

“Meet Me at the Cross”
Good Friday, 2008

“THE UNAVOIDABLE CUP”

In a few minutes we shall set out in the direction of Life Church carrying our crosses as an act of corporate witness. We have grown familiar with the symbolism of the cross. For us, it is a picture of God's love in making perfect provision for our salvation. We “cherish the old rugged cross,” sometimes forgetting that it was probably the most gruesome instrument of torture and execution ever devised. In fact, our word “excruciating” is derived from the practice of crucifixion.

We may well ask the question: “Was this really necessary? Could God not have found a more dignified and religiously respectable way to bring salvation to fallen humanity?” Rather than speculating in the abstract, let's look at the record. One of the best ways to understand what was going on at Calvary is to consider a symbol Jesus himself used. He referred to what he was about to suffer as a “cup.”

I. ON HIS LAST NIGHT ON EARTH, JESUS RE-CONFIRMED THAT HE WOULD DRINK THAT CUP.

- A. He made his way to the Garden of Gethsemane. In unprecedented anguish he prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will but as you will.”
- B. The second and third times he prayed on that night, he had concluded that the awful cup could not be avoided. “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

II. ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WAS GOING TO KEEP HIM FROM DRAINING THAT CUP TO THE DREGS.

When the detachment of soldiers and temple guards came to arrest him, Peter attempted to come to his defence and took and took a swipe at one of the arresting party. Jesus' words to him at this time are highly significant: “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (John 18:11)

But we may well ask . . .

III. WHAT EXACTLY WAS JESUS REFERRING TO AND WHY DID HE DESCRIBE IT AS A CUP?

- A. In the Old Testament we are given a graphic description of an awful cup.
 - 1. In Psalm 75, we read, “In the hand of the LORD is a cup, full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs” (Psa 75:8).
 - 2. In Isaiah 51, there is a similar thought: “Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the cup of his wrath, you who have drained it to its dregs, the goblet that makes people stagger” (Isa 51:17). [Jer; Ezek; Rev]
 - 3. The picture is of a cup filled with bitter and distasteful liquid; it is pungent and acidic and represents God’s wrath that must be exercised against sin. It is a cup of scorn and derision, of sorrow and ruin, of suffering and desolation.
- B. It was the thought of drinking every last drop of that cup that filled Jesus with such horror in Gethsemane. How repulsive that cup was to his righteous soul! The physical suffering was excruciating, but that was nothing in comparison with the awful cup he had to drink. The unthinkable happened. He tasted the last bitter drop of that cup when he experienced the utter loneliness of Hell and cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

IV. THIS WAS THE UNAVOIDABLE CUP, BUT PARADOXICALLY, THE UNAVOIDABLE CUP WAS AVOIDABLE ALL ALONG.

- A. It was avoidable in eternity. The Father was under no external obligation to send his Son. The Son was not obliged to come. But he emptied himself of his divine privileges and became obedient to death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-11).
- B. It was avoidable when Satan tempted him in the desert and offered him a crown without a cross. But he sent Satan packing.
- C. It was avoidable when he was riding the crest of the wave of popularity in Galilee. But he told his disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected . . . he must be killed and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

- D. It was avoidable in the Garden, but he prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matt 26:42).
- E. It was avoidable when they came to arrest him, but he said to Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" And he added: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled that say that it must happen this way?" (Matt 26: 52)
- F. It was avoidable when Pilate said, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" But Jesus responded: "You would have no power over me if it were not given you from above" (John 18:10-11).
- G. Jesus had said: "No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and to take it up again" (John 10:18). This remained true till the last second of his life. When they hurled insults at him and said, "He saved others, but he can't save himself. He's the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe him" (Matt 26:42), he could have done so. But he didn't. It was avoidable till the last moment.

Conclusion

You see, the bottom line is just this, THE UNAVOIDABLE CUP WAS AVOIDABLE ALL ALONG. From the point of view of Jesus' rights, he could have opted out at any moment. But if we were to be reconciled to God and know the riches of his grace, then the cup was unavoidable. And, on the very first Good Friday, he drank every last drop of it. For that reason, and for that reason alone, you and I don't need to drink a drop of it (2 Cor 5:21).