

“Drink the Cup,” John 18:1-27 (Third Sunday in Lent, March 4, 2018)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵ They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.” ²² When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” ²⁴ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

PRAY

We are now in the Easter season, just four more weeks until Easter Sunday. It's traditional for the church to focus on the life and work of Jesus during this time of year, particularly his work on the cross. We read in our text for this morning about the events surrounding the arrest of Jesus, which took place on the last night of his life. And what we're going to do is look in depth at three of the characters in this account.

There is no more important question you will ever answer than, "How do I respond to Jesus?" That's not just preacher talk. The most important question you need to answer is, "How do I deal with claims made about Jesus and by Jesus in the Bible?" I hope you answer that question this morning, and through these three characters I hope to show you there are only three ways you can respond to Jesus: first, we'll look at how Annas responded to Jesus. Second, we'll look at Judas' response. Third, we'll look at Peter's response.

First, Annas. We read in verse 13 that Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel. The high priest was the most important religious and political figure in Israel. He had the power and the prestige. Annas, however, was more than just the father-in-law of high priest. About fifteen years before, Annas himself had served as the high priest until he was deposed by the occupying Roman forces. According to the law of Moses a high priest served for life, so in the eyes of the people of Israel Annas almost certainly was still the high priest. They would not have recognized what the Romans did as legitimate. That helps explain why, after he was deposed, five of his sons along with Caiaphas had served as high priest.

Therefore, Annas was probably the most influential man in all Israel. That's why he gets first crack at Jesus. But notice that while he asks Jesus questions, he's not really interested in learning about Jesus. Annas asks Jesus questions about his disciples and his teaching, and when Jesus answers he gets punched in the mouth. When that happens to you, the person asking you the questions is not seriously considering your answers.

When it came to considering Jesus, Annas was closed minded. He already has his mind made up before he ever met Jesus.

Jesus claimed to be God. He said back in John 8, during an earlier confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." John 8:58. That's a claim to divinity. But Annas doesn't think that's possible. In his mind there's no way Jesus could be from God. It doesn't matter that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, it doesn't matter that Jesus has unimpeachable character, and it doesn't even matter that Jesus worked miracles and healed the lame and restored sight to the blind and raised the dead. Annas had his mind made up about Jesus before he ever met him, and so when Annas finally did get his interview with Jesus he refused to even listen to him.

That's the way many are in our society today. They have their minds made up about Jesus before they ever meet him. They reject him before they ever hear him out. If you are here this morning and you are self-consciously not a Christian, it may be that you've never heard about Jesus and you want to learn. But for some of you it may be that your mind is made up that if there is a God, there is no way he looks or talks like Jesus.

If that's you, will you please make sure that in rejecting Jesus you're rejecting the *real Jesus*? Some of you may hear the name, "Jesus," and immediately you think, "Oh, I know him. He's the guy with all the rules. Don't drink alcohol, don't vote for a Democrat, don't read *Harry Potter*, don't be kind to gay people but instead condemn them, don't ever act like you have any doubts about anything, and probably, to be safe, don't have much fun in your life at all. That's who Jesus is, and I don't want anything to do with him." That's what you think.

And friends, I want you to know that I don't know who that guy is, but he's not Jesus. I'm not telling you that you have to vote for Democrats, or that you should ever drink alcohol, or that you even have to read *Harry Potter*. Not at all. I'm just saying that guy in your mind, whoever else he is, isn't Jesus. That guy is the guy a lot of people who get on television and claim to be Christians say Jesus is, but it's not who Jesus is.

Do you know who Jesus is? He is God in the flesh, God who became a man, and he was a man noted for his love, his wisdom, and his good works. He loved the outcasts of society, and they loved him back even after he told them to stop sinning. In fact, just about the only people Jesus seemed to have an issue with were the religious leaders who were running around telling everyone else what to do.

Jesus is the man who said everyone on the planet is broken, no matter how put together your life might look like from the outside. And out of love for you, he went to the cross and through his death he made it possible for you to be reconciled to God.

