to be running riot, Here, God is saying, well, I still hold the pillars.

[3 : 45] I still keep things structured. The standard of right and wrong still exists. The principle of justice still stands firm, even when God lets wicked people get their way for a time.

Why? Why do we know that right and wrong and justice is still real in our world? Well, because even those wicked people who seem to get away with things will be at that feast that the psalm talks about, where one day they will drink every last drop of God's wrath.

And the Bible assures us of this, not just as a warning, but as an encouragement and as a way to show us the glory of God. Because that's really what all of God's revelation is meant to do. It's to point us to who he truly is and to point us to his glory and to challenge us to live in light of that. And so talking about this cup of God's wrath actually shows us his glory. God's wrath for sin, his uncompromising hostility to all that is wrong with the world is part of what makes him good. You know, if the creator and the sustainer of this universe didn't uphold the pillars of right and wrong and rightly judge sins, he wouldn't be good and he wouldn't be worthy of worship. [5 : 03] But he does do those things. He does judge sin. His holiness is such that it will always react to sin and wickedness in judgment. It's part of who God is.

It can't not do that. That's what his holiness does. It reacts in justice and judgment and wrath to all that is evil and wicked and sinful. But that is a scary thought still for us.

Even though it glorifies God, even though it highlights an aspect of how perfect his standards of justice are, it's a scary thought for us. Especially because the wicked in this verse doesn't only talk about the people that we think are wicked.

You know, often we read the Psalms and we read about the wicked being punished by God. And we think of people like Hitler and Osama Bin Laden and the person who checks out 14 items and the 10 items or less Q.

You know, people like that, who we define as wicked in our standards. But it's not just them that the Bible is talking about.

[6 : 10] Because this word translated wicked just means one who is guilty before God. One who opposes God's rule over them. Now who's that talking about?

You see, in a world where we often complain that justice isn't done, this Psalm and others like it assure us that one day it will be done, but in fact far more thoroughly than we want it to be. Because none of us stand totally guiltless before God, do we? If we're honest. If we meant what we said in our confessional prayer earlier. And given that God's holiness is perfect and reacts against all sin, all rebellion to his rule, none of us can honestly say, well, we don't deserve to be at that feast one day and drink the cup of God's wrath.

And that is why it is one of the scariest verses in Scripture. Because of what it implies for us when we read it. But it's only when we understand that. You see, and the reason that I wanted to start with us thinking about that verse in Psalm 75 and the cup of God's wrath, uncomfortable as it is, is because we need to understand it to make sense of some of the things that happened in this morning's passage in John 18, the night before Jesus died, to which we now turn.

You see, the passage begins with Jesus leading his disciples to a garden in the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem, a place that they'd often gathered, and therefore a place that Judas knew where to find him.

[7 : 39] Now remember, Judas has already betrayed Jesus to the authorities. And so here in this story, we find him leading some soldiers right to where he knew Jesus would be. The first question, of course, we've got to ask ourselves all, why did Jesus do that?

Why did Jesus go here if he knew that Judas would find him? Well, I think that's the point. He intended to be found. And that's something that's striking throughout this account.

As we carry on reading this narrative of Jesus' arrest, you see that John is stressing how Jesus is actually the one calling the shots.

Did you notice that? Jesus is actually totally in control of this entire situation. In verse 4, have a look, he takes the initiative to approach the soldiers. John particularly mentions that he takes the first step, approaches them.

He doesn't wait for them to find him. And after he tells them who he is, you know what happens? Incredible. The soldiers fall to the ground. This is a detachment of Roman soldiers, probably 200 or more.

[8 : 41] And Jesus simply reveals who he is, and they fall to the ground. They have no resistance against the authority of the one standing in front of them. And it's not to say they did this voluntarily.

They probably just found themselves falling to the ground because they couldn't help it. But the point is, and the point of these details in the narrative, is that they're not actually the ones in control here.

Despite their numbers and their weapons, Jesus is the one with the authority. That is quite stark in the story of his arrest. And despite that, he still hands himself over to be arrested by them, which is

strange.

