

“SHALL I NOT DRINK THE CUP?”

John 18:1-27

Key Verse: 18:11

“Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”

In this passage John describes the beginning of Jesus’ passion: Jesus’ arrest and his first trial before Annas. While surrounded by the powers of darkness, Jesus reveals that he is God, God Almighty. Jesus shows us how to identify as God’s children and obey his will. It is the way to spiritual victory. May God help us to learn of Jesus today.

First, Jesus knew everything that was going to happen (1-4).

Look at verse 1. “When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.” Jesus and his disciples had left the upper room and the city limits of Jerusalem and passed along its eastern side. Now they crossed the Kidron Valley and went to an olive grove. It was located on the Mount of Olives and was also known as Gethsemane. Here, Jesus had often met with his disciples. It must have been a quiet place where they could pray, study the word of God, and have fellowship. According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus continued his prayer to God, saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).

Look at verse 2. Suddenly, Judas Iscariot appears again. A few hours earlier, Judas had taken bread from Jesus’ hand and gone out into the night to betray Jesus. As he was leaving, Jesus said, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” As Jesus said, it happened quickly. Look at verse 3. “So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.” In the movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” only a few soldiers appear to arrest Jesus. They seem to barely outnumber the disciples. However, a careful reading of this text indicates that there were many soldiers. The Greek word translated “a detachment of soldiers” is “speira.” In common use, it referred to a cohort of Roman soldiers, about 600 in number. In addition, the Jews sent their own temple police. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. They expected to search for Jesus in the darkness. They expected to use force to take Jesus. Their numbers and weaponry were formidable. Probably Judas had insisted on it, remembering Jesus’ power to work miracles and his avid public support.

Look at verse 4a. “Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him....” They say that knowledge is power. The knowledge that Jesus had gave him greater power than any military weapon. Jesus knew all that was going to happen to him. This knowledge was the best preparation for Jesus to confront what was coming. How did Jesus have this knowledge? Of course, it was because Jesus is God. Yet there is also a strong indication that Jesus gained this knowledge through spiritual struggle. Jesus had taught his disciples that by holding to his teaching they would know the truth and the truth would set them free (Jn 8:31-32). Jesus had taught people that when they chose to do God’s will they would know if his teaching came from God or not (Jn 7:17). Jesus emphasized the importance of struggling hard to know the truth and then living up to the truth that we know. Jesus himself showed an example. Jesus had obeyed the will of God on a daily basis. Jesus always did what pleased God. Then God revealed everything to Jesus. This knowledge did not make Jesus a passive observer, but an active participant. In truth, Jesus was in control of this situation completely. Jesus used it to fulfill God’s world salvation purpose.

Here we learn the value of the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God enables us to overcome situations and obey the will of God. Those who struggle spiritually to know God through Bible study are truly wise people. They are storing up great treasures, treasures that will lead them to salvation and eternal life. Now many of us are preparing messages and testimonies to share at the summer Bible conferences. It is not easy; we must struggle hard and sweat a lot. However, the struggle to meet God and know the truth about God is the greatest endeavor anyone can make. May God bless each of us to truly know God through our summer Bible conferences. Knowing God made Jesus mighty powerful. Jesus took charge with initiative. Look at verse 4b. “Jesus...went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’”

Second, Jesus said “I am he” (5-9).

Look at verses 5-6. “‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.” Those who were arresting Jesus expected him to hide, or to fight from ambush. But Jesus did neither. Jesus came out, faced his accusers and said, “I am he.” Jesus confessed who he really was before God with boldness and clarity. Jesus made this confession knowing it would be twisted and used against him to make a false charge. Usually people who face arrest and trial are ashamed to expose themselves. They want to cover their faces with their jacket or hide behind someone. One infamous leader boasted that he would never surrender to his enemy without fighting to the death. But he was captured quietly, while hiding in a hole in the ground. This man boldly ordered others to fight and die, but when it was his turn to face the conflict, he saved himself. But see Jesus! Jesus was fearless. Jesus knew who he was and what he was doing. Jesus was ready to confront everything God had prepared for him. There was great spiritual authority in Jesus’ words. Those who heard him drew back and fell to the ground. They became helpless. They felt their chests constrict until they could not breathe. They became like dead men lying on the ground. They realized their utter powerlessness before Jesus. Here we learn that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus had authority over all people. Jesus could have crushed his arresters in an instant. Yet he did not.