This is my challenge to you: get to know the real Jesus before you reject him, and not some made up version of him. Don't close your mind to Jesus. You need to study the Bible, you need to talk to Christians and examine the evidence and figure out for yourself who Jesus is. You say, "Why? Why should I spend my valuable time trying to figure out who Jesus is?" Only because he is the most influential figure in human history. That's not just me as a preacher talking – trained historians who are not Christians or even religious say the same thing. You simply cannot live intelligently as a human being on planet Earth unless you know who he really is.

Plus, what if Jesus really is God? That's the claim he makes. If he's right, can you afford to be wrong? I want to keep you from the mistake Annas made – being close minded about Jesus and failing to listen to him.

The second character: Judas. Judas, unlike Annas, did listen to Jesus. He knew who Jesus was. In fact, Judas believed so strongly in Jesus that he followed Jesus throughout Israel for three years and preached the coming kingdom of God, all the while healing the sick and casting out demons.

Judas knew who Jesus was – he knew he was God, that he was the King of Kings. Yet he was mistaken about one crucial thing – Judas thought Jesus would immediately drive the Romans out of Jerusalem, reestablish the monarchy of King David, and then set his closest friends up in positions of power and wealth and influence over Israel.

Now that will happen. Jesus will return, he will set up his visible kingdom on earth, and he will sit his disciples on twelve thrones on his right hand and on his left. Judas was right about that; he was only wrong about the timing. Judas was wrong because he did not know the King of Kings would come to earth not once, but twice. On his first trip Jesus did not come to rule the world but to save it, by dying on the cross for sinners. Only after a period of what has so far turned out to be two thousand years will Jesus come a second time to establish his unbreakable kingdom on earth.

Judas thought that any minute Jesus would make himself king, and then Jesus would reward Judas. That's what kings do, right? They give their most loyal, trustworthy subordinates plum positions in their new administration. But when he saw Jesus wasn't going to the throne but instead to the cross *Judas became disillusioned with Jesus.*

We can actually see when this happened in the Bible. In John 12, we read where Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, anoints Jesus with perfume while he sat at a banquet given in his honor. But she didn't just put a little dab of perfume on Jesus' head – she poured the whole bottle, worth something like \$20-30,000, on his feet. She blew it all, probably her life savings, just to make Jesus' feet smell good.

Judas sees this and goes berserk. He says, “ ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ ”⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” John 12:5-6.

And when Jesus tells Judas to leave Mary alone, that was she did was a beautiful thing, Judas is disgusted. You can just see the wheels turning in Judas' mind. After three years of following Jesus the ugly thoughts rise to the surface of Judas' mind and he thinks, “You know, I've given my life to Jesus and I don't have anything to show for it. I don't have any more money, any more power, any more recognition than when I started. Jesus owes me, and obviously he won't give it to me because he lets that Mary blow \$30,000 his feet. I guess I'll have to go get mine myself.” And the next thing we read about Judas in the gospel of John is that he had made up his mind to betray Jesus.

When Mary pours the perfume on Jesus' feet, Judas asks himself, “What's in this for me? What do I get out of giving my life to Jesus?”

All of us wrestle with that question. It is so easy to be a Christian when things are going well - if things are good with our health and our family and our money and our career, we think this giving our lives to Jesus is great. And it makes sense, doesn't it? We're following Jesus the Lord of the universe. We've given him our lives. We're doing some good – helping others, giving our money away, telling the gospel. And we may never say this out loud, it may all be unconscious, but at some level we believe: “Of course I'll have a good life. I've given it to Jesus.”

But then something goes wrong. Maybe it turns out things aren't good with your marriage, your kids, your health, your career, or maybe you don't feel like you are being recognized enough for

all the ways you serve, *and your heart starts to grow cold*. And then the subconscious thoughts that have been there all along rise up and turn ugly. You start getting bitter. You look at your life and say, “Wait a minute – this isn’t supposed to happen. I’ve given my life to Jesus and now everything falls apart? Wait a minute: what’s in this for me?”

If you think that you’re getting disillusioned, just like Judas. And if you aren’t careful, you’ll walk away from Jesus just like Judas did. That’s the second response to Jesus – initial belief and excitement, followed by disillusionment, and finally rejection.

If Annas failed to even listen to Jesus, and Judas failed to persevere in following Jesus, you’d expect the third character, Peter, the third response to Jesus, to be an example of faithfulness to him. But that’s not what we find.