Now, shame, some of his poor disciples just didn't get this. They think that they still have to defend him. And so Peter tries and does a really harsh job of it. He heroically jumps forward with his sword drawn, maybe thinking, you know, he'll fight off the soldiers while the rest of the disciples bundle Jesus away to safety, while in reality, all he manages to do is cut off the air of some poor bystander, while the rest of his disciples just stand frozen in place.

So it doesn't quite work out like he planned. But of course, what he doesn't realize is that Jesus didn't need Peter to defend him, because Jesus is in control of this whole situation anyway.

[9 : 57] And all of what's happening is meant to happen, even if the disciples don't understand why. But it's vital that we understand why all of this is meant to happen, if we're going to understand the significance of Easter.

And so after Peter's attempt, you know what Jesus does? He tells them. He breaks the news to them. He tells them why all of this needs to happen. He tells them why he's not resisting. And it's very significant what he says.

And it's in verse 11. Have a look. Jesus commanded Peter, put your sword away. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

And so there it is, right there. In this verse, Jesus explains the reason he must be arrested, the reason he must go to trial, and the reason he must die.

And he says it's in order to drink the cup. He's referring to the same cup that Psalm 75 is referring to, which we found out is filled with God's wrath.

[11 : 04] And so it's here we discover that was his mission all along. His mission, the reason Jesus came to earth was not primarily to teach or heal people or set an example.

His goal, think about this, his goal right from the beginning was to die so that he can drink the cup of God's wrath. And he knew it. Because that cup is what's on the other side of human death.

So he must go through death to access it. And he came, he was born, he became a human so that he could die, so that he could access that cup and drink it. That's quite a thought, isn't it?

The obvious question, of course, is why him? Of all people, why did Jesus have to drink that cup? Jesus was unique in that he had no sin. He was the only person, if you think about it, who had the right to bypass that cup.

And so why was he so eager to drink it? Well, John tells us in verse 14 by referring to something we've read before. It's another detail he puts in that it's easy to read over.

[12 : 08] But have a look from verse 12. So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First, they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. Okay, John, well, why do you mention that? Well, obviously, because John wants us to go back and read that part again when that happened a few chapters before.

So let's do that. Turn a couple of pages back to chapter 11. And this is very important that we understand. And there's a reason John mentions it in the middle of this narrative of Jesus being arrested.

Chapter 11 from verse 49. This is what he's referring to. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all, nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

[13 : 25] Okay, so this is saying Caiaphas was speaking better than he knew. He was referring to Jesus dying so that the Romans didn't come and take over and there wasn't a civil war. But actually, God was using him to prophesy something much more significant than that, which you'll remember if you were here when we studied that chapter.

But God was using Caiaphas to make a prophecy that Jesus was going to die on behalf of other people. But not just other people in Israel, people all over the world.

But how does he do that? What does it mean? Have you ever thought, what does it mean that Jesus dies on behalf of other people? Because all people still die. So, if that's supposed to mean that he dies instead of us, then he kind of failed because we have to die as well.

So, what does it mean that Jesus dies on behalf of other people? Have you ever considered that? Well, here we find out in John 18. Jesus dying on behalf of other people is actually talking about what's on the other side of death, not the physical death itself that he took on our behalf because we all have to go through that.

But it's what we meet on the other side of death that it's talking about. Namely, the cup of God's wrath. because for human beings who have sinned against a God who must judge sin, what's on the other side of our death is waiting for us a cup full of God's wrath that we have to drink.

[14 : 57] But Jesus dying on behalf of us means that he went and drank that cup for us. He got in early to that feast and drank the cup to its dregs before we could get there and have to drink it for ourselves.

That's what it means that Jesus died on our behalf. And the reason he could do that is because he didn't have his own cup to drink waiting there for him. And as the infinite son of God, he had the capacity to drink it on behalf of many, many other people.

And that's why he went through with all of this. That's why he was born. That's why he came into this world. His mission was to drink that cup. His mission was to go through death before you to drink that cup before you have to.

And that was God's plan all along. And not just in Jesus coming to earth, but even, if you think about it, creating us in the first place, God knew all of that.

