

The Cupbearer

04 - Nehemiah: A Time for Restoration
Church on the Park | Sunday, 18 October 2020

Text: “Now I was the cupbearer to the king” (Nehemiah 1:11c)

Theme: Let God be God and let yourself be his servant.

Intro: What is a cupbearer? And what can a cupbearer teach us about God’s Kingdom? After Nehemiah’s intercessory prayer for the restoration of God’s people and city, he clearly states that he was cupbearer to the king. A cupbearer was a position that epitomised servanthood. And at Nehemiah’s very core was the nature of a servant. Eight times in his intercessory prayer he uses the word ‘servant’ עֲבָדֶיךָ (your servant). The cupbearer was one of the King’s chief servants. It was a position of deep trust and great responsibility. Cupbearers usually had a whole team of servants under them (like a Butler) and could even advise the king on political matters. History tells us that before the cupbearer would serve the king wine, he would taste it himself in order to make sure it was not poisoned. The cupbearer laid down his life for the king being an example of what a genuine servant is. We also are called to be cupbearers to our King, Jesus.

1) L - Let go of control (Neh. 1:11).

- God puts his people in **strategic places** to fulfil his eternal purposes.
 - Nehemiah was in the right place to bring about deliverance for God’s people. But at **first**, it looked like **the wrong place**—he was in **Persia**, rather than **Jerusalem**.
 - **Servanthood** is the **perfect place** for God to use you to do **great things**.
 - My old boss and the pen.
- *Are you willing to lose control?*
- By ‘lose control’ I **don’t** mean let yourself go in anger or let yourself spin out of control.
 - Instead, in order to be a **servant of God**, you need to **lose control of being Lord** of your life and let Jesus be Lord.
 - When you are saved, you say the “**Jesus is Lord.**” However, the **everyday outworking** of this can be difficult.
 - We often are trying to **take back control** of our lives.
 - **To be a servant**—God’s leader—continually **let go of control**.
 - A servant lives to **please their Master (Gal. 1:10)**.
 - A servant is **always looking to their Master (Psalm 123)**.
 - A servant **denies himself or herself** for the Master’s will.
 - The good news is that God always **looks after the well-being** his servants (Psalm 35:27).
 - **God’s power** is **manifested** in our lives when we **surrender our own power**.
 - We see this happening with **Nehemiah** (Neh. 2:1-8).
 - **God’s hand rests on the humble**.
 - ‘**Let**’ is a very interesting word.
 - It’s the word of a **servant, a humble word**. It’s a word of **politeness**. It’s a word often used in **prayer** (Neh. 1:6). “Let me know how I can help you.”
 - In order to be a servant of God you need to **LET God** be Lord.
 - **Let God** have **control** of your life, but also **loose yourself** from those who would try to control you (Isaiah 51:21-52:2).
 - God does not want you **captive** to anyone or anything.
 - Jesus is **captivated** with you and he wants you totally **captivated** by him (**SOS 4:9**).
 - This is true freedom.
 - Usually there is something or someone that is trying to take you captive—they want to **control or manipulate** you for their own purposes.
 - Jesus can’t be Lord of your life if **someone else is Lord**.
 - **Loose yourself from all captivity**.
 - Loose yourself from all captivity so that you can **serve God fully**.

- As a young man, I had to **let go of control of my life**.
- I had **great promise** in the business world winning **first place** in all of New York State as **Future Business Leader of America (FBLA)**.
 - I competed with hundreds (and I think thousand) of the best and brightest in New York State.
 - My High School said I was most likely to be a millionaire :-).
- But I let go in order to live to serve the highest King.
- Jesus himself is the great example of letting go to serve his Father (Matt. 20:20-28; *Matt. 26:39; *Mark 14:36)
 - Like these grapes, Jesus' life was crushed to fill the King's cup. His life was all about serving the Father.

2) E - Enjoy God's love (SOS 1:1-2; 5:1)

- Our whole lives should be pervaded by a **spirit of servanthood**.
 - But in order to **serve**, our cups must be **filled**.
 - You can't **serve** an **empty cup** to the King.
- **Your cup** will be filled as you **drink in God's love**.
 - When you **drink** in God's love, your cup is **filled with divine life**.
- The **bride in Song of Songs** shows us the way.
 - "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For **your love is better than wine**." (SOS 1:1)
 - Song of Songs 2:3-7
- All throughout the Song of Songs the bride is **drinking** in the love of her Bridegroom.
 - This love makes her **vibrant and bold**.
 - There's **no fear** in her because she has been drinking in the Bridegroom's love.
- *Are you giving God time to love you? Are you drinking in his love? Are you letting Jesus love you? Are you drinking his cup? Are you drinking in his words?*
- **Jesus** is the **ultimate CUPBEARER**.
 - **His cup** is filled with his **blood**, his **covenant of love** for you.
 - This blood is his very life **poured out** for you and it's on **his table** and **available** for you **everyday**.
 - To drink Christ's blood does **not** mean to be a **vampire**. Instead, it means to drink in **Christ's love, life and covenant**.
- The bread and the cup is the **essence** of life itself—**true life**—eternal life.
- Don't let **busyness** and trying to **impress** God cause you to **not enjoy** God's love.
 - **Learn to sit** at Jesus' table (Rev. 3) and drink of his cup.
 - **In his cup is love, healing, restoration, forgiveness, mercy, kindness and strength**.
- This is what it means to **abide** in him (John 15).

