

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Hand of the Lord: The Hand with a Cup - Psalm 75:8

I wonder if you can you remember the day that you passed your driving test? Obviously if you don't drive then the question doesn't concern you, but, for those who do, I would suggest that you remember it quite vividly. I can still recall the autumn afternoon, nearly fifty years ago, when the examiner uttered the words, "I think you have earned yourself a pass". The roads were much different then, as were the vehicles. The car I learned to drive in did not have a synchronised gearbox, but one that required you to double de-clutch every time you needed to change down. Neither did it have stop lights to indicate to the driver behind that the brakes were being applied. In fact, very few cars had such refinements. We also had to learn three basic hand signals, with our arms through the window, to inform other motorists whether we were turning right, left or slowing down. Others come to my memory where a hand was placed upon the windscreen pointing left or right or straight up. It did help to complete this manoeuvre if your wrist was double jointed! To any younger person, who is trying to imagine what such contortions meant, could I say that they were to advise a policeman on point duty which way we wanted to go. He, in turn, by the use of his hands could determine which line of traffic made progress.

What has all of this to do with today's talk you might be thinking? Well, for the past three weeks, we have been listening to a series of talks about the hand of the Lord. In these we have seen how the intentions of God towards His people were made apparent by something in His Hand. Today, we reach our final talk, which is based upon the picture of God that we get in Psalm 75:8. As usual I read from the King James Version of the Bible. "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." That is not the only reference to the Lord's Hand with a cup that I shall read, but it is the one that I wish to look at first.

I think it is obvious, from a cursory glance at this verse, that its main concern is one of judgment. The writer pictures God's judgment as a cup of wine mixed with spices or, as the New English Bible renders this phrase, 'and the wine foams in it, hot with spice'. This judgment is poured out over the wicked of the earth. It might make a gruesome picture, yet it is one that regularly appears in the Bible. We can't have a discussion about the contents of the Bible without considering the fact of God's judgment. I suppose I ought to correct what I have just said and state that we could talk about the Bible without mentioning judgment, but to do so, we would have to be highly selective and ignore a large section of Scripture.

Some people would suggest that the God of fierce judgment is an Old Testament view from which Christians have moved away. If I am honest, I will admit that talking about judgment does not come easy. I would far rather take up some of the themes that emphasise the goodness of the Lord and the kindly way He leads His people. To be true to the whole of Scripture, however, we must ponder over such a verse from Psalm 75 that I read a little earlier. This is only one of many that I could quote from the Old Testament, all of which would show that God is a God who demands ethical standards, faithfulness and loyalty from His people.

To illustrate this I wish to read Amos 3:13-15. "Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, said the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, That in the day that I shall judge the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also judge the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD".

The reason for this judgment is given in other passages of the prophecy. I shall read Amos 4:1 to give just a flavour of the Prophet's complaint. "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink". Amos certainly didn't spare his language as he addressed his fellow countrymen. God had given him a message and, come what may, he was going to get it across. Perhaps the end he had in view is signalled for us in Amos 5:24 where he says, "But let justice run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream".

Because God's people were not obedient to His message, he prophesied that judgment would come upon them. Many other examples of God judging His people could be culled from the pages of the Old Testament, but the one we have read from Amos must suffice. If we are serious in our desire to know what the Bible teaches about God we must recognise, as His Word makes clear, that He has always required those who name His Name to live a righteous life in

obedience to His commands. We must also recognise that there is a reckoning time or judgment day. God's standards for His people never alter and we do well to heed the picture of the cup in the Hand of the Lord. Some would say that that is an Old Testament picture of God and that the New Testament sketches in an entirely different view.

Consequently, I now wish now to show that the New Testament deals with the judgment of God with the same clarity as the Old Testament. As I have just stated, there are some who claim that the loving Saviour of the Christian era has nothing in common with the severity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. This distortion of the Lord's attitude to the injustice, hypocrisy and sin that He met in this world needs correcting. If all that remains is the 'Gentle Jesus' image of the children's songs then we need to occupy ourselves with a rigorous study of the Gospels.

