The Cup of Thanksgiving

Communion March 5, 2017

# Scripture: 1 Cor. 10:14-17

# Key Question: Why is Communion called “The Cup of Thanksgiving”?

# Intro:

## Cathedrals used gold chalices

Have you ever visited the rooms in back of the altar in a European cathedral? There you can see the elaborate gold and silver goblets that were used for Catholic masses. In the Protestant churches we usually give the sacrament different names like Communion or the Lord’s Supper, and we usually us individual cups to serve, but it is still the sacrament that Jesus instituted by which we are to remember him.

Why did the great cathedrals of Europe use such elaborate gold chalices? It was an attempt to show the value of what was represented. Their contents symbolized the precious blood of Christ. These cups represented to the worshippers the blessings of salvation itself.

## Larger section focuses on loyalty

Today’s text is part of a larger section, First Corinthians 10:14-22. The main point of this whole section is that the Corinthians would have loyalty to Christ alone. Paul is concerned that some to whom he was writing were participating at the Lord’s Table, celebrating the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the sacrament, and then also attending idol feasts where food had been sacrificed to the idols of the time. Paul makes the point that these feasts were offered to demons, not to God. Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians was that they could not truly be a part of two different camps. They could not have “a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” That is certainly an excellent lesson for us today as well. Our “idols” may not be of the same kind as those of the Corinthians, but we certainly have our idols and competing allegiances and we still try to have it both ways, compromising our faith in the process.

## Today let’s ask, “What is a “Cup of Thanksgiving?””

However today my focus is narrower. I would like us to consider one phrase which Paul uses in this context to refer to the sacrament of Communion. He calls it “The Cup of Thanksgiving” as it is translated in the NIV or, “the Cup of Blessing,” as it is translated in the NRSV**. I would like for us to dig into that expression and try to enrich our understanding of the sacrament that we practice every month in the process. What do these expressions mean?**

# What did the word “cup” refer to in the OT?

## The cup of salvation – a practice of thanksgiving

### Ps 116:12-14

What shall I return to the Lord

for all his goodness to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation

and call on the name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord

in the presence of all his people.

### On Psalms 116:13

Several commentators helped me to understand that this cup of salvation refers to the Jewish customs of giving thanks for the blessing of God, especially in certain ritual times such as when fulfilling a vow or at Passover.

Verse 13. [The cup of salvation ...] This is doubtless an allusion to the drink-offering of strong wine poured out before the Lord in the holy place (Num 28:7). But the Jews had also in their families a more private cup of thanksgiving, as well for the common benefits of life, as for the more marked instances of the Lord's mercies and deliverances. The use of this was daily, at each meal, and more solemn at a festival. On the daily occasions the master took the cup, and thus "called upon the name of the Lord:" "Blessed be our God, the Lord of the world, who hath created the fruit of the vine;" and having first drunk of it himself, it was presented in order to all who were present. This observance was more marked at the celebration of the Passover, and was followed by Christ at the last Passover which he kept with his disciples. -Kitto's Pictorial Bible. (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997-2014 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

“Cup of salvation” is a very similar expression to the “cup of blessing” or “cup of thanksgiving” found in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Basically, blessing and thanksgiving are two different translations of the Greek word “eulogia.”

“The cup of blessing: that particular cup, known everywhere, and set aside from other cups by the blessing. Blessing: the Greek word denotes “eulogy,” “benediction.” The Jews used to pronounce a benediction when they drank from a goblet. So they did when eating the Passover.”   
(The New International Commentary of the New Testament, First Corinthians p. 231)

## The cup of redemption during Passover – specific thanksgiving

### One of the cups of the Passover Meal

This commentary has given us the connection to a related key use of the word “cup” in OT times. A second connection for the imagery of the cup is found in the Passover liturgy. There are four cups of wine in the traditional Passover Seder, one cup for each main verb in Exodus 6:6, 7. Each of the four cups is connected with a promise of God for Israel that begins with "I will."

"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." Ex. 6:6, 7

### The Third cup is called the cup of redemption.

The leader lifts the cup and says, "This is the cup of redemption, symbolizing the blood   
of the Passover lamb." This cup was a cup of great thanksgiving for all that God had given. In this sense this cup was a special instance of the more general use of the cup of thanksgiving that we already noted. Allow me to read for you from an actual Passover Haggadah – the liturgy used by Jewish families today on Passover. Notice the sense of Thanksgiving. This is a passage from the section before the third cup.

