

The Cup and the Fire - Part 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The cup of the Lord is central to the Christian life and the life of the Church, and it involves sharing His reproof and standing with Him for His rights.

Duration: 39:02

Scripture: Matthew 20:22, Luke 12:49-50, Acts 12:2, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:18, 2 Corinthians 1:5

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon on Luke 12:49-50, the speaker explores the relationship between the 'cut of the load' and the scattering of fire in the earth. He emphasizes that the scattering of fire is dependent upon the drinking of the cup, which is a symbol of suffering and persecution. The speaker highlights the historical examples of Martin Marshall and James, who both drank the cup and experienced persecution. He also emphasizes that the drinking of the cup leads to spiritual progress and enlargement, and that it is a demonstration of love, both from God and among believers.

Transcript

The Gospel by Luke, chapter 12, verses 49 and 50. I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I? Oh, that it were already kindled, but I have a baptism to be baptized with. And how am I straightened till it be accomplished? With the passages which we have already read, fresh in our minds, I think we are able to see that this passage gathers them all into itself.

And what they and it bring before us is the relationship between the cup of the Lord and the scattering of the fire in the earth. The Lord, in these words, joined these two, showed their relationship, indicating that the scattering of the fire in the earth was dependent upon the drinking of the cup. And in saying this, he only indicated an established law, a law which history has demonstrated and proved so deeply, so mightily, either negatively or positively.

Where there has been no cup, there has been no fire. Where there has been the cup, there has always been the fire. It's the story of all the persecutions, all the suffering of the people of God which have issued in the progress of the gospel.

It is something, dear friends, that we have to very clearly recognize and to definitely accept. That right at the very heart of everything, in the purpose of God, there is a cup. And only by the drinking of that cup is any kind of real spiritual progress, enlargement, possible.

But to put that in another way, there is always a cup. But the drinking of that cup will always issue in spiritual progress or increase or enlargement or deepening. It is gained.

Now here we have to pause to clear up the peril and the difficulty always present to confuse our minds in this matter, to destroy a fundamental conflict or confusion. On the one side, the Christian life ought to be characterized by joy, by peace, by rest, by hope, by life. The other side, same Christian life, not in contradiction to that, not can be, should be characterized by suffering.

Lord Jesus mingled those two things in the moment when he took the cup. He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave thanks. There should be, I say, no contradiction between these two things.

Joy and sorrow mingled. Rest and peace and hope in the very presence of suffering, adversity and affliction. If we don't clear up this matter in our minds, we are going to get into difficulties.

We are going to argue that the Christian life ought to be one continuous, unbroken, sound, joyfulness, exuberance, enthusiasm, and lightheartedness, and nothing whatever that is not that is right in the Christian life. You misread your New Testament if you think like that. On the other hand, it is possible for us to so regard the sufferings and the trials, the difficulties and adversities as the marks of a kind of holy Christian life which must exclude anything exuberant and joyful and glad.

And some people nurse that kind of complex and they are afraid of joy. They are afraid even of spiritual laughter. You see what I mean? We have got to recognize that we are not speaking about natural things now.

There is that sublime, that wonderful, that divine paradox, sorrowing yet always rejoicing in the midst of afflictions and trials. Many fold trials, Peter says, yet rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of joy. Somehow that has got to be reconciled or we shall be in trouble.

The true apprehension of the cup is not morbid, is not morose, is not eternal sadness. The true apprehension of the Christian life is not that of frivolity and superficiality. It is something that has, as we have said, a cup right at the heart.

Well, let us see to it that we get over any peril, danger of having a contradiction in the back of our minds in this matter. And get it quite clearly straightened out. We have to deal with our difficulties as we go on.

That peril is far more real than perhaps you recognize. We are meeting those who are having a very good time. They are in one of those phases and stages of the Christian life where all is good.

It is springtime or it is summertime. There are no clouds in the sky and they are inclined to dumb the persons having a bad time. Is something wrong with their Christianity? For the time being they are passing through some time of darkness, perhaps eclipse.

On the other side, let us be very, very patient if we are having a difficult time with those who are not. Let us reconcile these things and see that they may only represent two aspects of one thing and not be contradictory at all. Now, I don't want to take too much time because I have a lot to say.

Let us get on with this matter. Firstly, then, the cup. We all know that the cup of the Lord is central and basic to the Christian life, to the life of the Church.

It has that place in the Church's life. It is there. It represents the very center, the very focal point of the Church's life and of the believer's life.

That is where the Word of God puts it. That is the place that the Scriptures give to it. The gathering center of the people of God.

The foundation of their life individually and collectively. But there is a division in the cup which we must recognize immediately. There is a division in the cup.

That is His side and ours. Let us get this cleared up before we go further. There is the side of the Lord Jesus in that cup with which we have nothing to do.

So far as the drinking of it is concerned, it is uniquely His. It is His alone. It has to do, as we know, with our redemption.

It has to do with our sin. It has to do with our judgment under the wrath of God. It has to do with the final outworking of sin and judgment.

