My Cup Runneth Over

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." —Psalm 23:5

THE 'CUP' IS USED TO SYM-bolize various truths and experiences pertaining to the Christian's life, and there is a close relationship between these precious truths. To understand them clearly is to have our appreciation of Divine love, and our relationship to the Divine plan, enhanced. When Jesus instituted the memorial of his death, he gave the cup to his disciples and invited them to drink of it, explaining that it represented his blood. Previous to this he had said to two of his disciples, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" (Matt. 20:22) It was evidently this latter 'cup' which Jesus referred to when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." (Matt. 26: 39) In Psalm 116:13, we read of the "cup of salvation," and, in Psalm 16:5, David writes prophetically of Jesus, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." The Apostle Paul also

contrasts the "cup of the Lord" with the "cup of devils."—I Cor. 10:21

It would be confusing should we attempt to take the same meaning from all these various symbolic uses of the term 'cup,' although they are related. The Memorial cup, of which Jesus invited his disciples to drink, is explained by him to represent his blood—his life poured out for the sins of the church and of the world. We, as the followers of Jesus, are invited to drink of this cup because it represents that through him, through the merit of his shed blood, we have life.

We partake of his cup also in the sense that we lay down our justified lives with him. We are "planted together in the likeness of his death." (Rom. 6:5) Under Jewish Law, to drink blood was punishable with death (Lev. 7:26,27), hence, when Jesus asked his disciples to drink of the cup which represented his blood, it was the equivalent of asking them to die with him. This particular symbolism of the cup applies alike to the entire church of Christ. Jesus laid down his life, and all who are to live with him and share in his kingdom reign also are to lay down their lives, 'planted together in the likeness of his death.' It is an individual matter in the sense that each one who qualifies for a position in the body of Christ must prove faithful. We see then that the symbolism of the cup applies to all members of the body of Christ. There are not many cups, but only one, and the entire Christ participates in that one cup.

THE CUP OF SALVATION

The 'cup of salvation' is closely related to the cup which symbolizes the blood of Christ. It may

be considered an extension of that symbol. It is by participating in the death of Jesus that the body members of the Christ attain to the great salvation which began to be spoken of by Jesus, and has been confirmed to the entire church by those who heard him. (Heb. 2:3) This association of thought was given by Jesus when he said to his disciples, "whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life . . . shall save it." (Luke 9:24; Matt. 16:25) These words were addressed to the disciples at the time Peter advised Jesus against going to Jerusalem where his life would be in danger. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to die as the Redeemer of the world, and that only by obedience to his covenant of sacrifice could he expect to obtain "glory and honour and immortality."—Rom. 2:7

The same is true of all followers of the Master. David wrote, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" Answering his own question, David continues, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." (Ps. 116:12-15) Like Jesus, his true followers have entered into a covenant with the Heavenly Father which is based upon the sacrifice of their all, even unto death. (Ps. 50:5) Having entered this narrow way of sacrifice which leads to life through sacrificial death, they realize that now their only hope of life is in faithfulness to their vows of consecration.

All of the Lord's followers accept this arrangement and provision of the great salvation with joy. They know that to attain salvation in this way will

first mean faithfulness unto death. They call upon the name of the LORD for grace to help in time of need, that they may have strength to be faithful. They know that the death of the saints (Rev. 2:10) is precious to God and that he will help them to be faithful unto death that they may attain salvation in the glory of the kingdom. This cup of salvation is symbolic of that which is common to the entire Christ. There is no variation from this arrangement whereby Jesus and the church attain to immortality and the glory of the kingdom. There is no other way to attain to the Divine nature or to attain to the heights of Mount Zion. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, reached his position of exaltation by way of sacrificial death, and those who share this reward with him are those only who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." (Rev. 14:4) Gladly do we take this precious cup of salvation.

It was this cup to which Jesus referred when he asked his disciples, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22) The fact that Jesus asked about their drinking this cup with him indicates that it represents that which is common to all body members of the Christ. The sacrificial death, leading to life beyond the veil, is common to them all. It is a cup of death and also a cup of salvation for those who, in sharing with Jesus in this phase of the Divine plan, lose their lives, and by so doing shall save them.

THE CUP WHICH MY FATHER HATH POURED

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, just a few hours before he was crucified, he prayed

to his father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," but then he added, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39) Here the Master is using the symbol of the cup to represent certain experiences which he then realized were impending for him, and which in some respects were peculiar to him alone. The very fact that he considered the possibility of this particular cup being necessary, indicates that it was not the cup in which all members of the Christ alike participate; nor was it the cup which represented the shedding of his blood.

Jesus knew that it was the Father's will for him to die as the Redeemer of the world. He knew that it was only through death that he could attain to immortality, the Divine nature. There was no question in his mind about this, and he was determined to carry out this covenant of sacrifice, to drink this cup of death, knowing that in the drinking it would become a cup of salvation. He knew that it was the Father's will for him. The Old Testament types had foreshadowed it, and the prophecies had revealed this as being the Father's will. But now he realized that other experiences were in store for him. In addition to dying, he could now see that there was to be shame, ignominy, and suffering. He could now see that although he had done nothing wrong he was to die as a malefactor, an outcast, charged with blaspheming his God.

