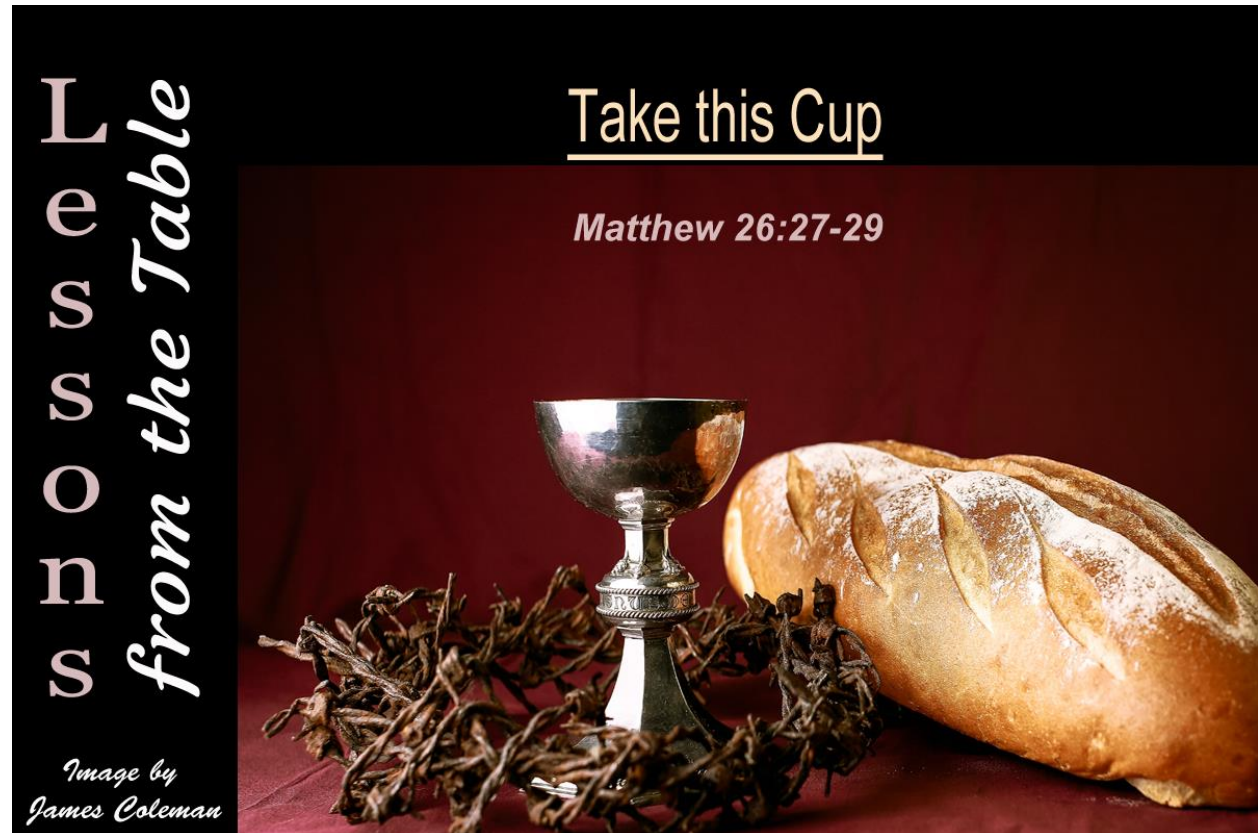


March 21

Take this Cup



Matthew 26:27-29

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

28 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 from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Special Music: "In Remembrance of Me"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WReXhV7MpI0>

TAKE THIS CUP

**Golden sun
Dancing on dewdrops
Dripping from ripened grapes.
Time for the harvest.
Workers, sickles in hand,
Cleave the fruit from its
Mother vine.
Gathered, pressed, and stomped
The nectar flows free.
Water, juice, sugar, yeast
Merged into a potion
Fit for royalty
Aged to perfection
And served to God's children.
A reminder
Of the blood that was shed
By the Servant King
As a sacrifice on the altar of the Most High
Blood given for us.
Blood purifying us
Blood of the lamb
Spilled for our transgressions
Take this Cup
Drink this wine
This is the new covenant between God and Man
Embrace its sweet bitterness
In remembrance of me.**

Rev Walt

Several years ago, I decided to engage in the hobby of wine making. I did not grow my own grapes. Instead, I used wine kits. When you use a wine kit, it usually has most of the ingredients that you need to make wine. Making wine today is not the same as making wine during the time that Jesus on earth. The process then was much simpler than it is today, mostly because many of the chemicals added to wine today are for the benefit of speeding up the fermentation process and then stopping it at just the right moment. Even though the process is faster today, it still takes a lot of patience to make wine and bottle wine. And contrary to what people may believe, it can be a rather intense. There is a constant checking of the temperature, specific gravity and chemical balance. If you miss a step or wait too long between steps, you can easily ruin the wine.

