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The Cross and the Cup (Matthew 20:17-28)

Pastor Gene Giguere, May 10 2026

Introduction

- 1) Good morning, Church! This morning we’re continuing our look at true, biblical spirituality as we reach for the finish line here.

In our base Text, Jesus declared:

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

We’ve learned that the “life” Jesus wants us to “hate” is the life we had in Adam before we were saved – the “life” of the worldly, natural man who does not receive the things of the Spirit of God (**1 Corinthians 2:14**).

We’re learning that to be *spiritual* – to have one’s life characterized by the filling of the Holy Spirit – is to die to self. ‘Dying to self’ means allowing God the Holy Spirit to direct my life and to refuse to allow my flesh – my Old Nature – to lead. And so, we’re to be “spiritual people,” as Paul calls those who are led by the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:1**).

And when we are – when we yield ourselves to God the Holy Spirit – we are carried into deeper and deeper depths of maturity by the Spirit.

“Among the mature” Paul says, “we do impart wisdom ... a secret and hidden wisdom of God ... ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human

wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”

So, let’s talk about the filling of the Holy Spirit this morning and what it means to live life as a *spiritual* man or woman of God.

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

- 1) The filling of the Holy Spirit is what Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer called “true spirituality.”

In the old language, this is to ‘abide in Christ.’ Or to ‘remain’ with Christ. Or to ‘walk in the light’ (**1 John 1:7**). Or to ‘walk by means of the Spirit’ (**Romans 8:4**) Or, perhaps my favorite, to ‘walk in the newness of life in Christ Jesus’ (**Romans 6:4**).

Now, each of these have their opposites. Rather than ‘abide in Christ,’ there are those who ‘abide *not* in Christ.’ Or ‘walk in darkness’ (**1 John 1:6**). Or ‘walk according to the course of this world’ (**Ephesians 2:2**). Or ‘walk as men’ (**1 Corinthians 3:3**, NASB95). Or ‘walk according to the flesh’ (**Romans 8:5**).

In the parlance of the past few messages, the opposite of being a *carnal* Christian is to be a *spiritual* Christian. And to be a spiritual Christian is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Again, this is not a matter of saved and unsaved. It’s a matter of saved carnal vs. saved spiritual. We all become carnal at times – fleshly or worldly – but God has given us a way out of the boggy ground of carnality.

Dr. Chafer reminds us that there are only “two great spiritual changes which are possible to human experience—the change from the ‘natural’ man to the ‘saved’ man, and the change from the ‘carnal’ man to the ‘spiritual’ man.”¹

The first great change occurs as an act of God when He causes a person to be born again to a living hope. It is a *once-for-all-time* change. It never needs to

¹ Chafer, Lewis Sperry, *He That Is Spiritual* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1918), pp. 3–8.

be repeated. At that time, as we've seen, God the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us.

The second great spiritual change that is possible is the change from carnality to spirituality. This change takes place over and over again throughout a believer's life. It is "accomplished when there is a real adjustment to the Spirit."²

What Paul calls the "spiritual person" is God's desire for us throughout every stage of our Christian life.

To walk in the Spirit is to have the power to meet every circumstance of life; to walk in the flesh is to suffer defeat after defeat after defeat.

"To set the mind on the flesh," Paul says, "is [to live in the experience of] death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is [to live in the experience of] life and peace" (**Romans 8:6**).

To be filled with the Spirit is to walk in fellowship with Jesus – or, as I like to put it, to *walk with Jesus down roads of the Spirit*. On that road, the Lord teaches us, guides us, calms us, reminds us, and lightens our load (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

He gives us *perspective* in all things – we see things as they truly are. We see people – the nasty, the hateful, the slanderous – not as our enemies, but as our mission field – lost ones in need of the Savior. We see the world – politics, current events – through the eyes of the cross and the lens of Holy Scripture.

To be filled with the Spirit is to travel through time and space as the Lord's own companion. It's to be aligned to His life, His purpose and to seek to do the things that are pleasing to Him. It's to be the Lord's student, His disciple, His true follower. It's what it means to 'die to self' and to pick up our cross and follow Him.