We also learn here the power of living according to God’s truth. When we know who we are before God, and are ready to carry out the mission God has given us, we can become fearless and bold like Jesus. These days many young people suffer from an identity problem. They want to blend in with their peers and be accepted by them. They think they can find their identity in this way. Many beautiful young girls are emotionally unstable. They worry endlessly about what others will say about their hairstyle, wardrobe, whiteness of teeth, etc. They even develop eating disorders. They suffer day after day with tormented minds. There is a sure remedy for this. Through deep and sincere Bible study we can discover ourselves before God. We can discover God’s good purpose for our lives (Eph 2:10). We can find our true identity in God, based on God’s love and hope for us (2 Cor 5:17). Then we can be happy to identify ourselves as God’s children in any and every situation. One young lady accepted Jesus between her junior and senior years of high school. The first day of school her senior year, she had a big struggle over how to identify herself before her old friends. She decided to carry her Bible everywhere. She began to read the Bible when she had spare time. The word of God moved her heart and strengthened her to stand firm in her new life in Christ. She identified herself as a child of God to others. Now she is happy and confident to live a blessed life for the glory of God. There was a great man of God named Polycarp who was the disciple of Apostle John. He faced a moment of martyrdom because of his faith in Jesus. Many expected him to tremble in fear. But he calmly and boldly said, “Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” May God help each of us to know who we are in Christ and to make a good confession for his glory.

Even though the soldiers were helpless, Jesus helped them finish their job by reminding them what they were supposed to do. Jesus asked, “Who is it you want?” This time, they whispered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Look at verses 8-9. “‘I told you that I am he,’ Jesus answered. ‘If you are looking for me, then let these men go.’ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me.’” Jesus secured the release of his disciples. Jesus knew they were not spiritually prepared to face what he must go through. So he had told them that they could not follow him now, but would follow him later (Jn 13:36). Now they must escape. Jesus set them free, giving his life for theirs. Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus saves his sheep at any cost. Jesus consciously fulfilled the words he had spoken in John 6:39, “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” Jesus had also said, “I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (Jn 10:28). We have a strong Savior who is mighty to save. Jesus is God with all authority and power. When Jesus holds us in his hand, we are safe. We will never perish and never be lost.

Third, Jesus drinks the cup the Father has given (10-11).

It seems that Peter was greatly inspired by Jesus’ spiritual authority. Peter was sure that even if they were few against many, they would win the victory. Peter drew his sword and tried to chop off a man’s head. But Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman; he missed and cut off an ear (10). People have interpreted Peter’s action in many ways. Some have praised Peter for his courage. Some have criticized him for his violence. However, in the context of this passage we must admit that Peter was not cooperating with Jesus. It was Jesus’ heart’s desire to protect his disciples. Jesus wanted them to escape. Peter’s act could have incited bloodshed; some of the disciples could have been killed. When Peter did not listen to Jesus’ words, he did not understand the will of God. As a result, he became a hindrance to Jesus, not a help.

Look at verse 11. “Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’” Jesus did not express any appreciation to Peter at all. In fact, Jesus issued an urgent command, “Put your sword away!” Jesus rebuked Peter for trying to fight a spiritual battle with the weapons of flesh. During the pioneering days of UBF USA, there were many attacks of deprogrammers who used brute force to bully young believers to abandon their faith. There were many things we could have done to retaliate. But Dr. Samuel Lee never used physical means, such as money and lawyers, to fight spiritual battles. Instead, he prayed and gave his heart to Bible study. He encouraged others to carry out one-to-one Bible studies. Sometimes we felt like targets in a shooting gallery. Yet this made us cry out to God more fervently. In the end, God blessed Chicago UBF by raising many new disciples. God protected his faithful children like Annie Lee. God sent many deprogrammers to jail and bankrupted their organization. God blesses those who fight with prayer and the word of God, not the sword.

At this time, our world is in a perilous state. In an effort to root out terrorists and to make the world safe for democracy, President Bush ventured to establish a democratic state in Iraq. Many American soldiers have paid the ultimate price for this. To many Muslim people, it is viewed as a great threat. Many “extremists” have given their lives to carry out terrorist attacks. We are indeed at war, as events in London reveal. The real danger of terrorism is the fear and hatred that it plants in our hearts. When suspicion and hatred predominate, violence escalates. Sadly, London police shot a man to death in what seems like a case of mistaken identity. We may be a step away from disaster. About two-thirds of Americans think World War III is inevitable. Many are ready to draw the sword and strike the enemy. But Jesus commands, “Put your sword away!” It is time for us to pray for Muslim people and for world mission.