Even after you buy the kit for making wine, you still need a plethora of different additional tools and accoutrements. You need carboys (big glass tanks to process the wine), breathers, corks, bottles, tubing, funnel, thermometers, hydrometers, straining equipment and extra chemicals in case things get out of balance. It is also nice to have a floor corker to help insert corks into the bottles once they are filled.

I only have a couple of bottles of wine left from my wine making days and most of my supplies gone. But you can see on this label, Wellborn Winery, which is a

cute way of saying I spent the time, energy and money to make this wine, even though I did not grow my own grapes.

During the time of Jesus, the process took a lot longer. Rather than use big glass carboys for creating the wine, it was done in large clay jars which were sealed with wax. Once the wine was processed and ready, it was poured into wineskins. Jesus talks a little about that process in the of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, & Luke). Although he is actually making a sermon illustration, His reference to the process helps to enlighten us to the process of containing finished wine at the time. He says,

“Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Wine continues to age and ferment after the wine is poured into wine skins. Gases build up and expand the wineskin and if the wineskin is old, it will burst because it is not capable of expanding like when it was new. It was really sad when a wineskin burst, because you lost both the wine that you were storing as well as the wineskin itself.

Wine was a staple at almost every meal. There was good reason for this.

Generally speaking, wine didn't generally go bad, and it was easy to store. The fermentation process kept bacteria from growing in the mixture. Not to mention that it tasted good, which is significant when you realize the limited number of beverage choices during the time of Jesus.

When I do the words of institution during communion, you often hear me reference the cup as Elijah's cup of Community and Welcome. We seldom hear this in the words of institution at other churches and I am sure you have all asked yourselves as some point why I use it. First, let me tell you that Elijah's cup is a common element at the Seder meal. Whenever the Seder is served, an extra cup is always filled in expectation of a visit from Elijah who is considered to be the herald of coming Messiah. During the Seder meal, scripture passages are read and customarily, the door is opened to welcome Elijah to the table to be in community with those at the meal. This is a custom and practice for many Jewish families.

As to why I use it, the answer is simple. And it is also a cop out. And for that I apologize. Sometimes, it is a difficult thing for me to admit the contradictions I sometimes face. The truth is, I learned the words of institution from ministers that I have served with. With everything else I had to learn, I did not question it at the time. But, just like any Christian, I continue to grow. I often encourage you to

read your Bible and find the truth for yourselves. So, I am ashamed to admit that I have been remiss in examining this element of the communion table. I truly believe that there are those who find comfort and in drawing elements from the Seder meal to incorporate into the Lord's Supper. It does not mean that they are wrong to do so. But the Lord's Supper is very personal and should reflect what we believe. There are two basic reasons that I have chosen to re-evaluate my words and beg your forgiveness for my laziness.

- 1) As I have explained before, there appears to some question as to whether the meal being served in the upper room was a Seder meal or not. If we refer to Luke, he tells us in the 22 chapter:

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

When we read about the Lord's supper, we do not see the ritual aspect of the Seder meal as the disciples engage at the table. That does not mean that it did not occur, but there is no mention of it. And, as I have stated, Jesus was not only a Jew, He was a good Jew. In Matthew 26, which is the source of the scripture that we have engaged in throughout

this series, Matthew goes into detail telling us how Jesus asked His disciples to go ahead and prepare the Passover meal. Which they did. So, I am inclined to believe that the elements of the Seder service were on the table. That would have included Elijah's cup. However, Elijah's cup was not necessarily the cup that was passed. Our scripture today tells us that Jesus took "A Cup" and passed it and does not directly reference Elijah's cup.

