

LEVITICUS 1:4

“Lay your hand on the animal’s head, and the LORD will accept its death IN YOUR PLACE to purify you, making you right with him.”

EXODUS 24:8

Then Moses took the blood from the basins and splattered it over the people.

The sacrificial system reminded Israel of the seriousness of sin before their holy God. The sacrifice symbolized the person’s desire to be forgiven for sin and thus be restored to God and receive new life. A life had to be given up (the animal’s) so that a life could be spared (the person’s). The blood of the sacrifice represented one life being poured out in substitution for another.

In Matthew 20:20–28, the mother of James and John, in typical motherly fashion, asks Jesus whether her nice, upstanding sons can sit beside Jesus in his kingdom. James and John, through their mother, are seeking prominence. They want to be great.

Jesus answers, in atypical fashion, with a question: “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” (Matthew 20:22). This is not a rebuke as we might expect. What Jesus was really saying was that greatness in the kingdom of God is obtained along the path of love — the path of sacrifice, service, suffering.

This is God’s economy, after all. Having more isn’t winning. Being served isn’t best. Being honored isn’t greatness. The people of Jesus are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus — who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Can You Drink That Cup? What do we make of Jesus’s unusual statement about a cup?

Key passages in the Bible connect God’s wrath with the imagery of a cup. Jeremiah 25:15 tells us, “Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.’” Then Isaiah 51:17 says, “O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.”

Before going to the cross Jesus confirms this connection in Gethsemane when 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).

The disciples will drink a cup, too — a cup of suffering (Matthew 20:23). But Jesus's cup of suffering is different from theirs because Jesus's suffering is under God's anger. Jesus drinks the cup of God's wrath, a cup that has accumulated the fury of God against sins of all types. Pride, ego, disobedience, rebellion, heinous crimes, adultery, lust, careless words, dishonoring thoughts, lies — all of it will be punished by God. This is the cup Jesus drinks on the cross and sheds His blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

ACTION: Take time out to be still in the presence of God and worship Him. If possible take communion with your family today or this week over a meal.

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