

WHICH CUP WILL YOU DRINK?

MATTHEW 20.20-28

CITY OF GOD CHURCH

Before sermon make sure the front table is set up with a dinner set up (plates, cups). Make sure there are two cups, two bottles of water, a tea light, and a lighter.

Opening:

I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but it's amazing the power that one question can have. One question can change your entire life. It can change the course of your entire future. One simple question can change so much.

Some start out simple. "Would you like to go to dinner sometime?" Honestly, that question is never answered that smooth. "If you think you might eat again eventually then what would you think about possible joining me for that food eating thing?"

Life is filled with questions that can change everything. Will you marry me? Can we afford this house? What do I want to do with my life? Are we ready to have kids? Some are a little more difficult, and make a much greater impact. Is it time to pull the plug? Would more treatment help at all? Life is filled with questions.

What's true of life is also true of the Bible. The Bible is filled with questions, and how you answer those questions can change so much. When you think about questions you might find in the Bible what comes to your mind? I bet I know one that probably didn't come to your mind (unless you looked at the screen). "What cup are you going to drink from?" I know that doesn't make a lot of sense yet, but we've got time to get to that.

ILLUS: Going out to dinner with Jessie

I know one cup I want to drink from...my own. Maybe you've experience this, but when Jessie and I started dating we went out to dinner a lot. The first few times it was great. We'd eat, we'd talk, and things were going well. Then about our third time out she did something I didn't see coming.

I'll be honest; when I go out to eat I order what I want to eat. If I wanted to try something else I would have ordered it. But about our third time out she took her fork and took something right off of my plate. Now that's fine for some of you. We'll call you all "sharers." For sharers every meal is family style.

There's another group of you, like me, that order what you want to eat. There's no reason to go anywhere else because I want to eat what I ordered. I want the meal I paid for. At some level all of us want to eat the meal, and drink the drink that we picked out for ourselves. Hang on to that idea of wanting to eat and drink what we've chosen, and let's jump in to Matthew 20:20.

Move 1: Why are you a Christian?

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

- Matthew 20:20-21

At this point, where are we at in Jesus' life? We're actually getting pretty close to the end of his life. For the past few chapters he's been trying to prepare his disciples for his death, but honestly they don't understand what he's talking about. It's odd that they don't understand him when you see how clearly Jesus has taught them about his coming death.

Look up just a few verses and you'll see how clearly he has taught them about his death. In 20:18 Jesus says, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." I literally don't think he could speak more clearly about what was going to happen to him.

All of us have experience this though. There are times when you don't want to hear what someone else is saying. They didn't want to hear Jesus talk like this. They had greater expectations for him. When Jesus was on earth what was happening to Israel? Israel was under foreign occupation by the Roman Empire. The Old Testament made a lot of promises about a Messiah who would come to earth, and many of the Jews had interpreted those in a very specific way.

God would send a warrior king to overthrow the Roman army. This King would set-up an earthly kingdom and rule over the people. What the people wanted saved from was military oppression and so they were shaping Jesus to fit the mold of what they wanted saved from. You can see why they wouldn't want to listen to Jesus when he started talk about his death. How can he save them from the Romans if he dies?

For the disciples it wasn't just the fact that he was going to save them from Roman occupation. They had "an in" with the future king. All of you likely know someone who is better than you at what you're going to spend your life doing. You have a couple of options when you find someone better than you at something. One popular option is this. "That guy/girl is talented. They are way better than I am at this. I'll at least come along for the ride." So you get close to them because you know you'll get some benefit from it.

I don't think this was the disciples' main motivation, but it was obviously there. "If Jesus is going to be king then we need to stay close to him. If Jesus is going to be king then we'll get to rule with him. We're going to get the benefits of being close to Jesus." You see this desire play out within the disciples as they're constantly bickering for position within the group.

Now, when you want to make sure something gets done what do you do? Well, for some of you, you'd ask your mom to do it. Don't be embarrassed we've all done it at some point. That's exactly what happens here in Matthew 20. James and John, two brothers, want to make sure they get high ranking positions when Jesus becomes king, and so they send their mom to talk to Jesus. How could Jesus say no to their mom?

²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

It's easy to look down on the disciples for this, but we do it all the time. We come to Jesus and he asks us "what do you want?" How would you respond to that question? How you initially answer that question shows a lot about what you believe. What do you want from Jesus?

"Jesus, when you become King give us a position of power. Jesus I want to be comfortable. I want to have enough money. I want to be happy. I want to be healthy. I don't want to be lonely anymore." Now, Jesus does care about all of those things, but how you answer that question shows a lot about what is most important to you. Let's keep going and look at Jesus' response.

²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"

- Matthew 20:22a

Jesus' answer teaches us why we should come to Him. When Jesus asks us "What do you want" what should our response be? We'll have to dig a little, but the answer is right there in Jesus' response. So what does he mean by, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"

The Bible teaches that everyone is preparing a drink that they will someday drink. This drink is the consequences of the decisions that we make in this life. Everytime we sin this cup is filled up more and more. Now sin is when we either go against how God has asked us to live, or when we ignore what God wants life to look like. Sin is rebellion against God because even though he has a good and loving plan for how life works we think we know better. This separates us from God.

If we're honest with ourselves we really don't think we're that bad. That's why I quickly wanted to go back in Matthew to Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." In this sermon Jesus taught that sin isn't only about what we do, but where our heart is at.