When were filled with the Spirit we are under the superintending care of God the Holy Spirit. We're concerned first and foremost with His agenda, not our own.

² *Ibid.*, Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 3–8.

So, if you're within the hearing of my voice and you've experienced the first great spiritual change – from lost to saved – then your primary concern should be the second great spiritual change.

To be filled with the Spirit is to grow up unto Christ. It's how we come to a deep “knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (**Ephesians 4:13**).

This is what the Apostle John means when he writes, “Dear children, continue [*abide, remain, stay, μένω*] in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming” (**1 John 2:28**, NIV).

The Greek word μένω appears 40 times in **John** and 24 times in **John's 1st** epistle, often with respect to the believer ‘remaining’ or ‘continuing’ or ‘abiding in Christ.’ “Continuing” or “remaining” is a VERY important concept for believers! It is the essence of the Christian life.

We can discern a progression in Paul's writing:

- ✠ First, we're to be filled with the Spirit (**Ephesians 5:18**) – our sins are confessed and we are in fellowship with Jesus.
- ✠ Second, we're to walk in the Spirit (**Romans 8:4, Galatians 5:16**) – move through our day, travel through space and time, in the Spirit's filling.
- ✠ Third, we're to be led by the Spirit (**Galatians 5:18**) – as we walk through this world and through our day, we're to listen for the Spirit's guidance (*‘Which acquaintances that we make are actually divine appointments?’*)
- ✠ And fourth, we're to keep in step with the Spirit (**Galatians 5:25**) – refusing to let the distractions of this world and the exigencies of life pull us away from fellowship with Him.

2) When we're in fellowship with the Spirit we are protected from deception.

Case in point: let's consider Paul's relationship with the Corinthians.

We've already seen that Paul "could not address [them] as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ" (**1 Corinthians 3:1**). Why not? Because of their carnality: jealousy, strife and divisions. Their immaturity had left them vulnerable to false teachers and the devil leading many of them astray. And so, the Church which resided at Corinth was a VERY mixed-up church.

Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:1-18**), led some to Christ, and stayed there building the nascent Church for 18 months according to **Acts 18:11**. This visit would have occurred roughly between 50–52 AD, making it one of Paul's longest stays in a single city. While he was there, he worked as a tent-maker alongside Aquila and Priscilla, grounding the Church in essential Christian doctrine. When he felt the Church was stable, he left and continued His missionary journey.

Then, about a year and a half later, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians which we do not have. We know about it because he refers to it in the letter we know as **1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9)**, which is actually **2 Corinthians (!)**.

After receiving that first (lost) letter from Paul, the Corinthians sent him a letter asking him to clarify a number of issues, which he did in the letter we know as **1 Corinthians**.

Timothy visited Corinth and found the Church in a mess of confusion and sin. Paul received the report the Church was in disarray while he was in Ephesus. They had fallen into conflict, permitted immorality, and embraced false teaching, with many disregarding Paul's previous instructions (**1 Corinthians**). There were also attacks against his authority as an apostle from members of the Church.

All of this deeply concerned Paul, and so he made a beeline to Corinth to try and sort it all out. But this second visit was a difficult one – he referred to it as a "painful" or "sorrowful" visit in **2 Corinthians 2:1** (λύπη refers to "pain of mind or spirit," and thus, grief, sorrow, affliction³). This hasty trip occurred sometime between the writing of what we know as **1 and 2 Corinthians** (circa A.D. 56). During this visit, Paul was insulted and challenged by members of the church who questioned his apostolic authority and his integrity. Some in the Church had chosen to follow other teachers who opposed Paul rather than

³ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 604.

follow the Apostle himself. Wanting to avoid growing the conflict, Paul left, which his opponents used to accuse him of not loving the Corinthians.