- 2) The second reason that I have called chosen to re-examine my words is not so technical. By that I mean that it is more about intent rather than the physical nature of the occurrence. We, as protestants, embrace the cup as a symbol of the "New Covenant." Luke addresses this directly in Chapter 22:20:

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Because this is the New Covenant, and because Jesus came to fulfill the law as Matthew tells us in chapter 5 verse 17:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

We are not bound by the Old Covenant, but purchased by Christ through the New Covenant, signed and bound by Jesus with the blood that He shed for the entire human race, God's greatest creation. The symbol of His blood, given to us expressed through a cup of wine to be shared as

we join in community as the Table of our Lord. It is a continued reminder that we are joined with Christ and purchased at great cost.

For these reasons, I choose to work on reframing my words to better express my own beliefs and not lean on tradition or the recitations and ritual of others. I ask for your patience as I reteach myself in a way that better expresses my understanding of scripture and my relationship with our Savior. Growth is not always easy and is often requires re-education and transparency with both ourselves and with those around us.

I also want us to examine another aspect of this image of the cup of Christ. I want us to look a little farther in the scripture. As I have expressed before, Jesus has intent in all that He does, both through His words and His actions. Most often the purpose is to teach. He also ties parables and scriptures together to bring new meaning to what He is teaching.

In Matthew 26:36-41, Jesus is in the Garden. He has left His disciples to watch and pray while He goes to spend time in prayer with His father. This is an extremely difficult passage of scripture for me. It always brings me to tears. Matthew tells us the story this way:

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.

41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

46 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

I want us to block out the disciples in this picture. Yes, there are lessons to be learned there, but what I want us to focus on is this moment when God and Jesus are talking with one another. And yes, I did say one another, even if we can't hear what God is saying back to Him. I want you to change the preconceived picture you have in your mind, the one where Jesus is alone, face to the ground. That's the what the words are telling us. Jesus in angst, prostrate before His Father. I want you to change the image that you see because Jesus is not alone, just as we are never truly alone. Think about a time when you had to tell your mother or father the hardest thing you ever had to tell them, when you buried yourself in their arms, hoping beyond hope that they would understand your angst.

Picture it this way, Jesus is still on prostrate on the ground, but God is also there with His arms wrapped around Him, both are weeping as Jesus tells His Father what they both already know, that He really doesn't want to go through with this. What is coming is going to be excruciating beyond imagination. Jesus knows that He is going to be beaten, spat upon, cursed, driven to a breaking point that will devour His flesh and tax His soul beyond measure before He is nailed to a cross to slowly relinquish His spirit and die a most horrible death for the very people that had beaten Him, spat upon Him, cursed Him, humiliated Him. His friends would desert Him. The very people that had praised Him as He entered the streets of Jerusalem would be calling for His death.

“Take this cup. If there is any way possible, please take this cup.”

“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Is this the same cup that Jesus was talking about just a few hours before at the table that He shared with His disciples, the table where He has saved a place of honor for all of us? I thought that was a good cup. A cleansing cup. The wine representing the blood of Christ given in payment for our sins. The gift of salvation. Suddenly, it has all become way to real. I sometimes envision Christ having brought that very same cup from the table just for this moment when He is prostrate before His Father.

This beautiful cup filled with symbolic wine. This beautiful cup that Christ shares with us. This beautiful cup that allows us to remember. This beautiful, wonderful cup that renews our relationship with our heavenly Father and Creator. This beautiful, wonderful cup that is covered in blood. If Christ did not drink from that cup, all would have been for naught. It is so very difficult for us to begin to imagine the agony and consternation that Christ was experiencing at that very moment. So, yes, I see God with His arms wrapped around His son, weeping with Him on that hard ground.

And, as Jesus resolves to face what lies ahead, God's booming voice heard round the world, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased."

When you drink this cup, there is no magic in it. There are no special effects. No sparkles or rainbows. There is no room for ritual or spectacle. This is the real thing. This is in the moment. This cup of wine marks the beginning of a New Promise from God. This cup tells the world that our souls have been bought and paid for. This cup that Jesus drinks and He shares with us is a new covenant bought at great cost. This cup is filled to overflowing with love. This cup is not just for us to drink, it is for us to share so that those who don't know Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Messiah can be pulled into the fullness of the love that is meant for each of us. This cup is the essence of what Jesus came for. This cup is, and always will be, overflowing with love.

Take this cup!

AMEN

Copyright © 2021 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.