What does Peter do? He denies Jesus. Three times (verses 17, 25, and 27) Peter claims he has no clue who Jesus is. What does that show us? There are only three ways to respond to Jesus. You can fail to listen to Jesus, like Annas. You can fail to persevere in following Jesus, like Judas. Or, you can just flat fail him, like Peter. Those are the only three options!

Friends, no one perfectly, faithfully follows Jesus. You are going to totally blow it. You may not deny him publically, like Peter did, and say, “I don’t know who this man is,” but in your life you’ll deny him all the time. You’ll know that in a given situation if you want to be faithful to Jesus you need to do this, but instead you don’t. You have a chance to take a stand, and you bail. *Everyone blows it when it comes to following Jesus.*

Yet, we know from reading the Scriptures that Peter was restored, but Judas was not. Peter was reconciled to Jesus Christ, and Judas dies unreconciled to him. ***So what’s the difference between Peter and Judas?*** This is a very, very important truth to grasp, because if you don’t you will fundamentally misunderstand what it means to be a Christian.

What’s the difference between Peter and Judas? Some people say the difference is that while Peter denied Jesus, Judas *betrayed* Jesus. Judas’ sin was far worse, they say. Peter just lost his nerve one night, so he could be restored by Jesus. But Judas’ sin was premediated, it involved money, he sold Jesus out, so he could not be restored. He could not be forgiven.

Is that true? Absolutely not! Judas could have been forgiven. There’s a place in Mark 3 where Jesus says, “²⁸ Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man . . .” Mark 3:28a. I would say that includes betraying Jesus Christ to the high priest, wouldn’t you? Judas absolutely could have been forgiven.

So what’s the difference? The difference is this: ***Peter believed he could be forgiven, and Judas didn’t.*** Judas failed Jesus, and he went off and hung himself. He thought there was no use going back and asking for forgiveness. Peter failed Jesus, but he stayed with the disciples. When Jesus came back from the dead, he found Peter just where he left him – with the other believers. Peter remained with the church. Judas condemned himself, but Peter ***kept coming back to him.***

Here is what it means to be a Christian: *it means recognizing that you fail Jesus all the time but you refuse to give up on Jesus' mercy and you keep coming back to him to be restored.* Being a Christian means you're counting on, more than anything else, that there is more grace in Christ than sin in you. Do you believe that? Do you believe that no matter how many times you blow it, Jesus will always be there waiting to receive you? Waiting to restore you? Then you're a Christian. It doesn't mean that you go out and *try* to sin – it just means that when you do sin you know Jesus is always ready to welcome you back. He's more ready to welcome you than you are to go to him in the first place.

If in your heart you really believe that the difference between Christians and non-Christians is that we are the good people who never blow it while the non-Christians are those bad people out there who mess up all the time, *you will be a terrible Christian.* You will either judge others all the time and despise them for their mistakes, or eventually wear yourself out trying to earn your salvation. Trying to be good enough for Jesus. But you will never be good enough for him! Stop trying. You don't *have* to be good enough for Jesus, because Jesus was good enough for you!

We're going to take the Lord's Supper in a moment. We're going to take the bread and the cup, signifying the body of Jesus broken and the blood of Jesus shed to pay for our sins and reconcile us to God. When you take the cup, here's what I want you to do: I want you to remind yourself that you're not eligible to drink from this cup because you're such a good person, or because you never or hardly ever fail Jesus.

No, the only reason you can take this cup is precisely because you admit that, just like Peter, you fail Jesus all the time. But you believe, you have faith, that Jesus will have mercy on you over and over and over again and restore you. And I want you to remember the reason this cup will do you so much good can be found in John 18:11 where Jesus said to Peter, “[S]hall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” God, as it were, filled up a cup with the wrath he stored up against us because of our sins. He filled up this cup of his judgment with his anger *and on the cross Jesus drank it down to the dregs so you wouldn't have to.* It's all gone. God is not and cannot be angry with you anymore, no matter how badly you've failed him.

Jesus drank the cup of God's judgment so at the Lord's Supper you could drink the cup of Jesus' grace, and his grace never, ever runs out! No matter how badly you failed him this week, this month, year, or over your life Jesus is ready to welcome you. Remember that as we come to the Lord's table. LET'S PRAY.