Paul then wrote another letter to the believers at Corinth, his third. This letter too is lost, but we know of it from his *fourth* letter which we know as **2 Corinthians**. It was apparently quite severe. Of that second lost letter he said: “I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you” (**2 Corinthians 2:4**).

This second ‘lost’ letter was carried from Ephesus (where Paul was) to Corinth, and in a beautiful divine reversal, Titus was able to bring Paul a good report. While factions still remained and some immorality continued, many of the Corinthians had repented and embraced Paul’s authority and instructions. But false apostles were still bothering God’s flock.

And so, Paul wrote them a *fourth* letter, the one we know as **2 Corinthians**. In that letter, Paul promised another visit. So, the scholarly consensus is that Paul visited Corinth three times total (cf., **2 Corinthians 12:14** and **13:1**).

Now, there was a lot of hurt and there were many exposed nerve endings here. False teachers were infecting a church that was largely being led by their flesh into ‘deep things’ that were not even coming from God. But Paul’s attitude was amazing. In **1 Corinthians** (which was actually his second letter to them) he wrote:

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified [*I only wanted to see you through the eyes of the cross*]. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (**1 Corinthians 2:1-5**).

And *that’s* when he says,

“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age ...

⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” ...

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” ...

¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:6, 7, 10, 12-13).

Walking in the filling of the Spirit – being what Paul calls ‘spiritual people’ – protects us from error because the Holy Spirit Himself teaches us the things that are true. Jesus promised that “when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth ...” (John 16:13). And so, the Spirit helps us to discern wisely, to see things as they truly are: “The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one” (1 Corinthians 2:15).

It is the “Spirit who is from God” who helps us to “understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). And how does He do this? By imparting “wisdom” which is “taught by the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Why were the Corinthian believers so vulnerable to error? What led them to embrace sin and reject the authority of Paul? What led to divisions within the Church and brought so much pain upon this man, who already had more burdens than any man should bear? Instead of being a blessing to him so that he might continue to advance the work of Christ, they became a burden to him – effectively *preventing* him from doing far more important things – like plant new churches – because he had to stop and address their carnality, their grudges, their sinful mess.

He had to travel MANY miles to try and fix their problem. The shortest way to get there meant traveling about 280 miles on water, across the Aegean Sea, in the ancient world! What led to this disastrous mess? Simply this: *they were not walking in the filling of the Holy Spirit.*

Corinth had a *Spirit*-problem. Because they were not advancing to maturity, Paul could not speak to them as ‘spiritual,’ nor impart God’s wisdom to them (1

Corinthians 3:1). Wisdom, he said, could only be imparted to the mature (**1 Corinthians 2:6**). Spiritual things can only be shared with those who are spiritual (**1 Corinthians 2:13**).

Do you see how walking in the Spirit, living life in the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit protects us from error?

The gift of the Holy Spirit is what John calls God’s “anointing” that “abides” [remains] upon each believer. Watch what he says in **1 John 2:26-27**:

“I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.²⁷ But the anointing [**χρῖσμα**, the indwelling Spirit] that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide [remain, stay, **μένω**] in him.”

In other words, *remain in the filling of the Spirit*; remain *spiritual*. If we are filled with the Spirit, we “have no need that anyone should teach [us]” (**1 John 2:26b**). The Spirit Himself “teaches [us] about everything, and is true, and is no lie” (**1 John 2:27b**). The Spirit protects us from error because when we’re filled with the Spirit He continues to teach and guide us in the truth. And so, John writes, “just as it [i.e., *the anointing*] has taught you, abide [continue, remain, stay, **μένω**] in Him.”⁴

- 3) That second great spiritual change – the one from carnal to spiritual – is available to every believer, every minute of every day!

How? Well, we sin. We acknowledge it to God – confessing our action or thoughts as unworthy of Him. And when we do, God forgives us, cleanses us of all unrighteousness, and restores us to fellowship with God. We are once again filled with the Holy Spirit.

This continual *yielding* to God makes available to us the power of the Spirit to meet the challenges of life.