Jesus continued, “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” Jesus had made a firm decision to obey the will of God and he could not deviate. Jesus describes this poetically as “drinking the cup.” It meant to take all the sufferings that had been decreed by God to pay the full price for men’s sins. This was God’s will. Isaiah 53:10 says, “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”

Jesus was willing to drink the cup. Jesus was not forced by the situation. Jesus was motivated by his great and burning love for God. Jesus knew God’s heart. God wanted to save men from their sins through his one and only Son’s sufferings. In order to please God, Jesus would do this at the cost of his life. Jesus’ description of “drinking the cup” is insightful. A cup is measured, it is not endless. The sufferings that God required to bring about the salvation of mankind were great. But they were not endless; they were measured. When God’s justice was satisfied, the sufferings would end. Afterward, Jesus anticipated everlasting joy and victory. Moreover, Jesus mentioned “drinking” the cup. This is not a passive action. It is an aggressive action of reaching out to take what God has given and digesting it with full effort. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

As Jesus had a cup to take, so each Christian has his own cup to drink (Mk 8:34). We must pray and study the Bible until we find out what our cup is. We must decide to drink our cup. Then, we can follow Jesus into spiritual victory. My cup is to take all the sufferings and pains to preach the gospel boldly in this generation, and to shepherd young people with the love of God, and to administer God’s work with wisdom and grace. To sanctify me, God has trained me in many ways. Still, I anticipate many sufferings. But I believe that when I finish, God will be glorified and I will be a victor. What is your cup? What are you doing with your cup? May God help each of us to take the cup he gives.

Fourth, the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ arrest (12-14).

After hearing Jesus’ words that he would take the cup, the arresters felt they had permission to continue. So they arrested Jesus and bound him. Look at verse 12. “Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him....” There is deep meaning in this. Jesus had done nothing wrong. Indeed, as his trials will demonstrate, there was never any basis for a charge against him. Nevertheless, he was bound and taken away like a criminal. According to tradition, Jesus’ hands were bound so tightly that blood was forced out of his fingertips. Thus bound, Jesus was at their mercy, to be mistreated at random. Jesus suffered bondage in our places, for our sins. Isaiah 53:8 says, “By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can

speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people he was stricken.” The power of sin binds us as slaves. Again and again young ones are bound and dragged away to sin’s captivity. This summer the power of lustful desires has bound and dragged off many to view bad images on the movie screen, television or computer monitor. After doing so, guilt and depression drive them to darkness. The release of a new book about a child sorcerer caused many to line up at midnight in bookstores. This is the power of sin to bind people. We cannot set ourselves free. But Jesus can. Jesus was bound to set us free from the power of sin. Romans 6:18 says, “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

Fifth, Peter failed because he did not listen to Jesus (15-26).

Simon Peter was probably surprised that Jesus submitted to arrest. All of the fighting spirit drained out of him. Summoning the last reserves of his will power, he went with another disciple to the courtyard of the high priest, trying to follow Jesus. Peter could not get in the door. So he waited outside. When the other disciple came back and spoke to the girl on duty there, Peter could get in. As he passed through the door, the girl said, “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” Peter seems to have been caught off guard. Whatever the reason, Peter said, “I am not.” Just like that, Peter denied his Master Jesus. Peter denied his identity as Jesus’ disciple and his holy mission.

After the first denial, Peter went to the fire where the servants and officials stood warming themselves. One standing nearby asked, “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.” Then a relative of the man whose ear he had cut off challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the olive grove?” Peter panicked, thinking there might still be blood on his sword. Then Peter denied it. This was the third denial. At that moment the rooster began to crow. Just as Jesus had foretold, Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed (Jn 13:38). Whether Peter accepted it or not, Jesus word came true exactly as Jesus had foretold. We must learn to accept Jesus’ words even when we don’t like them. Then we can be prepared.

In this passage we learn that Jesus willingly took the cup of suffering to save us from our sins. We must decide to drink our own cup with much prayer. May God help us to do so and render glory to God.