

*“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”*

“I am already being poured out like a drink offering.” What in the world is a drink offering? If you've never heard of it, don't feel bad. They're kind of obscure.

Read through the Mosaic Law, the books of Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and you will find detailed instructions on all sorts of offerings. Burnt offerings for general atonement. Grain offerings for thanksgiving. Peace offerings for fellowship. Sin offerings for confession. Trespass offerings for restitution. All sorts of offerings. But you won't really find a good description of drink offerings.

Maybe that's because drink offerings don't fall into a nice neat little category like other offerings. They're scattered throughout the Old Testament. Combined with other offerings. Never very well explained in and of themselves, but referenced in the Law and Prophets quite often. And obviously so familiar to St Paul that he would describe himself as a drink offering not once, but twice in his letters. Both here and in Philippians 2.

But I think the best way to understand a drink offering is to go back to its very first occurrence in the Bible. And interestingly enough, we find ourselves once again meeting up with our very sinful Patriarch, Jacob, whom I spoke about at length last week. Jacob who cheated, conned, and stole his way through young adulthood, until he was finally broken by God by the River Jabbok. Broken both emotionally and physically.

We're a few chapters beyond that event point now, in Genesis 35. Things seemed to be improving for Jacob after that encounter with God, at least initially. He meets his brother for the first time in years, fully expecting to be murdered on the spot, only to discover that Esau is past his anger. He's forgiven Jacob, left Canaan, settled in Edom to the north, and is now doing quite well for himself. And they have a surprisingly happy family reunion.

So Jacob and his family travel on a little farther, to the city of Shechem, and that's when things go down hill again. But for once, it really wasn't Jacob's fault. You see, his daughter, Dinah, was kidnapped and raped by the son of the ruler of Shechem.

This was bad enough in itself, but then Jacob's two oldest sons decide that they wanna get a little revenge. And so they proceed to massacre all of the men of the city and pillage their homes. Running for their lives before the neighboring towns find out.

Jacob has finally had enough. It has been a long, LONG journey. He is sick of fighting. He is sick of struggling. God has been faithful every step of the way. And he has transformed Jacob's heart. The old Jacob probably would have agreed with his sons' revenge. But this new Jacob doesn't.

This new Jacob, this new man named Israel, just wants to go home, reunite with his elderly father, and worship his Lord in the way that he had promised to do decades before. So he leaves Shechem behind, makes a beeline for the city of Bethel inside the borders of Canaan, and finally arrives inside his father's land.

And when he gets there, God is waiting for him. He meets with Jacob and reaffirms his covenant. Reaffirms his new name of Israel. And in response, Genesis 35:14 tells us, *“Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him and he poured out a drink offering upon it.”*

After struggling for all those years. After wondering about God's plan for his life. After triumph and laughter, failure and tears. Jacob was home. He had fought the good fight. He has finished the race. He had kept the faith.

Now there was in store for him a crown of righteousness to rule over God's promised land and to be called a Patriarch of God's people. And so Jacob poured out on that altar a drink offering. A cup of pure, fragrant, choice wine offered to heaven as a memorial of God's absolute love and faithfulness.

What is a drink offering? A drink offering is a memorial of God's faithfulness. It is a testament to the covenant God makes with his people. To the promises he always keeps. To the salvation he always brings. To the prayers he always hears. A drink offering is a recognition that God is always deserving of our faith.

That is the drink offering that St Paul has become in our Epistle lesson. That is the drink offering that we each become in Christ Jesus. Jesus pours out his blood on the cross as a sacrifice, as an offering, and he gives it to us.

Not that we may pour it out, but that we may drink it, in, with, and under pure, fragrant, choice wine. That we may humbly receive that sacred life and make it our own. That we may be clothed with Christ's blood and righteousness. That we may be given a new name – God's Triune name. We don't pour out Christ's blood as a drink offering. We let it transform us into a drink offering.

Through Christ's sacrifice, our lives become an acceptable offering to God. Our lives, even as they are poured out on this earth, rise to God as a pure and holy gift, pleasing to the senses. Just as Jacob's youth was a complete sinful waste, except for the blessing that God gave to him. Just as Paul's former life as a Pharisee was a complete sinful waste, except for the calling that God gave him. So too, our lives are a complete sinful waste, except for the blood of Christ given for the forgiveness of all our sins.

The world looks upon God's people and sees lives splashed across the rocks of death. Poured out. Meaningless. But we look at those lives and see a drink offering to the Lord. We look at our own lives and see a drink offering to the Lord. A covenant, sealed in blood, resting upon the absolute assurance of God's love and faithfulness. Poured out as we make our way to our heavenly home.

We become a memorial of God's faithfulness. We become a testament to the covenant God makes with his people. To the promises he always keeps. To the salvation he always brings. To the prayers he always hears. We become a sign to all the world that God is always deserving of our faith.

And so when Paul looks at all that he has suffered, he doesn't see how God has abandoned him. His friends have completely deserted him, he says. But God didn't. The Lord stood by him and strengthened him. The Lord gave him a message to speak and people to hear it. The Lord rescued him from lions and from every evil deed. Why? Because Paul was a drink offering. A memorial to God's faithfulness.

You are a drink offering. And like Paul, you will suffer. You may be deserted by your friends. You may be persecuted by those who hate you for your faith. You may be surrounded by evil men and their evil deeds. But still, you will be a memorial to God's faithfulness. A testament to the promises he always keeps.

Because no matter what happens, you know that you are one of God's forgiven children. And there is in store for you a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to you on the last day. And though you feel alone, you are not. Because not only is the Lord with you, but all those who long for his appearing are with you too.

So like Jacob, like Paul, like millions upon millions of saints who have gone before us, we fight the good fight. We finish the race. We keep the faith. Not because we are so strong, so swift, or so faithful. No, we are sinners like Jacob and Paul and like all those millions who came before us. We are tax collectors standing far off, beating our breasts and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

No, we fight and we race and we keep the faith because the Lord is faithful to us. Because he has fought and he has run and he has won the victory for us. He has brought us home. And we are merely a drink offering to his goodness and grace. Not to us, but to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.