⁴ Various other translation renders it the phrase with the male personal pronoun: “Just as He has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ” (NLT). See also the LSB, Amplified, HCSB, and ISV. The CEB renders the phrase, “just as the Spirit has taught you.” “It” is preferable because the antecedent is *the anointing*, not the Person of the Spirit.

The same Spirit who exercised His divine omnipotence in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, LIVES IN YOU! (**Romans 8:11**) So, who or what can defeat us if we're walking in the Spirit?

To live according to the Spirit is to experience life, but to walk according to the flesh is to surrender the experience of our new life in Christ to wallow in the waters of death!

- 4) We all know that we fall into sin at times. Paul wrote, "I do not understand my own actions. I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (**Romans 7:15**).

Then in exasperation, he cried out: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (**Romans 7:24**) And answered his own question: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (**Romans 7:25a**). Yes! The Lord is the One who helps us, rescues us, guides us and prays (**Romans 8:26**) for us – if we abide in Him.

And then he says this: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit ... ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (**Romans 8:5, 8**).

- 5) So, we do fall into sin and that's why we need the process of contrition, confession and repentance.

I think it should be obvious that the biblical teaching on true spirituality is pointing up a lifelong process of falling into to sin and being restored to the filling of the Spirit.

When we're led by the Spirit, we're *denying* ourselves, we're *dying* to self, we're *picking up our cross* and *following* Jesus, we're *hating the life* we had in Adam – the life that Jesus has freed us from.

‘God Bless You Please, Mrs. Zebedee!’

- 1) Now, there’s a story from Matthew’s Gospel which I absolutely love – and I think it has a lot to say about dying to self and following Jesus.

First, a bit of backstory. Mrs. Zebedee was a *great* mom. She had at least two kids, one was the Apostle John and the other was the Apostle James. They’d both done *very* well for themselves, thank you. They’d made it to Jesus’ *inner circle*: they were two of the TWELVE! Furthermore, they had made it within the *inner circle* of the *inner circle*, the THREE: Peter, John, James.

But here’s the problem, in the Kingdom, Jesus would only have *one place* at His left and *one place* at His right. So..... if her math was correct, THREE was ONE too many! Being the good mom that she was, she did what all good moms do: *she talked with Jesus about her boys*. You do that by praying; *she* did that by reverently approaching Him to have a chat.

Now, let’s set the context.

Matthew 20:17-19: “And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸“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 ¹⁹and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

Imagine the solemnity of this moment! Mrs. Zebedee got the message loud and clear: Jesus was coming close to the end of His ministry. Now, she figures, is the perfect time to talk with Him about that “third wheel” in the *inner circle* of the *inner circle*!

Matthew 20:20-21: “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.”

Now, you’re probably thinking, ‘WOW, how wildly inappropriate.’ My question to you is: *Have you ever met a mother?*

Now, Mrs. Zebedee probably figured that Jesus already knew that her boys belonged on His left and right, but it never hurts to give a little nudge, right? You know, remind Him of what He *already knows!*^{5 6}

- 2) So, “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 20:21**).

I’m surprised she didn’t say, ‘You know, Lord, just a little while ago You said to Peter, ‘Get thee behind me SATAN!’ Not for nuthin’, but You never had to call *my boys* SATAN!’

Mrs. Zebedee's request came right on the heels of our Lord's announcement of His imminent death upon the cross – the greatest act of humility the world has ever witnessed. Jesus’ answer in verses **22-23** is stunning in its cold realism:

“Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.”²³ He said to them, “You will drink my cup ...”

He’s asking, ‘Have you considered the cross that comes before the crown?’

‘Have you considered what it means to be great in my kingdom?’

Jesus had discussed this with them a bit earlier – same Gospel, two chapters back.

Matthew 18:1-4: “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and

⁵ It is possible that this whole thing wasn’t Mrs. Zebedee's idea at all. It’s possible that the boys put her up to it. In Mark's version of the event, she’s not even mentioned – only the boys are! Mark 10:35-37: “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.” Mark may not have mention their mother because it was obvious that they were behind the whole thing and were essentially speaking through their mother! Just food for thought.

