

Cross Examination – Lent 2016

"Shall I Not Drink the Cup the Father Has Given Me?"

Text: John 18:10-12

*"A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, the guilt of all men bearing;
And laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing!
Goes patient on, grows weak and faith, to slaughter led without complaint, that spotless life to offer;
Bears shame and stripes and wounds and death, anguish and mockery, and saith,
'Willing all this I suffer.'" TLH #142*

Grace and peace be yours as you recognize once again on this solemn occasion that our comfort is never supposed to lie in our passion for the Christ, but in his passion for us – his suffering and death as our substitute. Our sins do not find payment when we feel pity for the suffering Jesus, they found full payment in what Jesus did for us at Calvary. His merits are ours through faith, not through feelings. To him alone be all glory and honor. Amen.

Our theme for our midweek services this Lenten Season is "*Cross Examination*." We are basing our meditations on several questions asked by or of Jesus during Holy Week. This evening we examine our own hearts on the basis of a question spoken by Jesus to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane at the moment of his arrest. The question was this: "*Shall I Not Drink the Cup the Father Has Given Me?*" Our text for this evening gives both the setting at which this question was posed and the question itself. These words are found recorded in the Gospel of John, the 18th Chapter:

ESV John 18:10-12 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" ¹² ¶ So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

These are the verbally inspired words of our Holy God. Remember who it is who gave us these words, and treasure them according. In that spirit we also pray, "***Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.***" Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, questions are asked for many different reasons. Sometimes a question really is a question; that is, the one who asks really is seeking information or guidance. Sometimes the question is rhetorical - a statement requiring no further information or comment from the individual to which it is spoken. As we progressed through our Lenten meditations this year, we have seen examples of both of these kinds of questions. Pilate, for example, was actually asking for information or guidance when he asked the crowd, "***What then shall I do with Jesus?***" It was Pilate that also asked that rhetorical question of Jesus, "***What is truth?***" This evening we examine a third kind of question. When Jesus asked the question of Peter that we are studying this evening ("***Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?***") he wasn't looking for information, but he did expect an answer. This then is the third kind of question, where the one who asks it already knows the answer, but asks to that others are forced to consider and answer. Jesus wanted an answer, but he also wanted more than just a yes or no. That's also why we study his words this evening, applying the Lord's message to our own hearts and lives. That is your job this evening – to make this question personal.

The first lesson we should learn from our Lord's question this evening is that good intentions are not a guarantee of good, God-pleasing actions.

Understand, first of all, exactly what was happening when Jesus first spoke these words. Jesus had entered Jerusalem with the full knowledge and acceptance of the fact that he would soon die there. This is not an educated guess on our part, Jesus said so. Matthew 16:21: ***From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*** Jesus had come to Jerusalem to die, and he had revealed his intentions to his disciples. What we witness in the Garden of Gethsemane (as Peter tried to

defend Jesus with the sword) was therefore simply a continuation of what we witnessed earlier when Peter tried to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem in the first place. At that time Jesus said to Peter, **"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."** In this evening's text Peter is actually doing much the same thing as he did then, despite Jesus' strong admonition earlier. Jesus' reaction here is actually just as sharp, and it is evidence that Peter still hadn't gotten the message.

To better understand these events and the lessons we are supposed to learn, ask yourself if Peter believed, at that moment in time, that his actions were noble and right? Without a doubt. He was obviously trying to show his love and devotion to the Savior by opposing anything that might harm him. There is a psychological component to all of this. Peter had bragged that he would die for his Lord, and his Lord had foretold his cowardice. Since Peter had the only sword, and since he had made the promise, he probably felt obligated to show his Lord that he was ready to give up his own life for him. Was that a good thing? Yes. And no. Is it good and commendable to be willing to lay down your life for your Savior? Of course. Does that make what Peter did right? Obviously not.

This is an important lesson – don't miss it. God determines which acts of devotion and dedication are pleasing to him. Mankind and human emotion do not decide such things. Common sense even teaches us that much. If you want to do something for someone as a way of saying thank you, or to demonstrate your love and affection, you do what *that person* wants or desires, not what would make *you* happy. Would a wife try to say thank you to her husband by buying him a new purse or a pair of nylons? Would she say, *"Honey, I'm so happy for what you did for me yesterday that I called Ralph and cancelled the fishing trip that you've been looking forward to for months?"* Would a husband say to his wife, *"Sweetie, I love you so much that I went out and bought you the entire Rambo series on DVD and cancelled your membership at the health club?"* Would a son say thank you by stealing the family car and driving into the side of a bus?

Peter discovered that the same thing held true with his Lord – only here the stakes were anything but trivial. The fact that Peter loved his Lord did not make his actions right in God's eyes. The fact that he was nobly trying to prevent physical harm or discomfort from afflicting another human being did not make his goal acceptable. Peter, in ignorance, was actually trying to prevent his own eternal salvation, along with the salvation of his wife, parents, and every other man, woman, and child ever born. What was the question the Lord asked of Peter? **"Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"** What was the "cup" that God the Father had given to his Son to drink? It was the work of paying for the sins of the world. It was the assumption of the responsibility for every single sin ever committed by any human being. Did Peter realize what Jesus was doing? Yes and no. He realized that Jesus was the Savior who had been promised to Israel for about 4000 years, but he had formed his own ideas of just what form that salvation was going to take. Peter wanted to be saved, but he had his own ideas as to how that salvation could be accomplished and what it would look like.

