

The cup of suffering, the cup of salvation

Psalm 116

One has not truly read the Psalms, nor understood them, unless he learns to discern Christ here. I mean this quite literally, for in most of the Psalms, the speaker is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There He lays before our eyes His life, passion, death, and resurrection. It is particularly His Passion that stands out, for every part of of our Lord's suffering, His anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, the false witnesses at His trial, His silence before His accusers, the mocking of the soldiers, the piercing of his hands and feet, His unbroken bones, all of it is written there. All that is necessary to see the suffering of our Lord in the Psalms, is to believe the Gospels which plainly teach us that Christ is speaking there. Though the Gospels do not mention every single Psalm where our Lord speaks, it only takes a few before we realize that if Jesus indeed is the speaker in three or four or five Psalms, then He is the speaker in many many more. The several Psalms noted by the Gospel writers are not alone in their language and manner of speech. Once you hear them, and are mindful that Christ, our Lord is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, it should not surprise you that the deep and meaningful events of the Passion should spill over the bounds of time and make their mark throughout the Word of God, from beginning to end. Read the Psalms with the Passion in your heart, as recorded in the four Gospels, and you will see what I mean. The Gospels are a key that unlocks the book of the Psalms, and many other prophecies as well, so that we can see what was always before our eyes. Christ practically leaps off of every page, often appearing where you do not expect Him.

Throughout our midweek services, we shall see the Passion in the Psalms laid out before our eyes, piece by piece, as a full picture of our redemption is painted, a picture that still speaks powerfully to us, even in light of the clear Gospel testimony. These Psalms will make the Gospel all the more vivid as in poetic language and in fresh ways they portray the events of the Passion which we have heard so often, and so often have taken for granted.

We begin at Gethsemane, where Jesus is deep in prayer, looking onward to the trials that will confront Him. Many different Psalms tell of this event, but tonight we consider Psalm 116 because of the uplifting way that our Lord speaks of the cup which He has taken on our behalf: the cup of suffering, the cup of salvation.

As we follow our Lord's passion in the Psalms, there is a stumbling-block of understanding that we must first remove, or else we will fail to perceive what the Gospels

insist is there. Remember this always: Jesus is our substitute in every way and at all times. His was a vicarious life. He took our place under the Law of God. He took our place in bearing the punishment of God. He took our place in bearing all our sins and all their guilt. Isaiah 53:5,6 explains: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and *the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" If the iniquity which the Father laid on His Son was not fully laid upon Him, if Jesus could not truly lament our sins as if they were His own, if indeed He could not call them *His own sins*, then He was not our substitute. Our sins had become His sins in just such a degree, so that His righteousness could become our righteousness, really and truly, so that not only we, but God, in His perfect justice, could declare that *we* are entirely *without sin* (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus is always and at all times God and Man. Yet He often speaks and acts particularly according to one nature. In the Psalms, He speaks especially as the Son of Man. In our Psalm this evening, we see a man who is humble, who is lowly, and who cries out for deliverance from death. This is the man Jesus Christ, your substitute. He was brought low, made poor, so that you might be made rich.

How lowly indeed our Lord looked then, bowed down with grief in the Garden of Gethsemane. The sorrows of death surrounded him, the pangs of hell grabbed hold of him. He could see before His eyes the great and looming jaws of hell, and He knew that it was His lot to freely submit to them. Remember the words which Jesus spoke to His disciples, as He echoed the words of this Psalm, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death."

In this Psalm, these two things are the same: The sorrows of death and the pangs of hell. It was no simple fear of dying that Jesus faced. It was the fear of eternal death itself: of infinite suffering, and separation from the Father, of hell. He knew the Scriptures. He knew that eventually He must cry out in torment, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This was the cup of suffering that lay before Him, and even being a perfect man, He knew trouble and sorrow just contemplating the things he would suffer.

Our Lord was in great need of strength, a strength that no man could offer Him, but which could only come from the His Father, in heaven. Therefore He bows down in prayer to seek peace and relief. He prays earnestly, that if it is in any way possible for the cup to

pass from Him, and the will of Father still be done, then let it be so!

But it could not be so. This cup could not pass from Him. Therefore the solace of Jesus was finally only this: It would not be for His sins that He suffered, but for ours, and in this the Father's will would be done indeed, and the greatest desire of Jesus' heart would be fulfilled: We would be saved by His sacrifice.

Three times He prayed for these things. Three times He found His disciples sleeping, His dearest friends weak and unable to comfort Him. And yet Jesus received that for which He sought. He rose up refreshed. He was strengthened and prepared. He went forward willingly and peacefully to His cross, knowing that all things were in the Father's hands.

Look at how joyfully our psalm speaks. Even though the dread of death and hell are very real, that fear is eclipsed by the joy of the Salvation which Christ would bring by His suffering. Jesus knew the end of His work. He remembered that the Lord is good, and the Savior of all who call upon Him. He is the Savior of the lowly and the poor in spirit. He alone can deliver from death, and He would indeed raise His only begotten Son from the sleep of death, so that He again would walk in the land of the living.

By His death, we would have life. The cup of His suffering, would turn into the cup of our salvation. Though all men about Him were liars, yet He would prevail over them, and be their Savior. Therefore He declares His free choice and resolve: "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." He would pay His vows. He would finish His task, and by His suffering and death, he would make the death of all Saints to be precious.

We will never face our own Gethsemane, for Jesus has removed the sting of death. "O death, where is thy sting? O hell, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). We need never tremble, and grieve, or be anguished over our death. We need never fear hell, or its torments. Death has no dominion over us because Christ has taken the cup of His suffering and turned it into the cup of our Salvation. Death has now become precious: a peaceful sleep for the body, and a joyful rest for the soul.

In the passion of Jesus we see so much darkness and anguish. Where is the peace and joy? It is there, in the heart of our Savior, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb.

12:3).

Let none be so calloused as to forget the need for somber and repentant meditation on the passion of Christ. These seven weeks we sanctify for just that purpose. But also let none be so blind that they do not know the joy of Salvation which God, in Christ has made our own. Lent is darkness and light. Therefore we are both somber and joyful, repentant and rejoicing, sorrowful and at peace. Such a heart we find in our Lord Jesus. May we learn to imitate Him as He takes this cup of suffering and salvation. In that cup we find our every sin mingled with the blood which cleanses us from all sins. Therefore we mourn and therefore we rejoice in the salvation which is revealed in every drop of His blood, in those first great drops, born of His anguish in the Garden, and in that stream of blessing born of His sacrifice upon the cross. Amen.