There was no hesitancy in accepting this cup if it was the Divine will—"The cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11) Jesus wanted to be sure that this was the cup which the Father had poured, and when in answer to his prayer

he was assured that it was, there was no wavering, not the slightest hesitancy, nor any holding back, from doing all that had been written of him in the "volume of the book."—Ps. 40:7,8

At times, the cup is used in the Scriptures to represent individual experiences of the consecrated. These experiences are best suited to the individual needs of those for whom they are provided, and are in keeping with the Divine plan as it applies to all the consecrated. It is in this sense that David used the symbolism of the cup when he wrote in our featured text, "My cup runneth over."

Earlier in this beautiful psalm, David reminds us of the shepherd's provisions which are supplied alike for all of his sheep. All of them are made to lie down in green pastures; all are led beside the still waters and all are protected as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death. In these references, we are reminded of the abundance of God's care for all his people through the Truth, and the assurances of the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word.

But the provisions of the cup may vary according to individual needs. This thought is borne out in the psalm, particularly if we follow the shepherd and sheep symbolism throughout. Those who are acquainted with the customs of shepherds tell us that they did use a cup in connection with their care of individual sheep. Ordinarily this was at the close of the day, in the final roundup of the sheep, and the inspecting of them for bruises and fatigue. When, as frequently would be the case, the shepherd found a sheep that had become wearied from the day's experiences, and needed special attention, it would

be given a refreshing drink from a cup which the shepherd used for this very purpose.

What a precious thought is thus illustrated! We know that it is only as we are in Christ that we have any right to expect Divine favors. We know of the general and abundant provisions the Lord has made for all his sheep, and in these provisions we do indeed rejoice. There is nothing more that the Heavenly Father could do or say in order to assure us of his love. We know that as long as we continue to follow the Good Shepherd, hearkening to his voice at all times, there will never be any lack of green pastures nor of still, refreshing waters.

In the cup symbolism, there is a touch of intimacy and of personal and individual care that suggests a tenderness and warmth of love which is almost beyond our ability to grasp. Without detracting from the reality of the shepherd's care as it manifests itself in a blanket of Divine love spread over all his sheep, we are given this additional assurance that he knows all our individual needs and is providing for them also. There are many such occasions of need. There is no time when we are more weak and in danger of stumbling and falling by the wayside than when we feel self-sufficient and are not depending upon the provisions of the Good Shepherd. At such times, we may think we are strong, but the wisdom of the Good Shepherd detects our self-sufficiency, and knowing that if we are permitted to continue on in our own strength we are sure to fall behind and lose our way, he pours a cup of bitterness, disappointment, humiliation and sorrow, and holds it to our lips that we may drink and thereby have our weakness removed. It is only as we tremble

when thinking of self that we are truly strong in the Lord, and whatever experiences bring about this proper viewpoint are a refreshing cup.

There are times when a cup of sorrow would discourage and crush us, times when our greatest need is to be encouraged by a cup of sweetness, some gladdening experience which assures us of the Good Shepherd's smile of approval of the efforts we are making. In such cases, we may be sure that our cup will run over with an abundant provision of just the right experiences which we need. There are many ways in which our cup of joy runs over. We may be permitted to see some evidence that the Lord has blessed our efforts to bear witness to this Truth; someone may be showing interest in the Divine plan through our efforts to tell them the old, old story. What a joy such an experience is to those who truly love the Lord and his Truth.

Paul assured us of this fact when he wrote that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) They are working together for our good because the Good Shepherd is pouring the cup for us, and because he knows exactly what we need at any and every moment of our walk with him. What a blessed assurance, 'My cup runneth over'—the Good Shepherd abundantly supplies our individual needs. Thus does he continue to refresh and strengthen us that we may be able to follow him through the dry and thirsty land of an unfriendly world, and through the "valley of the shadow of death."

We read, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." (II Cor. 9:8)

This is Paul's way of saying that our cup runneth over. The Greek word translated 'abound' in this passage means 'over and above,' or in other words, running over. This running over of God's grace is experienced always, and in all things. Could the Good Shepherd do more for us than this?

Our response to such abundant provisions of Divine grace should be as suggested by the apostle—namely, that we in turn 'abound to every good work.' How could any of the Lord's sheep be indif-ferent to the Good Shepherd's tender care and fail to appreciate what is being done for them? May it not be so with any of us! The way is narrow and difficult, but the privilege of drinking the cup of death with Jesus, that we may partake of the cup of salvation together with all the faithful in the first resurrection, is a glorious one. The strength needed to share this partnership of suffering, death, and glory, is assured. We can together feed in the green pastures of nourishing Truth; and together partake of the refreshing waters of the Word. All the while, the Good Shepherd is watching out for our individ-ual needs, causing our cup of experiences—the very experiences we need—to run over. Thus we will have no lack of strength, nor of any other quality we may need, in order to follow the Good Shepherd. ■