We will give thanks to you, oh Eternal, our God, for having caused our ancestors to inherit that desirable, good and ample land; and because you have brought us forth from the land of Egypt, and redeemed us from the house of bondage; and for your covenant, which you have sealed in our flesh; for the law which you have taught us, and for your statutes which you have made known to us; and for the life, kindness, and mercy, which you have graciously bestowed upon us, and for the food wherewith you feed and sustain us continually every day and hour…. Our God, and the God of our fathers, may you be pleased to grant that our remembrance and the remembrance of our fathers, the remembrance of the Messiah, the son of David, your servant, and the remembrance of Jerusalem, your holy city, and the remembrance of your people, the house of Israel may ascend, come, approach, be seen, accepted, heard and remembered for the granting of a happy deliverance, with favor, grace, mercy, life and peace, on this day of Passover. Oh Lord, our God, remember us this day for good, visit us with your blessing and save us to enjoy life. And with the word of salvation and mercy, have compassion and be gracious unto us! O have mercy upon us and save us, for our eyes are continually toward you, for you, O Lord, are a merciful and gracious King. (Passover Haggadah, pp 33, 34 copyright 1995),

Did you observe the emphasis upon remembering the past salvation given to Israel in the deliverance from Egypt, upon Thanksgiving for all that God has given to Israel, both the land and the law, as well as current blessings? I observed also the prayer for future salvation and the hope of the Messiah that is mentioned in this preparation for the 3rd cup of the Jewish Passover.

This is why Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Vol. 10 p. 251) says simply, “The “cup of blessing” was a technical term for the 3rd cup drunk at the Jewish Passover, the time when the Lord’s Supper was instituted.”

This conclusion is also in accord with the record of Matthew’s Gospel which mentions specifically that Jesus gave thanks after taking up the cup to institute the sacrament we call Communion (See also 1 Cor. 11:24).

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matt 26:27-28 NRSV

## The cup of God’s wrath

There is a third and completely different use of the word “cup” in the Old Testament. In several different places the word cup is used figuratively to represent God's wrath upon sin. This also is an important Old Testament use of the word because of its relationship to the life of Jesus and our communion celebration. Consider the following passages.

In the first passage, Jeremiah explains this use of the cup metaphor.

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.” So I took the cup from the Lord’s hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jer. 25:15-17

The prophet Ezekiel also used the expression of a cup in Ezekiel 23:28-34 referring there to the judgment that was to come upon Jerusalem as a "cup of ruin and desolation" (Ez. 23:33).

The prophet Isaiah also used the metaphor of a cup to speak of the judgement of God upon the sins of Israel. Consider this passage where Isaiah is talking about the time when God would end that punishment and restore the nation of Israel.

Awake, awake!

Rise up, Jerusalem,

you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord

the cup of his wrath,

you who have drained to its dregs

the goblet that makes people stagger….

Therefore hear this, you afflicted one,

made drunk, but not with wine.

This is what your Sovereign Lord says,

your God, who defends his people:

“See, I have taken out of your hand

the cup that made you stagger;

from that cup, the goblet of my wrath,

you will never drink again. Isa 51:17, 20-22

So the third meaning of the image of the cup in the Old Testament is as a metaphor of the nation receiving the wrath of God in retribution for its sins.

# How did Jesus change the meaning of “the cup”?

Now let’s move into the NT and see what happened to the imagery of the “cup. Let’s start with the third one, the cup of wrath.

## Jesus took cup of wrath for us?

### Jesus spoke more personally of the punishment that awaits those who reject God’s ways and his Son.

“Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”   
 John 3:36

“Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” John 5:29

The Apostle Paul explained this teaching this way,

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.” Rom 1:18

“Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath.” Rom 2:5

When Jesus gave the parable of the King separating the people as shepherd separated the sheep and the goats, he represents God as saying,

“Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Matt 25:41

So the cup of God’s wrath is waiting to be poured out at the judgment upon the unbelieving and the disobedient.

### But Jesus spoke of taking up this cup himself

This woeful picture would be cause for despair if it were not for something else Jesus said. When he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, just prior to his crucifixion, he was contemplating the task that was his, bearing the sin of the world. His prayer was this:

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. …My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”   
Matt 26:38-39

We absolutely cannot understand Jesus’ use of the word “cup” in that sentence without looking back into the Old Testament to the passages concerning the cup of God’s wrath upon Israel for their sins. Jesus knew ahead the tortures and death by crucifixion that loomed ahead of him. He knew that the worst of it was not the human suffering though he shrank from that as well. He knew the worst of it was the spiritual suffering because of the sins of the world. That was so severe that darkness came over the whole earth for three hours (Matt 27:45). That darkness is symbolic of the darkness of hell itself which awaits those who are under the wrath of God. Jesus mentioned this darkness at least twice in his teachings (Matt. 22:13; 25:30). Part of the spiritual suffering was a sense of separation from God which Jesus alluded to by quoting Psalm 22:1 while he was on the cross. This separation is the separation of those who reject Christ. As Jesus explains, that rejection places a great chasm between them and God and those who believe (Luke 16:26).

### The Good News for us is that Jesus drank the cup in our place

During his ministry, Jesus framed his purpose this way:

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matt 20:28

In the upper room, as he celebrated Passover with his disciples, Jesus explained:

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matt 26:27-28

On the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, Jesus opened the Word of God to the two travelers who did not recognize him.