So what does Jesus teach about sin. Murder is a big deal right. Most of us feel like we're pretty good people compared with someone who has murdered others. What does Jesus say? He says not only is murder bad but, "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:22). So everytime I'm angry with someone I fill my cup up.

It's easy for Christians to become self-righteous when they compare their sexual lives to the lives of others. But again Jesus cuts through our pride when he says, "I say

to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). God created men and women to have intimacy with one person, and when you live differently it goes against God’s will for your life. So every time that I lust I fill my cup up more.

There are some things that the Bible calls sin that really we don’t see as that big of a deal. Who hasn’t told a lie before? Everyone does it’s just part of life. What does Jesus say about our words? “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this come from evil” (Matt. 5:37). So whenever I’m untruthful I fill up my cup even more.

The reason these sins or rebellions fill up this cup is because they are against the God who created and loves us. The Bible clearly teaches we will be held accountable for all of these things we’ve done against God. There will come a point in history when we’ll all stand before God, and be judged for the things we’ve done. Because sin goes so deep, even into our heart, none of us have any chance when we stand before God on judgment day, me included.

So what does this cup become in the hands of God? What do I deserve from God because of all of my sin? The Bible actually answers that question with the same imagery of a cup. Back in the Old Testament this is what God said to the prophet Jeremiah.

¹⁵ Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ¹⁶ They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.”

- Jeremiah 25:15-16

This is what happens to our cup in the hands of God. On judgment day we’ll all hand to God a cup that is filled with sin. It’s filled with rebellion against God. It’s filled with moments when we destroyed others. So what does this cup become in the hands of God? Jeremiah says it becomes, “this cup of the wine of wrath.” We are all preparing for ourselves a drink that we will one day drink. That drink is wrath and judgment from God because of our sin. This is the drink that we’ve prepared for ourselves.

However, what about the drink that Jesus prepared for himself? At Christmas we celebrate the fact that God came to earth as a man in the person of Jesus, and so what did his life look like? His cup was filled up with something very different.

When you look at Jesus’ life what do you see? What we don’t see is any sin in his life. What was Jesus cup filled up with? Rather than getting angry Jesus loved. He even asked God for forgiveness for the men that killed him (Lk. 23:34). Jesus filled his cup with forgiveness and love.

Rather than lusting Jesus viewed the women around him as sisters and partners in ministry. It’s amazing to consider that Jesus never had one impure thought about any woman he ever encountered. Jesus filled his cup up with purity and righteousness.

Rather than lying Jesus always spoke truth. Even when it was difficult he spoke truth. There was never one lie that ever came off the lips of Jesus, and so he filled his cup with this truthfulness.

It wasn't just in these areas. The Bible say Jesus lived his life perfectly. He lived perfectly in communion with God, and lived perfectly with others. His cup was literally overflowing with holiness. This is what Jesus had to present to God on judgment day; a perfect life free from sin. Of course God was pleased with Jesus life.

So now we get back to our original question. What did Jesus mean when he said, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am able to drink?" Now if you're like me and think you should eat and drink what you've ordered for yourself then Jesus should be pretty happy. His cup was a life of total devotion to God and others. Jesus had nothing to fear in drinking the cup he had prepared for himself.

But Jesus seems to say that there is something to fear in the cup that he is about to drink. Look at the last verse of this paragraph and it will help us understand what he means. "²⁸ ...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

What does it mean for Jesus to ransom us? It means that he saves us from our sin. He saves us from the wrath and the bondage that we're under. How does he do that? He drinks. But he doesn't drink his drink. He doesn't drink from the cup that he filled up.

I don't know of a clearer way to explain the heart of the gospel. This is why Jesus came; to drink the drinks that we prepared for ourselves. He takes our cups filled with sin and rebellion against God, and he drinks the wrath from God. He takes the consequences of our life. On the cross Jesus drank completely the cup of the wine of God's wrath.

So if Jesus takes my cup and drinks the wrath of God for me, then what cup do I have? What will I present to God on judgment day? This is where the gospel gets even better. Flip over to Matthew 26:26-29. In this section we find Jesus at a meal with his disciples when he explains,

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

- Matthew 26:26-29

So Jesus takes our cup and gives us his. What is the cup of Jesus filled with. It's filled with his perfect life; his obedience to God. It's filled with his blood because he died on the cross in our place and took God's wrath for us. So Jesus literally gives us his cup to drink. So now when we stand before God and he asks what we have to show for

our life we give him the cup of Christ, and we receive the reward Jesus earned; a relationship with God and forgiveness of sin.

The obvious question coming out of this is, “So how do I sit down at the table? How do I get Jesus to switch cups with me?” Again, this is why we love the gospel at City of God. Jesus says anyone can sit down at the table. You have to love him. You have to believe that he did take your punishment. The good thing for us is that it’s not about how good you are that lets you sit at the table.

We see this play out in Jesus’ life. Who did he eat with? Who did he invite to share a meal? He invited prostitutes, cheats, criminals, and religious/more people. Jesus invited the full spectrum of people to sit and eat with him. He pursues all people and calls them to let him drink their cup in their place.

That’s why we celebrate Christmas. God became a man to drink the cup of wrath that we deserved, and to give us a cup filled with love and forgiveness. So when Jesus asks, “What do you want” our first answer shouldn’t be about any physical need that we have. Rather, we come to Jesus because he removes God’s wrath from us, and shows us the love of God.

All people are invited to come and sit down at this table. Regardless of where you’ve been or how you’ve been living Jesus will trade cups with you. The question you have to answer is, “Will you love him?”