

Mark 14:32-42. The World Cup

Introduction: The World Cup

The FIFA World Cup is the international football or soccer competition held every four years. 32 teams compete for the title of World Champion. The World Cup is the most widely-viewed sporting event in the world. An estimated 715.1 million people watched the 2006 final at which Italy beat France in a penalty shoot-out.

"Take this cup from me", implores Jesus (v36). This is the ultimate World Cup. Not just 715 million, but every single person who has ever lived on this earth, participates in this world cup and the world champion has already been crowned - Jesus himself.

In 399 BC 70-year old philosopher Socrates stood before a jury of 500 fellow Athenians. At one time two of Socrates' students had briefly overthrown the democratic government of Athens. A reign of terror followed with thousands of citizens suffering the confiscation of their property, exile or execution. Socrates was blamed. He was charged with failing to recognize the Athenian gods and also of corrupting the youth. Upon being convicted, Socrates was ordered to be his own executioner. In accordance with Athenian law, he put himself to death by drinking a cup of poison.

One day every person who has ever lived upon the face of this earth must stand before the grandest jury, the highest court. Each person will be charged with refusing to honour the true and living God and with corrupting themselves and others. Upon being convicted each person will be required to drink from a cup.

The Cup of Wrath

The entire human race, being radically sinful, is under God's judgment. Psalm 75:8 states: 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.

If on the Day of Judgment God finds you guilty and classes you among "the wicked" then you will be made to drink the cup of God's wrath down to its dregs. I love a glass of wine with my evening meal. But this is one glass of wine you never want to drink.

The prophet Jeremiah was told to make various nations drink from this same cup:

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. 16 When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." 17 So I took the cup from the LORD's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it (Jeremiah 25:15-17).

A drunken Brett Stewart claims he doesn't remember sexually assaulting a 17-year old girl. Drunkards stagger, they lose control of themselves. After a night's binge drinking, the drinker wakes up with a hangover, and then jokes about what a great night it was. But it is fatal to drink from the glass of the wine of God's anger. Drink this wine and you will stagger and go mad for evermore. Gone will be all self-control. Gone will be the ability to think with a sensible, reasonable mind. That's the hell that awaits you if you are made to drink from that cup of God's wrath on the Day of Judgment.

On the Day of Judgment no-one will be able to refuse to drink the wine of God's anger. God says through Jeremiah: But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: You must drink it!" (Jeremiah 25:28).

The Cupbearer

In the ancient world kings worried about conspiracies. The royal cupbearer made sure that any wine or drink the king consumed was free from poison. He might even swallow some of the drink himself to reassure the king that he had nothing to fear.

God has provided a cupbearer for you and me. If you have asked this cupbearer to drink the cup of God's wrath then you yourself will not drink the wine of God's anger on the Day of Judgment. But you must have asked the cupbearer to do this before the Day of Judgment. There will be no cupbearer on the Day of Judgment itself.

"Take this cup from me", implores Jesus in verse 36. Jesus is not at some dinner table, but lying on the ground, praying in anguish, thinking about the cup of God's wrath. In verse 35 we read he *"prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him"* and now he prays *"Take this cup from me."* The "cup" and the "hour" refer to the same thing. Jesus knows the time has come for him, as our cupbearer, to drink the wine of God's wrath intended for you and me. No wonder in verse 34 it literally says that Jesus *"began to be appalled and profoundly troubled."*

How extraordinary! This is no servant drinking poison to save his king's life. This is the king of kings drinking poison to save those not fit to be his servants, people like you and I.

In verse 34 he tells his disciples, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."* Jesus echoes the language of Psalms 42 and 43 where a greatly suffering man asks himself repeatedly, *"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?"* People mocked the psalmist, asking, *"Where is your God?"*, just as they would mock him. Despite this, Jesus, like the psalmist, put his hope in God his Father.

Jesus, knowing horrible death lies before him, prays, *"Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will"* (v36). Later, as he sees Judas Iscariot approaching, he says, *"The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"* (v41). Jesus is not saying, "Let's get up and get out of here", but "Get up and let's go and meet my betrayer." Jesus has accepted God's will. BUT why? It is not obvious that by doing this Jesus will be saving anyone else. It is not as if the Romans, at the Jews' instigation, have decided to crucify x number of men and Jesus says, "No! I will let you crucify me if you let those men go free."

Many years back a missionary in Pakistan died while saving children from drowning. He gave his life for their lives. We can all understand why he did this as he saw those kids about to drown and heard and sensed their panic. He responded to a real-life, here-and-now situation. But Jesus doesn't seem to be doing that. The perceived danger to others seems to be all in his head. His disciples certainly don't see or perceive any danger for while Jesus is struggling with grief and inner torment they are sleeping.

Jesus is no fatalist. He is not simply saying, "If you tell me I have to go through with this I'll do it even though I don't want to." Jesus has just addressed God in the most intimate terms, "*Abba, Father.*" Jesus knows that God's will is the will of a loving Father. When Jesus says, "*Yet not what I will, but what you will*" he is embracing the will of his loving Father, knowing that however hard the path ahead, it is a good and perfect will; knowing that wonderful blessings will flow from obeying his Father.

The Cup of Suffering Service

The words "*Take this cup from me*" also take us back to Mark 10:35-45. James and John, two of the three with Jesus in the Garden, had previously requested, "*Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory*" (v37). Jesus replied, "*You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?*" With typical brashness, they answer, "*We can.*" How does Jesus respond? He informs them, "*You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.*"

We need to examine carefully the contents of this cup. The main ingredient is God's anger, demanding the death and destruction of sinners. But Jesus tells James and John, "*You will drink the cup I drink.*" He doesn't mean they will drink the cup of God's wrath and die as sacrifices atoning for the sins of the whole world. Only Jesus, the uniquely sinless one, is the cupbearer in this sense. Yet Jesus does say, "*You will drink the cup I drink*" and in Mark 14 Jesus is poised to drink from this cup. So when Jesus prays, "*Take this cup from me*" he is praying something relevant to you and me.

