



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the Feast of St. James, the Elder
July 25, 2021

The Two Cups

Mark 10:35–45

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” ³⁹ And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus asks James and John, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” You see, they had just come up to Him requesting to sit, one at His right hand and one at His left, when He came into His glory.

And He didn’t correct them at that point, nor did He deny that to sit at His right or His left would indeed convey power, prestige, and honor. But He did take the opportunity to *redirect* them.

“You don’t know what you’re asking,” He says. And here He begins to direct them away from ideas of prestige and power and instead toward the privilege of service and sacrifice . . . but not theirs. You see, this was more than just teaching James and John to be humble. And it’s much more than teaching us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom. 12:3).

James would come to understand that later. He would eventually grow old as the Bishop of Jerusalem and He would ultimately offer His head to martyrdom, and it was taken by a Roman soldier. He was the first of the apostles to give his life for the Faith.

But long before that day, Jesus posed that question to James: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” He and John answered quickly, “We are able.” But they had no idea what He meant.

You see, He’s really talking about two cups, the second of which is filled from the



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the Feast of St. James, the Elder

July 25, 2021

first.

Of the first cup He says, “My Father, if this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done.” But not once, not twice . . . three times, He prays, “Father, take this cup from Me . . .”

What is it about this cup that has Jesus so frightened? He is, after all, the Son of God. More than once the skies opened up and the Father said, “This is My Son...” Why was Jesus so terrified of this cup that “being in agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground”? (Luke 22:44)

Have you ever noticed that Jesus talks about cups a lot? His first mentioned a “cup” while teaching the crowds. He said, “Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42). The “cup” here refers to a cup of water. Simple, right? Or was there more to it than that? Doesn’t Jesus’ promise of a reward turn that simple cup into a cup of blessing for the one who gives it?

Elsewhere He says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matt. 23:25–26). Here the cup refers to the souls of the Scribes and Pharisees. Surely these “cups” are not the source of Christ’s dread when He mentions the “cup” in the Garden?

He speaks of a cup again while at table: “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.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 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’” (Matt. 26:26–29). Such simple words: “This cup is my blood, which is poured out for many.” You can argue with Him if you want to, but His words are plain, “This *is* . . .” And the purpose? “for the forgiveness of sins . . .” This cup was handed over to the Apostles by His very own hand – a gift, “for the forgiveness of sins . . .” It’s a cup which He says He will not drink until He drinks it with them in His Kingdom.

So, this cup is a foretaste of that heavenly cup from which both the Bride and the Bridegroom will drink in heaven. What we have in this cup is a foretaste of the feast to come. It’s this cup which Paul would later call “The cup of blessing which we bless...” and it’s from this cup that he says we have “the communion of the blood of Christ.” And in the bread given with it, we have “the communion of the body of Christ.” This cup is a gift, a gift that brings “forgiveness of sins” just as Jesus said. And, of course, when He gave this cup, “They all drank of it.” They did so because it was a gift given by Christ for the purpose of forgiving their sins. Drinking the Lord’s cup sits you at His Table. And to sit at His table means you’re a child of heaven. So this can’t be the cup in the Garden, for this is a cup



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the Feast of St. James, the Elder

July 25, 2021

of celebration, a cup of thanksgiving. It simply cannot be the cup of which He was so terrified in the Garden.

“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” Jesus said to Peter in the Garden, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Now, what cup is *this*? More importantly, what’s it filled with? We know it’s not “the fruit of the vine.”

Perhaps The Revelation of St. John can help us: “[They] . . . will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger . . .” (Rev. 14:10). “Repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she has mixed” (Rev. 18:6b) “And God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath” (Rev. 16:19b).

Now we see that God has reserved unto Himself a cup of wrath, a cup of indignation for those who sin against Him, for those who despise His Word and reject His covenant, as He says in John 3(:36), “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not . . . shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

But isn’t the cup of wrath reserved only for sinners? Isaiah writes, “Wake yourself . . . stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath” (Isa. 51:17). This is disobedient, unbelieving Jerusalem, those who were Sons of the Covenant, but through much sinning and unbelief they had abandoned God’s grace. They were given over to wrath and drank “from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath.” So, yes, this is a cup reserved for sinners.

But why does this cup have Christ so shaken with fear in the Garden? Ponder this: “Behold, my servant . . . his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance” (Isa. 52:14) “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:3–6).

“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” Scripture says, “Behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire” (Isa. 66:15). John the Baptist said, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt. 3:11b) – *fiery* fire it says in the Greek. Can it be that Christ’s terror at the cup in the Garden is that it’s the cup of the wrath of the Father upon sinners? He had stood in the place of all mankind that day in the Jordan to be baptized by John. Couldn’t it be that as His holiness went into that water, the sinfulness of all humanity was soaked up into His body? Couldn’t it be that whenever His virtue went out from Him through His healing touch that the sin which caused each disease was drawn into His own flesh?



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the Feast of St. James, the Elder
July 25, 2021

Beloved, in Holy baptism, we receive the robe of His righteousness. At His baptism He began His ministry as the “Christ of God” who “must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” He, as the Christ, in the Garden’s cup drinks the wrath of God in all its fullness and He *is* rejected by men, forsaken by the Father. “My God My God Why have You forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isa. 59:2). “The people . . . scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself . . . !’ “All who see me laugh me to scorn; they make faces at me; they wag their heads, saying, ‘He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, seeing he delights in him!’” (Ps. 22:7–8).

The cup of the Garden is filled with the wrath of the people, the government, and of Almighty God! No wonder it filled Him with dread! No wonder He cried out from the cross, “My God, My God!” We hear in this cry His sense of being abandoned by His Father as He atoned for the sin of the whole world. But we also see in it an expression of perfect trust, “*My God, My God!*”

In the Garden Jesus prayed that the cup would be taken away from Him. But the will of the Father is that all mankind be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). So Jesus “ascends to the cross” as commanded by God and men. And the wrath of God’s fury is poured out on Him. It’s *there* that He’s baptized with fire, the fire of God’s wrath; it’s a baptism of blood as well, blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. It’s *that* cup that He sees in the Garden. And it’s from *that* cup that He pours the cup of blessing, the cup of the new covenant in His blood. It’s from that cup that He fills our baptismal basin. In His baptism he takes on Himself our unrighteousness that in our baptism we’re given to wear His righteousness. His Garden cup was filled with unfathomable and indescribable sorrow, yet that cup fills for us a cup of joy, a cup of blessing, a cup of Communion with Him, a cup of eternal thanksgiving. In *that* cup, then, we join with St. James the Elder. It’s the very cup from which he drank, for it’s the very same blood of Christ. May we with him, then, “take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.” In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.