⁶ “Matthew says that the wife of Zebedee came, and asked for her sons that they might hold the highest places in the kingdom of Christ. Mark represents themselves as making the request. But it is probable that, being restrained by bashfulness, they had the dexterity to employ their mother, who would present the request with greater boldness.” Calvin, John, *Calvin’s Commentaries: Harmony of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House).

become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

✠ So, to enter Jesus Kingdom is to “*turn and become* like children.”

We must *turn and become*. From this we might imagine that we have to make a decision to turn and go another way. But that’s *not* what the Greek says; that would be the *active* voice – the *subject-producing-the-action-of-the-verb* voice. But what we have here is the *passive* voice of the Greek verb **στρέφω** which means to be ‘turned around’⁷

Jesus is saying to enter the Kingdom we must *receive the action of being turned to become like children*. Salvation is *God’s* work in us.

✠ But then verse 4 says, “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

He’s no longer talking about *entering* the Kingdom, He’s talking about *being great in it!* He’s moving from salvation to the process of spiritual maturity. And so now he calls believers to the practice of childlike *humility*. He’s saying, ‘The process of walking with Me should make you more like a child in some way.’

And this *childlikeness* is a very evocative phrase; it’s completely counterintuitive. It means that, somehow, becoming *mature* means becoming *like a child!* And not only that, but the one who *most* exhibits a genuine childlike humility “is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Becoming childlike means to become *more dependent*, and less independent. It means having no concern for achieving glory or becoming powerful. It’s unconcerned with sophistication, or position, or ambition; it embraces simplicity – as John Philips puts it, “A small child is a lesson in simplicity.”⁸ It’s believing as a child believes his father.

⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) p. 948.

⁸ Phillips, J., *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Kregel Publications, 2014) on Matthew 18:1–14. Not also that in Mark’s version of the story (9:36), Jesus took the child “in His arms.” “The picture is one of love, life, and lowliness.”

‡ They had not yet come to understand that, in God’s economy, humility always precedes honor, and “like snow in summer or rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool” (**Proverbs 26:1**).⁹

Now, the disciples WERE going to get thrones, but they would come at a *great cost*. All of the disciples would endure tremendous suffering and hardship for Jesus. This is why Jesus told dear Mrs. Zebedee: “*You do not know what you are asking.*” If she had known what the boys were going to suffer to in the days ahead, she would surely have withdrawn her request!

The Cup

1) Paul made it clear that “if we suffer with Him [Jesus], we will reign with Him” (**2 Timothy 2:12**, KJV, NKJV).

The Greek word for “suffer” here (ὕπομένω) means “endure through a hardship.” But that’s the big “if” – are we willing to suffer with Jesus? For that matter, are we willing to even be *inconvenienced* for Him?

Christians today don’t like to hear this, but suffering is a part of the Christian journey.

Philippians 1:29: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”

As I’m sure you know, the Lord was well aware that each of the apostles would be assigned a preordained cross of suffering that would result in each of them dying a martyr’s death.

3) Anyway, Jesus’ answer is very straight-forward: “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.”²³ He said to them, “You will drink my cup ...” (**Matthew 20:22-23a**).

⁹ They just did not get the point. But that’s no great surprise – they had a knack for asking questions motivated by self-interest. They once asked Jesus: “Who [i.e. *which of us*] then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 18:1) Jesus’ answer: the one without inordinate ambition to ask such a question; one with a child’s humility. Peter once asked, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27)

What “cup” was Jesus referring to here? He was referring to the baptism of the cross that lay just ahead of Him. The baptism of the cross was the act by which the Lord Jesus Christ was identified with our sins. The cross was Jesus’ personal destiny, *His* preordained suffering; each of the disciples would have his own.

This is why our Lord said to the Zebedee boys (John and James) in Mark’s account of this story, “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” (**Mark 10:38-39a**).