See, God created us knowing full well that we were going to sin against him. God created you knowing that you would rebel against him, that you wouldn't want to live under his rule, that you wouldn't be able to help but breaking his laws.

[16 : 09] And also, knowing full well that his holiness would not tolerate that sin, and his holiness would need to react against that sin in judgment. He knew that from the beginning, and yet he still created us.

Why? Because he also knew that there was a way that that cup of wrath could be drunk without us having to drink it. But there was only one way that could happen, and he knew it.

The only way is if he drank it himself. That is the only way that that cup of wrath doesn't have to be drunk by you. And that is why he came to earth as Jesus.

And right from day one, he headed towards the cross. That was his mission. To get through death before you did, so that he could drink the cup that you were meant to drink before you have to.

Let that settle in your heart for a second. You see, that's why we celebrate Jesus dying on Good Friday. because at the cross, he went to drink to the dregs that terrifying cup of God's wrath in place of his people.

[17 : 13] And so, really, an important question we've got to ask this morning as we head to Easter is, well, who are those people? Who are those people who know for sure when they go through death and arrive on the other side that they'll find the cup empty?

Do you know that for sure? Are you convinced of that? That when you go through death despite all the sins you've committed, you get there and you'll realize that cup has already been drunk for you. Will that be you? How do you know that? Because not everyone will. You know, the Bible still talks about a day when God will pour out that cup on the wicked and many, many people will have to drink it and it will be a terrifying day.

How do you know that yours has already been drunk? Who are the people that Jesus did that for? Well, the answer is simple and we find out in this passage. It's those who believe in his name.

Those who confess who he really is. Those who don't deny the truth. You know, John says at the end of his gospel a few pages over in chapter 20 verse 31 he says, These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[18 : 25] So eternal life simply comes through believing in the name of Jesus because he did it all on our behalf. So there's nothing else that we have to do, nothing that we can do because we can't drink that cup ourselves.

And so because Jesus did it on our behalf the only thing that we've actually got to do is truly believe that but do we? What does it look like to truly believe?

Not to just come to church and say I believe and sing the songs but what does it look like in our lives to truly believe that Jesus drank that for us? Who are the people who truly believe?

Well that's what we find out in this passage in an indirect way because the passage actually shows us who they're definitely not. You see belief in Jesus doesn't come naturally in fact the world is programmed to deny him.

People are programmed predisposed to deny the truth about Jesus and that is the stark truth that we see throughout this story. So right from the soldiers who came to arrest him and realized that he did have divine authority over them and fell to the ground before him after he said I am he which by the way is the Aramaic name for God I am.

[19 : 36] So basically Jesus is telling these soldiers oh by the way you're about to arrest God and they know it on some level and yet they denied the truth because they still went ahead and bound him and took him to Annas.

They still arrested him knowing that knowing what had just happened knowing that they had fallen down before the authority of this man who's just claimed to be God they still arrest him.

It's an absolute blatant denial of the truth that they know. And so you see it in the soldiers you see it in the Jews as well who brought him to trial before Annas the high priest Jesus states the truth about himself and he asks if there is evidence against him and of course they can't provide that so they just hit him to keep him quiet.

And then in the next chapter you can read it this week at home chapter 19 at the final trial the Jews show their true colors verse 14 Pilate said to the Jews behold your king they cried out away with him away with him crucify him Pilate said to them shall I crucify your king the chief priests answered we have no king but Caesar and so here the Jews have gone the whole way and finally denied even that they have a Messiah at all so you see it in the Jews this denial of the truth and then Pilate himself denied the truth so Jesus in chapter 18 from verse 37 Jesus was clear with them he says for this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice you know what Pilate said to him in response what is truth that's an easy way to deny truth when it confronts you doesn't it you just claim that you can't know there's no way of knowing truth you see it all the time don't you with agnostics in this world you tell them about Jesus and they say well there's no way we can actually know what's true everybody's wondering and there's no way we can confirm it people deny the truth when it's confronted when they're confronted by it by trying to imply that there is no real objective truth at all that's what Pilate did and then we read on even though after he had said this he went back outside to the Jews and told them