While many of Jesus' twelve disciples became martyrs and while James was beheaded, John appears to have died of old age. Yet Jesus said to John, as well as James, "*You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.*" So, in understanding what Jesus is getting at it pays to read on. From Mark 10 we learn the other ten disciples were miffed with James and John. So Jesus told them all,

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

What is our common calling? To be servants, just as Jesus "*did not come to be served, but to serve.*" Our idea of servanthood conjures up at worst ideas of inconvenience. But Jesus says he came to serve "*and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Jesus as the Son of Man does something none of his disciples can do, namely "*give his life as a ransom for many*". While unique, the point remains that as we give our lives to serve others this will not merely be a great inconvenience. It will involve great suffering.

This is the typical Christian life. The more we give our lives to serve others the more we will suffer. Perhaps you are refusing to make a certain decision that would involve serving others because of the hardship you know it will involve. Perhaps you are holding back from giving your life to serve others because you fear the cost. "*Take this cup from me*", you cry. Ah, but do you add, "*Yet now what I will, but what you will*"? What does prayer mean for you? Do you pray when you want the Lord to do your will or do you pray because you are committed to doing what he wills, whatever the cost?

We shrink back from living as suffering servants like Jesus. We need the faith of Jesus. We need the intimacy of his relationship with his Father. We need his conviction that our Father's will is good and perfect and will bring unspeakable blessings. 2 Corinthians 5:7 reminds us, "*We live by faith, not by sight.*" Like Jesus let's make costly to do that which we cannot see with our own two eyes, simply because we believe, on the basis of God's Word, we know this is his will for us. Is there a decision you need to make simply because you know it is God's will for your life?

This incident in Gethsemane also strongly recalls what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9). Then too, Jesus took Peter, James and John with him. When Christ's glory was revealed at that time, Peter, representing all three of them, "did not know what to say" (v6). Similarly, in Gethsemane we read in verse 40: "*They did not know what to say to him.*" What a contrast there is between the glorious Son of God on the Mount of Transfiguration and the suffering Son of Man in Gethesamane!

Preparation for Testing

Why was Jesus prepared to meet the ultimate test, whereas his disciples were not? Jesus returned from wrestling in prayer to find his disciples sleeping. He addresses Peter, saying, "*Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (vv37-38). The word "watch" here is full of meaning. In the previous chapter Jesus mapped out the future for his disciples. He closed off with this warning:

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (Mk 13:32-37)

Now in Gethesame Jesus is warning them afresh, "*Watch and pray that you fall not into temptation/testing.*" The whole period of history in which we live is a time of testing and temptation. Jesus urges everyone of us to "watch and pray". When we fail to do this we become easy prey. Testing and temptation overwhelm us. The relationship between "watch" and "pray" is intimate. We effectively "watch" as we "pray". One of the chief purposes of prayer is for us to keep spiritually on our toes, to ask God to prepare us to withstand the tests and temptations that come our way.

One evangelist quipped, "The average Christian does not spend five minutes a day in prayer and that is why they are average." In 1979 studies were done that indicated that the average pastor prayed only 3 minutes each day. If we were to do a survey of our PCNSW pastors today I wonder if it would be much higher than this? In Luke 18:1 we read that Jesus told his disciples a parable with this purpose in mind: "to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

Evangelist Dr. Bob Jones was once relaxing on his front porch when he heard a scream from his neighbour's yard. The neighbour's boy, while playing, had fallen on to a picket fence, wounding himself badly. His dad, hearing his son's cries, rushed to him, gathered him in his arms and began to carry him down the street to a doctor.

The mother, seeing her husband with the shrieking son in his arms running down the street, she cried out, "Honey, what's wrong?"
 The husband shouted back, "Billy fell on to the fence. I'm carrying him to the doctor!"
 The mother reached her hands to her head. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I'm going to faint."
 The husband halted. "Listen," he told her, "this isn't no faintin' time. Pray!"

That's what Jesus was telling his disciples in the Garden. This is a time of crisis. This is no time for fainting or sleeping: "Watch and pray!"

Unlike Matthew and Luke Mark does not record the Lord's Prayer, but you may have noticed that Mark narrates what happened in Gethsemane in a way that reminds us of it. Just as Jesus taught us to address God as our Father, so he prays, "*Abba, Father.*" Just as Jesus taught us to pray, "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*", so now he prays, "*Yet not what I will, but what you will.*" Just as Jesus taught us to pray, "*And lead us not into temptation*", so Jesus tells his disciples, "*Watch and pray that you fall not into temptation.*"

The focus on Peter is deliberate because in the immediately preceding passage Peter stood out among the disciples when he declared, "*Even if all fall, I will not*" (Mk 14:31). This is the same brashness which we saw earlier displayed by James and John. These guys simply have no idea what they have got themselves into. Are you and I anymore savvy? Peter is a tough fisherman and he presumes that he has the inner strength to pay whatever cost required of him, even death itself. But when the ultimate test comes his way Peter is not ready because he has not watched and prayed with a view to withstanding the test. Peter displays what is true of you and me as well: "*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (v38b).

Let's watch and pray! Let's draw on God's strength! Only in this way can we hope to overcome the weakness of our flesh which hinders us from overcoming the temptations and tests that stand in the way of doing our Father's good and perfect will.