The incident recorded in John 2:13-17, where the Lord Jesus drives the money changers from the Temple, is certainly not in line with the view that the Lord Jesus was always nice and never upset people. Those who were at the cutting edge of His wrath, on this occasion, were left in no uncertain mind that He judged matters that needed judging. The Lord's Hand was raised towards those whom He recognised as unjustly using the space in the Temple courtyard. This was in line with the attitude of the Prophet Amos whom we have already quoted.

The pilgrims who made their way to Jerusalem for the Passover were compelled to pay the Temple tax. In fact it was a bounden duty for all Jews over nineteen. It was not the tax that Lord was railing against, but the unfair practices of the money changers. They levied a rate of exchange that made them extremely rich. As William Barclay has written, "Jesus loved God, and because He loved God, He loved God's children, and it was impossible for Him to stand passively by while the poor worshippers of Jerusalem were treated like that". Further to that, there were other reasons for the Lord's actions in the Temple courtyard. Matthew records the words of Jesus in Matthew 21:13. Here again, I quote from the Authorised Version. "And [He] said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves". The Lord Jesus was concerned with the desecration of God's Temple. Again, to quote Barclay, it was worship without reverence.

I trust that this one example, of the Lord raising His Hand in judgment, fits the picture that we began this talk with. To summarise this point, I would say that we have proved that the Lord Jesus, in His earthly life, had the cup in His hand when the occasion warranted it and was not afraid to pour its contents upon the offenders.

There are other scriptures, to which we can turn, that will fill out our understanding of the Lord Jesus as One who will judge the living and the dead in a coming day. The concept of a Day of Judgment was not novel to the world of the New Testament. It was central in Judaism that God judges. As sin was not always, or even usually, penalised immediately the Jew believed that a future time would bring the tribunal when righteousness would rule with a just judgment brought against sin. Some don't consider such ideas valid today but, if the Bible teaches them, we, at Truth for Today, must also pay strict heed to the teachings of Scripture.

We have not time to delve too deeply into the relevant scriptures but I want to outline briefly a few features of the coming judgment as they are recorded by John the Apostle in his Gospel. In John 5:28-29 he sees the judgment taking place in the last day when the dead are raised. The act of judging is placed into the hands of the Son, as verse 22 of the same chapter states. It is important to remember that it is made plain that the Lord Jesus came not to judge, but to save, as John 3:17 tells us. However, it is also made plain that His word will be of primary and sole importance when the judgment day arrives. So solemn is this that I will quote the words from John 12:48 that tells us just this. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day".

In our day and age, when everything goes and anything seems to be acceptable, it is not easily received that we shall be held to account for all our actions.

Up till now, we have seen that the cup in the hand of the Lord is a picture of the judgment executed by God upon the guilty. There is another different picture which is extremely important – that of the Lord Jesus taking the cup of God's judgment upon Himself. I wish to read a verse that hints at the suffering that was soon to envelop the Lord. It is found in Mark 10:38. "But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with".

The thought that the Lord was going to suffer death shortly was always a puzzle to the disciples. Yet the Gospels make it clear time and again that the Lord knew that He was heading for the cross. Neither was it going to be a martyr's death, but rather one that involved Him becoming a ransom for all.

It takes the whole of the New Testament to sketch in the implications of this glorious sacrifice as He gave Himself upon the cross. The Gospels record the facts as they appeared to His company of disciples, but we, like them, are slow of heart to believe all that He tells us.

There is another scripture that fills out the thought of the Lord having a cup in His Hand as He approached the cross. This time it is in Matthew 26:39-42. “And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done”.

These words introduce us to a scene that is replete with mystery. There is in view the introduction of what Christians believe is the most important, and significant event in the whole history of the world. The cup in the Hand of the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is where the Lord was praying, is the cup of suffering and judgment that He bore for the sins of the world. So intense was the contemplation of that awful event that His agony caused Him to sweat blood. We can read that in Luke 22:44.