It has to do with death. It has to do with the remission. You come in my blood, shed for the remission of sin.

It has to do with our justification before God, our setting in the position of the righteous. It has to do with our very life, the eternal life. In all that, you and I have no part, only to receive it by faith.

In drinking the cup, we do not, of course, work out our redemption or have any part or place in that great, atoning, substitutional, representative work for us. That is isolated to Him. No one can just go that far with the Lord in His suffering.

That's His part. But then there is our part. Not in that, for our sufferings with the Lord are not vicarious as His were.

But here we are. We are brought in to share the cup. But our part is in another realm, that of sharing His reproof.

It is because we are standing with Him for His rights, which are being disputed and challenged and so terribly fought against in this very universe and in this world. It is because the Holy Spirit is doing something in us in relation to the character of the Lord Jesus. And you know very well that no sooner is there the slightest sign of any Christ-likeness in an individual that seems to provoke something and bring out antagonism, which says, in effect, you must not be like Christ.

They take knowledge that we have been with Jesus and they counsel to put us to death. Something you see in the spiritual realm which hates this character of Jesus because its presence is an exposure and a condemnation of sin. Evil hates good and cannot bear its presence.

It causes misery and sorrow, the very presence of good. And it is in that, just being Christ-like, that we are involved in His cup. And in all it is because we have taken side with Him against a great enemy, His age-long sworn enemy, who with all his vicious malignity is determined that the last, the last semblance and trace of this run shall be blotted out, if He can, if He can.

And you and I in our presence in this world are a semblance of Christ, or we should be. And we come under those evil counsels. And that is our part.

We are partners with Him in His position in this world. And that involves drinking of His cup. That's where we begin with the cup.

It's there as our ground, the ground of our salvation, our redemption, our justification, our life. We stand on that ground, we take the cup, gratefully and with thanksgiving. But we commit ourselves, when we do so, to this life.

We commit ourselves. We become involved in this side of His suffering. And there is no evading or avoiding or getting away from it.

We've got to recognize this, I said. It's something to be clearly recognized and definitely and deliberately accept right at the outset. And continually be kept in mind.

But there are, after we have said that, there are other things about the cup. And I'm keeping, really, to the Word. You can take what I'm saying by the Scriptures.

This cup takes forth and represents the absolute holiness and the partnership of Christ and of all that is related to Christ. You know 1 Corinthians 11. You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

Can't bring these together. Not discerning, not discriminating. That's the word there, not discriminating.

Not recognizing the tremendous apartness of two whole realms. And this cup speaks of that apartness, that holiness, that separateness of Christ and all that is Christ. It marks the difference, the fundamental and radical difference between a Christian and everyone else.

That's the whole argument of the first letter to the Corinthians, as you know. Throughout that letter we have an unlawful bringing together of things and focusing that unlawful bringing together at the Lord's table. It's a terrible letter, which really does center in this matter of the cup.

What the apostle is doing in that letter is seeking to point out that there is a discrimination which has got to be discerned. There's a difference, this is the difference, not of degrees of Christian life but of the very basis and nature of the Christian life that a Christian is this and not that. These things are separated by the cup.

It's something very holy, something very separate, something very different. And if you and I take the cup, we drink the cup, we are supposed to be different from everyone else who is not the Lord. There's a character required by this cup, a character that is different.

There's a life that is different. There's a person that is different. It challenges everything that does not belong to Christ and says the cup stands against that because that's against the cup.

This is a holy thing. No wonder the apostle was so strong on this matter and no wonder things were happening in Corinth. For this cause, many of you are sick, some even die, not discriminating at the Lord's table.

It's that. But note again, this cup deals with and removes all the ground of Satan. Satan's ground, of course, is the ground of nature.

Your nature and mine. What we are in ourselves. That's the playground of Satan.

The cup deals with that and takes Satan's ground from him. It puts him out. Why? Judas had to go.

The cup drove him out. The very significance of it meant he was not of this. He was of another.

He must go. He is Satan's ground in the holy circle. And he must be eliminated.

I was going to say liquidated. There's something there that's got to go with Satan's ground. But then again, the cup is the great unifying thing with the Lord's own.

It is the great unifying thing with himself. Our common participation with him. The cup links us with him.

It not only distinguishes us as his, as his. But it establishes a relationship which is, to use the symbolism, a blood relationship. But it goes beyond that.

It establishes a relationship of that kind between all who are joined to the Lord. The cup is that which unifies his own. These may sound simple things, but they're tremendously challenging.

Let's look here. This letter to the Corinthians again. First letter, chapter 10, verse 16.

The cup of blessing which we bless. Is it not a communion, a participation in the blood of Christ? Now look, just over the next chapter in this division. Continuous narrative in the original letter.

Chapter 11 and verse 18. First of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I partly believe it.

See the contradiction. A common participation. It is not just that we participate with Christ, but together we are on common ground in our participation.

It's collective. It's corporate. A common participation.

A together participation. A one participation. It's the church.