I find no guilt in him he said it he said Jesus is innocent and he still goes on to order his execution he's denied that truth as well and so we find it in the soldiers a denial of the truth we find it in the Jews a denial of the truth and we find it in Pilate a denial of the truth but saddest of all we even find it in Jesus' closest friend Peter three times he's asked whether he is truly one of Jesus' disciples and three times he denies the truth he denies even knowing Jesus and so in this passage as Jesus is arrested and led to the cross everybody ends up denying the truth in their own way and for their own reasons but they all end up denying the truth because that's what we all naturally do when it comes to Jesus by default we deny the truth of Jesus in our own lives his lordship of our own lives Pilate why did he deny Jesus well he didn't care about the truth and so he denied it when he saw it the Jews denied Jesus because it turned out they didn't want God to be their king after all despite all their religious pretensions and Peter denied Jesus out of fear and peer pressure to escape the trouble that associating with Jesus would have caused ask yourself which one of these would you have been why would you have denied the truth and which one of these might you still be today maybe you're still denying the truth about Jesus in your own life why is that is it because like Pilate you don't care about what's true and you don't actually want to hear the truth that you'll have no choice but to believe maybe that's why you avoid reading the Bible at all or is it because like the Jews you don't actually want God ruling in your life you want to call the shots in your own life and like the Jews maybe you actually use religion as a way to appease your conscience and convince yourself that you can get away with living how you want or do you deny the truth out of fear fear of what it'll mean to you if you stand up and confess that you belong to Jesus what will people think what changes will that mean for your life you see it's not easy to believe in Jesus in a world that is predisposed to denying the truth about him but that's what you'll need to do if you want to be saved and even if you take heart even if you've been denying the truth up until now and you realize that and you actually if you consider that there's no real reason that you can't admit that this truth is real even if you've been doing that up until now it's not too late because we discover later don't we that

Peter repented of his denial and he was saved after all but that's what you need to do if you want to have life you've got to stop denying the truth you've got to put your trust in

[25 : 10] Jesus and be willing to stand up and be counted as one of his come what may and that's often where where where the divergence happens that people will say when they're happy at church they'll say they believe in Jesus but when it's out there when the rubber hits the road when you're at work when you are talking to your neighbors over the fence when you're at school it's out there where you really see whether you believe in him or not do you stand up for him is he is it evidence that you are one of his disciples or like Peter do you try to hide away from that fact and do you deny that fact because that's where true belief is seen not here but out there but you need to do that you need to make sure that you can stand up and be counted as one of his that you really do believe it and that it comes out in your life and it is evidence so that you can be sure that when you go through death one day which you will and you stand before God you can be sure that his cup of wrath is empty for you because Jesus already drank it is that you are you going to go through death and find an empty cup or not that's what you've got to ask yourself and if you know that it is empty if you have already put your faith in Jesus and you have stood up for him and you are one of his well then will you just use this sermon and this week to realize afresh just what Jesus actually did for you and to let that flow over you that he went and he drank the cup of

God's wrath that was meant for you and will you worship him in response truly worship him by giving your whole self to him giving your whole life to him because it's a life for which he drank that cup down to its bitter dregs for you will you remember that and will you respond to that properly in the coming week and beyond well we're going to have a chance to respond to that right now as we come to holy communion I'm going to pray Lord Jesus we thank you for this account of your arrest and how in it you revealed to us what you were going to do at the cross thank you that we can read it now a week before Easter so that we can prepare our own hearts to celebrate Easter as we should in worship of you thank you Lord Jesus that you went and drank that terrible cup for your people Lord I pray for everyone here in this church this morning and everyone listening to the sermon pray Lord that you would help them help us all to examine our own hearts and ask ourselves whether we are truly in the faith whether we truly believe you whether we truly are willing to stand up in this world and say that we are one of yours and that you are our Lord and that you are our Savior help us to be able to do that boldly and help us Lord to reaffirm our faith in you as we come now to share at the Lord's table

Amen to to hold on to answer the truth I want to become even the order I can't satisfy many things let's Whoever wrote them how to impose your