We can never minimise the anguish of the prayers in Gethsemane by seeking to explain or understand. We shall read, in a few moments, the significance of the cup of suffering that was delivered into the Lord’s Hands. Suffice to say, indeed, to impress upon our hearts and affections, that the Lord Jesus, when He strode forth from Gethsemane as a prisoner of the Temple Police, willingly embraced the crucifixion with all its ignominy, pain, separation and shame. The children’s hymn puts it very succinctly.

“He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
*That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.*

*There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in”.*

That hymn contains thoughts regarding the cross, which we have anticipated, rather than proved, from Scripture. The redeeming power of the sacrifice at Calvary is an ever-present theme of the Apostles. Paul, in Ephesians 1:7 writes that, “In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace”.

We have a similar statement in Romans 3:24-25. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;”

We also have a further thought in Romans 5:9-10. “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life”.

I want to finish this rather long series of quotes from Scripture with one from 1 Peter 2:24. “Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed”.

I don’t apologise for citing so many verses. It is a measure of the supreme importance of the time when the Lord Jesus received the cup from the hand of God the Father and suffered at Calvary.

The critical importance of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ can never be over emphasised. For Christians it is the pivotal point of history. The immensity of His work upon the cross provides us with the possibility of God’s rich forgiveness. There, upon the cross, He, who never sinned, was made sin.

Christians believe that Isaiah prophesied about the events at Calvary in Isaiah 53 when he wrote, “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”. This verse reinforces, for us, the substitutionary nature of the death of the Lord Jesus. Wesley helps us to understand the practical effects of this in many of his hymns. One I particularly like is,

*“He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.”*

Please note the sentiments in the third and fourth lines. Christians aren't people who think themselves better than others, at least we ought not to behave in that way. We should be aware that only the merit of the Lord Jesus makes us acceptable to God. It is His Blood, His Sacrifice, His Sufferings that bring us the possibility of peace with God. All we have to do is to believe. As Paul said to the jailer at Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved".

I have gone on at some length about the cup in the Hand of the Lord at Gethsemane, but, as I have already stated, that is because I believe it is fundamental. It speaks of the time when the Lord Jesus suffered for sin at the Hands of a loving, yet holy, God. The mystery of the atonement can never be penetrated by enquiring or investigative minds. We can only adore such wondrous love and echo the words of John Newton, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound".

This thought of adoration brings me to another scriptural scene where there is a cup in the Lord's Hand. The scene is recorded for us in the Gospels, but I wish to read the Apostle Paul's account from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come".

How different now is the cup in the Lord's Hand. No longer a cup overflowing with judgment. The Lord Jesus exhausted that upon the cross. There, He drank, to its last dark dregs, the cup that His Father delivered unto Him in those hours of darkness at Calvary. Nothing now remains, for the believer in Jesus, but the cup of blessing that we receive from His Hand. I ask a question directly to each one of us. As we move through this world, with all its enticements, do we ever pause to remember the Lord Jesus in His death? Every company of Christians will have this celebration somewhere in its planned events. Whatever name we give to it, we, if we are faithful to the Lord, should remember Him by receiving the cup, of which Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians 11.

The Lord Jesus, through His sacrificial death, has removed for ever from the Christian believer, the prospect of that dreadful judgment day that we spoke of earlier in this talk. That does not mean we can lead a careless life, full of indolence, selfishness and sin. Rather, it means that we are now servants and diligent disciples of the Lord Jesus. That should be a calling we gladly receive.

To return, in closing, to the great privilege of remembering the Lord Jesus by receiving the loaf and the cup from the hand of the Lord, I wish to quote directly from a short essay, written by a Christian who ministered the word of God when I was much younger.

"This service of praise may be enjoyed by us at all times, for by Christ we may offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. But this privilege has been opened up to us through the precious death and rising again of our beloved Lord. How blessed then is the opportunity when together, having remembered Him in that death at the Lord's Supper, we contemplate all that has ensued for the praise and worship of our God and Father".

May our consideration this morning of the cup in the Hand of the Lord, lead us, through the power of the Spirit of God, to give praise and glory to Him, who has done all things well.

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