Now when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you. It's a contradiction. It's a violation of the very meaning of that cup.

You know, when you go back to the beginning of that letter, the apostle has much more to say about this matter of division. But the point is this. When he so early opens up the matter of divisions, there are divisions among you.

One says, I am of Paul. You put what name you like there. And I am of Apollos.

Put another name there. And I am of Cephas. Put another name there.

Write up the date if you like. And it represents partings, doesn't it? Partings in the church. The point is this, that the apostle steadily works his way right up to the table and makes that the climax.

In effect, you can't have the table in reality while it's like that. The reality of the table is impossible. The reality of it.

It's a mockery to have it. It's a contradiction. It's a denial.

The fundamental subverting of the very meaning of the cup. It is like that in reality. But you can have it to your own undoing.

And judgment. You see, this cup, dear friends, above all things speaks of love. Cup of the Lord.

Yes, it speaks of love. His love. The Father's love.

The love of the Son. The love of the Spirit. And the mutual love of believers.

That's all at the moment about the cup. But that's not all about it so far. I have a baptism to be baptized with.

Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? And to be baptized with a baptism. For with I am baptized. These two things go together.

I have a baptism. The Lord was only saying, in other words, I have a cup to drink. And until I have drunk it, that very purpose for which I have come is in suspense.

I have come to scatter fire into you. We shall see, perhaps later, the fire scattered. But here we're just dealing with this matter.

You see, the scattering of the fire, and we're all very interested in that. You can put that how you will. You like the progress of the gospel, the extension of the kingdom, the salvation of souls, the expansion of testimony.

Put it how you will. It's all the same thing. It's the scattering of the fire.

The earth has got to feel the touch of something from Christ. The earth has got to register something burning, something living, something consuming, something against which it cannot stand. I have come to scatter fire in the earth.

But note, that is all dependent upon the cup. That is all dependent upon what I've been saying about the cup. From first to last.

You notice that 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians entirely rests upon those two things. You begin. Chapter 1, verse 5. For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us.

There you are. There's the cup. Chapter 4, verse 1. We have this ministry.

The ministry rests upon the cup. This second letter, as you know, is the letter of the ministry. But notice, it begins with the sufferings of Christ abounding unto us.

The scattering of the fire, the fulfillment of the ministry, the service of the Lord, the expansion of the gospel, however we may put it, rests upon the cup. And not only, dear friends, upon the cup for our salvation, but the cup in all those other aspects of our holy life, of an inward separateness, of something apart for the Lord. And it rests upon not only our oneness with Him, but our oneness in Him.

Souls will not be saved while there is disruption in the instrument. Souls will not be saved while there are divisions amongst those who are seeking their salvation. The work will not grow and expand and enlarge if Satan is allowed a place to divide the people of God.

You can take it, God, Christ himself, has established or pointed to the established law. We can't get away from it, we just can't get away from it. We may try, make our effort, do all that we can, but it is, it's just not getting there.

Come back, what's the matter? Well, this is the matter. There's sin somewhere, or there's division somewhere. There is, it's circling round, people are making parties.

It's circling round, people are making parties. And we're simply destroying our own work, if it's like that. You see, this is, this is corporate.

It's the church that the apostle is talking about and writing to. He's speaking about the church again and again in these Corinthian letters. When you come together as the church, as the church, it's a corporate matter, this fellowship with the cup unto the scattering of the fire.

Can we have the table? Can we have the cup? Have we got the ground for this? I don't know. It's with the Lord by this word, but there it is. It's the beginning of the word.

There's more about this. But you've got to get your basis, your foundation right before you seem to have anything else. It's lovely to go on with the scattering of the fire.

See the things working out on the side of the glory and the power. Yes, we'd like to be caught up in that, but we've got to get our basis right. And the basis is the cup.

You see, there's no doubt about it, but the ruin of the church's testimony and ministry is so often resultant from either or both of these two things. A contradiction to the cup right in its midst. Or an avoidance of the cup.

Trying not to face the cup and accept the involvement in the suffering. Have a good time. Make everything like that.

But the ruination of testimony and ministry comes as much by avoiding the cup as by contradicting the cup. The cup is there. You cannot move it.

It is there. In all its meaning, it has to be there. I think those two were a little frivolous.

Certainly the Lord was right when he said, you know not what you are. We are able, they said. Well, all right.

You shall. First one of those was the prototype of Martin Marshall. We'll talk about him perhaps in a minute.

He drank the cup. Herod killed it. James with the sword.

You shall. You shall. This is something very real.

But we shall see that it worked out for the furtherance of the gospel. But leave that. Let's get this one.

This is right. The other will follow. It will follow quite naturally, quite spontaneously.

The cup leads to the scattered fire. The scattered fire waits for the cup. He took the cup.

Gave it to them. Said, take. Drink ye all of it.

If the message seems too heavy, don't blame me. Ask the Lord. Just how this applies, where it applies, what it means.

I haven't any doubt. But what is His word? The Lord give us grace to receive it.

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