Jesus, contemplating the cross in great anguish, said: “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” (**Luke 12:50**)

- 4) Now let me finish with this: it’s important to note that when Jesus said, “You will drink my cup ...” (**Matthew 20:23a**), the Greek word translated “cup” is **ποτήριον** (poterion).

Literally speaking, a **ποτήριον** referred to *a vessel used for drinking, mostly for the drinking of wine*.¹⁰ But it’s often used figuratively in the New Testament for ‘a cup’ of suffering or of judgment.

✠ At His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (**John 18:11**)

✠ That same night, Jesus had prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (**Matthew 26:39**).

✠ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* speaks of that early Church martyr sharing “in the cup of Christ.”¹¹

¹⁰ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 857

¹¹ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14:2; available online at: [https://www.philipharland.com/Courses/Readings/5025/Martyrdom%20of%20Polycarp%20\(English\).pdf](https://www.philipharland.com/Courses/Readings/5025/Martyrdom%20of%20Polycarp%20(English).pdf)

‡ **Revelation 16:19** speaks of the “the cup of the wine of the fury of His [God’s] wrath.”

‡ **Revelation 14:9-10** promises that anyone who “worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand” will also “drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger.”¹²

So, it should be obvious that when Jesus tells the disciples they will drink His cup, *He’s not referring to a literal cup, but figuratively to the contents of the cup – His suffering and death.*

Even in the Lord’s Table we take the cup, meaning, we drink *the contents of the cup* which represent His blood shed for our sins.

And here’s the thing, *every believer has a cup*, a **ποτήριον**, to drink. And yours is not mine and mine is not yours. Each believer’s cup is mixed by the sovereign will of the Father and represents the unique plan of God for his or her life. For some, that will mean martyrdom; for others, it will mean dying of cancer while glorifying God to each one they meet in their dying days. But, mark it down: *The Lord has mixed a cup for each of us!*

The contents of your **ποτήριον** is known to you alone. Our obligation to the Lord is to faithfully endure under the contents of it. Those who do will be greatly honored by the Father and by the Lord Jesus at the Bema. The divine will for my life is the ‘potion’ mixed for me and me alone by God, which will be revealed in the course of my life.

No one’s **ποτήριον** is unfair. Some believers indeed will be called to suffer more than others. But great suffering is an opportunity to glorify God in ways that few are able in this life – and to be glorified forever to an unimaginable degree. “If we endure [that is, *endure through suffering*], we will also reign with Him” (**Timothy 2:12**).

They said to him, “*We are able*” to drink the cup that you’re about to drink. He said, “You will.”

¹² Also, speaking of the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18:6 a voice from Heaven cries, “Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.”

✠ James would be the first of the Apostles to be martyred.

Acts 12:1-2: “About that time Herod [Agrippa] the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword ...”

✠ John, his brother, was boiled in oil and miraculously survived,¹³ he was exiled to Patmos where Jesus appeared to him and gave him the Revelation, and he may have been martyred as well.¹⁴

What is the cup, the **ποτήριον**, the potion, the Lord has mixed for you?

Will you remain faithful despite the cost?

Will you take up your cross, die to yourself, and follow Jesus?

Will you cry, ‘No fair,’ if your suffering is worse than that of others?

Will you endure *the cross* and *the cup*?

We’ll see what all of this means as we continue next time.

Amen.

¹³ According to church tradition and historical accounts, the Apostle John was miraculously unharmed after being thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil in Rome by Emperor Domitian. This event is said to have happened before his exile to Patmos. It is mentioned by the early Church Father and theologian Tertullian, who reported it around A.D. 200. He says the John was unharmed and that witnesses in the Colosseum were converted. Speaking of the Church at Rome, he writes: “How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood; where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's; where Paul wins his crown in a death like John [the Baptist]'s; *where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile [to Patmos]*” (*The Prescription Against Heretics*, chapter 36; available online at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0311.htm>).

¹⁴ The historical record is unclear with respect to John’s death. The consensus of scholars favors the idea that he died of old age, not martyrdom.