The basic problem here is man's refusal to accept that there are certain things in life that cannot be changed or altered to avoid all pain and suffering. Physical conditioning, for example, does not come through watching television and eating only Big Macs and Twinkies. A woman who wants the joy and fulfillment of motherhood must suffer through the pains of childbirth. The ground has been cursed. Gravity cannot be repealed. There is heavy lifting and hard pulling that simply cannot be avoided.

So also the "cup" that was given to Jesus could not be avoided. Jesus himself asked his Father about that in the Garden just before he spoke the words of our text. There he 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) A perfect, loving Father would never allow his Son to suffer as he did if there had been any other way to achieve the desired results. For mankind to escape an eternity in hell, Jesus had to drink the cup of suffering that his Father had placed before him.

Where is the lesson in this for you and me? The first lesson is that God the Father said no to his Son. We often have a hard time accepting the fact that God's answer to our prayers can be "No." – prayers for things that we see as so good and right. What, for example, do we almost always mean when we say, *"The Lord really answered my prayer!"*? We mean that his answer was yes. We almost never say such things when his

answer is no, or not now. God does say no, and he does so always for the greater good. He alone knows how to be God. Jesus willingly accepted his Father's answer, accepted the fact that there was no way around "the cup" and that he alone could drink it. And he willingly stepped forward to do so. This is what Peter, in his impulsive naivety, tried to prevent.

Jesus drank the cup. Who would really want him not to? Would Peter, if he had known what he was doing? So now Jesus asks the question of each one of us this evening. Looking directly at you and me he asks, **"Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"** Would we ever answer no? Unfortunately that is exactly the answer we give whenever we try to add our own good works to what Jesus did, and then imagine that only that combination of "goodness" (what Jesus did together with what we do) is enough to pay for our sins. Only we don't put it so crassly as that, do we? We are much more subtle in our work righteousness. Our "No" answer to Jesus comes when we feel that we have made ourselves more forgivable or loveable by regular church attendance, by extraordinary contributions of time or money, or by some other act of out-of-the-ordinary kindness. When Jesus asks the question of us this evening, hear his emphasis on the word "I" - **"Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"** Our answer should always and only be an unequivocal, emphatic, and unanimous. *"Yes, Lord! You drink the cup, for therein lies my salvation – the only hope that I have to avoid eternity in hell."*

That, of course, makes this question of Jesus very personal. We can, however, make it even more so. Jesus obviously suffered beyond what you and I can possibly comprehend. That same Jesus once said, **"The student is not above the teacher."** If they did such things to the Master, what will they do to his followers? This is the second way we make this text, this question, very personal. As Jesus once asked it of himself, so we now ask it of ourselves: *"Shall you and I not drink the cup which our Father has given us?"*

We obviously cannot do what Jesus did – nor would we ever try. Jesus suffered for sins – all sins – once and for all. We can add nothing to the payment he has made for sin – nor do we need to. The full payment has been made. Nothing is left to do, to add, or to earn. In fact we destroy or nullify Jesus' work by *trying* to add to or improve it with our own good deeds. Full and complete forgiveness is ours by God's grace through faith in what Jesus did. His victory is our victory, ours as a gift from God the Holy Spirit.

Yet Jesus still warns of impending suffering when we spend ourselves in his service. Here we broach a most interesting topic, for who among us feels that he or she really ever *suffers* for Jesus? Who has ever felt the sharp barb of persecution for the sake of his or her Christian faith? Part of the problem, of course, is that we fail to live our Christian faith as openly and honestly as we would like. Our sinful flesh wins far too many battles, and we continually yield to the temptation to blend in with the world around us. In other words, when asked **"Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"** we answer, *"No, I'd really rather not."*

And that, fellow sinners, is exactly what made that cup that only Jesus could drink all the more bitter, all the more terrible. That's why he came to earth to earn full payment for all of our sins, not just a part. That's why he didn't come as a good example to show us how to do what we needed to do. He came to do it all because we had nothing – at least nothing good. And even now that we have been brought to faith and recognize the full truth that for a time escaped Peter, we still fail to live our lives in harmony with his will.

The cup that Jesus had to drink, therefore, only *he* could drink, for only *he* could make the payment necessary to secure our salvation. And here's where so many churches today would spoil it all by telling you that now, if you really love your Lord and are thankful enough for what he has done, you will drink your own cup – you will take up your own cross and follow him.

But that's really not the gospel, is it? Jesus didn't come to earth and suffer as he did to shame us into now doing our part. He came for utterly unworthy sinners, and he came to do what we could not and would not do for ourselves. Does that new man in us want now to do the right thing? Of course. That's what that new man in us desperately wants; it's how we attempt to thank our Lord. But that's not the gospel, because the gospel never makes demands. It only gives. Only Jesus could drink that terrible cup. Thank God he did. Amen.