

Matthew 26.<sup>36-46</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, “Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.”

<sup>37</sup>And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. <sup>38</sup>Then saith he unto them, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.”

<sup>39</sup>And he went a little further, 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.”

<sup>40</sup>And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour? <sup>41</sup>Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

<sup>42</sup>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.”

<sup>43</sup>And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup>And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. <sup>45</sup>Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, “Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup>Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.”

Scripture struggles to adequately describe and explain Jesus’ atonement, what it means, how it impacts us, and how it impacted him. This is understandable. Human language is not up to the task of talking about Beings who are infinite or the infinite works they perform. Our resort to metaphor is the best we can do. However ingenious the metaphor, we must always remember that it is only and just that— metaphor— and thus merely approximate, and always inadequate to the reality of the divine.

I have always been intrigued at Jesus’ resort to the metaphor of a “cup” in regard to his suffering and pain even as he discusses it with his Father, an infinite Being capable of understanding infinite things: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Perhaps he resorted to metaphor more for our benefit than for any benefit it might bring to his communication with his Father. We know what he meant, of course, by “let this *cup* pass from me.” “Let this pain pass.” “Stop the pain.” “Isn’t there some other way?” Some such sentiment. But, perhaps you have wondered, as I have, why he resorted to the image of a *cup* to represent his pain? Scripture uses this metaphor of a cup to represent a pain and suffering that is hellish, literally. There is a cup that is a metaphor for the pain and destructiveness of hell. King Benjamin so uses it in his famous sermon at the temple.

“And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls. Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God...”<sup>1</sup>

Here, I understand Benjamin to refer to a deeply painful mental or psychological state, either in life or in death. Those so suffering feel extraordinarily guilty and believe that God is angry with them—a belief

---

<sup>1</sup> Mosiah 3.<sup>25-26</sup>

that, while intensely painful and “real” to sufferer, is likely false. But, whether God is actually angry or not, the thought of his anger is real enough to be called “hellish.”

In his Atonement, Jesus became at-one with us. He experienced everything all the rest of us have, do, or will feel. This includes the sense of God’s “anger” or “alienation” with us. Jesus was so thoroughly united with us that he felt the guilt of sin. Paul goes further and says that Jesus was “made... to be sin for us.”<sup>2</sup>

Here are a few more passages that speak of a cup. These bear some semblance, I contend, with the cup of which Jesus spoke.

“Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem,  
which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the *cup of his fury*;  
thou hast drunken the dregs of the *cup of trembling*,  
and wrung them out.”<sup>3</sup>

“But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink *the dregs of a bitter cup*.”<sup>4</sup>

“For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; take the wine *cup of this fury* at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and *be moved, and be mad*... Drink ye, and *be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more*.”<sup>5</sup>

The emotional, psychological, and spiritual turmoil of the hellish cup is a most hateful brew. It is brutal and brutish. It brings fear and trembling and sickness. It is enough to drive one mad—and indeed, during his earthly ministry, Jesus had seen and healed many so maddened by their guilt and sense of alienation from God. In becoming one with his brethren, Jesus partook of the brew and entered the madness of the cup.

“The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is *poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation*; and he shall be *tormented* with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night...”<sup>6</sup>

To drink the cup is like being burned alive. Yet Jesus rejected any drug that might have lessened the pain and put out the fire. He had to know the human condition to its deepest depths. He had to descend below all things so that he might know how to succor his people. Otherwise, his Atonement would not be “infinite.”

Well, we could go on. There are many other references to the horrific cup that Jesus so willingly drank. The reader might want to take some time to examine this hateful cup and its poisonous brew.<sup>7</sup> Such an examination is not conducted out of morbid curiosity, but out of a desire to deepen our appreciation for

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 51.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Alma 40.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 25.<sup>15-16, 27</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 14.<sup>10-11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Mosiah 3.<sup>25-27</sup>, Psalm 11.<sup>6</sup>, Psalm 75.<sup>8</sup>, Isaiah 51.<sup>17& 22</sup>, Jeremiah 25.<sup>15-17, 27</sup>, Jeremiah 51.<sup>7-9</sup>, Ezekiel 23.<sup>32-34</sup>, Revelation 14.<sup>10-11</sup>, Revelation 16.<sup>19</sup>, Revelation 17.<sup>4-6</sup>, Alma 40.<sup>26</sup>, D&C 29.<sup>17</sup>, DC 43.<sup>26</sup>, DC 101.<sup>11</sup>.

Jesus and the great sacrifice it was for him to come to earth and live the life that we all live—live to know the depths of the most hellish of lives. Yes, the Lent and Easter season is a good a time to “view his death” and to know and experience more deeply the new life that his death brings.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: April 9, 2025)*