“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke 24:46-47

Isaiah prophesied about what the Messiah would accomplish for us.

Surely he took up our pain

and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,

each of us has turned to our own way;

and the Lord has laid on him

the iniquity of us all. Isa 53:4-6 NIV

The apostle Peter emphasizes that we are the beneficiaries of Jesus taking the cup.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” 1 Peter 2:24

So our conclusion is that Jesus bore the penalty that was coming to us. When we read about the wrath of God that comes upon those who are disobedient, we do not need to be afraid. Jesus has paid our penalty.

***Our cup of thanksgiving this morning is possible because Christ bore the cup of God's wrath which was coming to us.*** When we take up the cup of communion, it has truly become for us a Cup of Thanksgiving, thanksgiving to God that Jesus has borne the punishment that we deserved for he died in our place.

## There is more. What about the relationship to the Passover? As a result of what Jesus has done we raise the Communion cup as a cup of salvation and the cup of redemption with great joy.

### The 3rd cup of Passover remembered the Passover lambs

Traditionally, the 3rd cup of the Passover was also the cup that remembered the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. It is in this context of taking up the 3rd cup that Jesus said,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”   
Luke 22:20

He was our sacrificial lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world as John the Baptist had prophesied (John 1:29). So when we raise a cup for Communion it is a cup Thanksgiving for Jesus’ sacrifice for us. He is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). Just as the death Angel passed over the Israelite homes because of the sacrifices of the Passover lambs, so the penalty of death passes over us because Jesus, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. When we take up the cup of Communion, we identify ourselves as recipients of his grace. And it becomes for us a Cup of Thanksgiving!

### The 3rd cup of Passover was the cup of redemption

As a part of the Seder tradition as Jesus picked up the 3rd cup of Passover, he and the disciples would have been giving thanks for the redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt. “I will redeem you” was the third of the four promises of Exodus 6:6, 7 which were remembered by the cups of Passover. But as he took up that cup, Jesus transformed its meaning. Today, our communion cup is still a Cup of Thanksgiving for redemption! But Jesus filled it with new meaning. It is now the cup of Thanksgiving for our redemption from sin and death and hell. We celebrate the fulfillment of OT promises like:

I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. Zech 3:9 NIV

On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. Zech 13:1

Who is a God like you,

who pardons sin and forgives the transgression

of the remnant of his inheritance?

You do not stay angry forever

but delight to show mercy.

19 You will again have compassion on us;

you will tread our sins underfoot

and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Mic 7:18-19

# How should we respond?

1. Understand how precious our salvation is!

No better summary of this response has ever been written than that of the apostle Peter in his first letter.

Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:17-21 NIV

1. Receive the Communion cup today with a new sense of Thanksgiving.

This is my purpose in today’s message. So often, liturgies of the church that we perform regularly can become simply habits. We do not stop to think about them deeply and understand and appreciate them. Since the sacrament of communion is often at the end of the service which has different themes, we do not always stop focus on it directly as we have this morning. So I’d like us to have a new appreciation for what Jesus has done for us and how that is represented by what we do when we partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace. Eph 1:7 NIV

One reason it is called a Cup of Thanksgiving is because when we do have the proper sense of appreciation for what Jesus has done and what he has made available to us, our hearts will overflow with Thanksgiving!

If we have accepted Christ we drink it in thanksgiving for Christ bearing the cup of wrath for us. We are free from sin's penalty. We are blessed. This is the cup of salvation. It is the cup of blessing. It is a cup that reminds us that we are no longer under wrath but have obtained mercy. It is truly a cup of thanksgiving.

1. Be loyal to Christ alone.

We still need to be reminded not to attempt to synthesize our faith with other religions and isms. Destructive syncretism is most often seen on mission fields where other religions are dominate. But unfortunately, mixing and matching is now becoming a thing in this country too. Seeking to pursue more than one way to God at once is not just unwise, it is in opposition to what Jesus himself taught us when he said,

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 NIV

1. If you cannot identify personally with what Jesus has done; if you feel yourself still under the wrath of God, without forgiveness, today is a day of invitation for you.

If you have not accepted Christ, opened your life to him, acknowledged his leadership over your life, you are storing up against yourself God's wrath. It is not a good idea to take communion without being reconciled to God through accepting God’s forgiveness. Paul says that drinking this cup unworthily without examining oneself and without recognizing the body of Christ broken for each one is to drink judgment; meaning it is an act which will contribute to future judgment waiting for you.

I urge you to let Jesus bear that cup away and replace it with the cup of salvation. Once again this morning the message of forgiveness of sins has been preached in Jesus name as we’ve explained what he has provided. All that is left is for you to positively respond to God’s invitation to open your heart to him. You can do that now as I pray and by repeating with full meaning the communion liturgy which we will recite in a few moments. You will see how it is meant to help us each personally appropriate the good news of Jesus’ sacrifice for us.