3) T - Taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:9).

- Psalm 34 is an **acrostic** Psalm.
 - It was easy for a **young person** to memorise so that he could learn from A-Z (Aleph-Tav) what it means to be a righteous person.

טַעֲמוּ וּרְאוּ כִּי־טוֹב יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־יִחְסֶה־בּוֹ
(Ps 34:9).

- "Taste and see that Yahweh is good" falls in the 'Tet' verse of this Psalm—the ninth Hebrew letter.
- God wants to be **experienced**...God **NEEDS** to be **experienced**.
 - Many people get discouraged thinking, "I can't do this Christian thing."
 - But being a Christian is not about **doing something** as much as it is about **letting God do** his will in your life.
 - He wants you to **experience** him, to taste and see him.
 - That means you must **sit** down at his table.
 - **Experience God** so that you can **express God**.
 - Know his goodness.

Conclusion: The main points of this message spell LET. 1) Let go of control, 2) Enjoy God's love, 3) Taste and see that the Lord is good. This week let's focus on letting God be God and letting yourself be his servant.

END NOTES

Cupbearer

A prestigious position in the royal courts of the ancient Near East. The cupbearer would serve wine (Gen. 40:13), but also tasted it as protection against poison. A 9th-century b.c.e. jar from 'En-gev is inscribed "the cupbearers" and may indicate an amount of wine the cupbearers would bring from storage during any given occasion. In his prison dream, the cupbearer served Pharaoh freshly pressed grape juice in a cup (Gen. 40:11); Joseph interpreted this to mean he would be restored to his position. Nehemiah had served the Persian king Artaxerxes as cupbearer before returning to rebuild his land after the Exile (Neh. 1:11; 2:1). Jesus became the subservient and trustworthy cupbearer to his disciples when he offered them the cup at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:27).

Carey Walsh

Walsh, C. (2000). Cupbearer. In D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers, & A. B. Beck (Eds.), *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible* (p. 301). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

CUP-BEARER Official whose primary duty was to taste the wine served to the king as a precaution against poisoning. Cup-bearers frequented the courts of kings and high officials in antiquity (1 Kgs 10:5). These men were close to those in authority and sometimes exercised considerable influence. Generally several of them served the king with the "chief cup-bearer" (butler) at their head (Gn 40:1–23). Solomon's court included cup-bearers (2 Chr 9:4), and Nehemiah was the king's cup-bearer (Neh 1:11–2:1); Rabshakeh may have been a cup-bearer (2 Kgs 18:13–19; Is 36:2).

Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (p. 340). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

CUPBEARER (Heb. *mašqeh*, 'one giving to drink'). The 'butler' of Joseph's pharaoh (Gn. 40:1ff.) both in Heb. and by function was the king's cupbearer. His office as depicted in Gn. 40 corresponds in part to the (wider) Egyp. *wdpw* of early times and especially the Middle Kingdom period (broadly, c. 2000–1600 bc; cf. Joseph c. 1700 bc), and exactly to the later term *wb'*, 'cupbearer', of New Kingdom times (c. 1600–1100 bc), which includes Moses' day. See A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 1, 1947, pp. 43*, 44* on No. 122 (*wb'*), and J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 1959, pp. 35–40 (esp. p. 36). The Egyptian cupbearers, *wb'*, were often called *w'b'-wy*, 'pure of hands', and in the 13th century bc one such cupbearer is actually entitled *wb' dp i'rp*, 'cupbearer (or, butler) who tastes the wine' (R. A. Caminos, 4, 1954, p. 498). These officials (often foreigners) became in many cases confidants and favourites of the king and wielded political influence; this is very evident in 20th-Dynasty Egypt (12th century bc), and cf. Nehemiah. The (lesser) cupbearers of high Egyptian dignitaries are sometimes shown serving wine in the tomb-paintings. Cupbearers were part of Solomon's glittering court that so impressed the queen of Sheba (1 Ki. 10:5; 2 Ch. 9:4); for a somewhat earlier cupbearer at a Palestinian court (Canaanite), see left end of the Megiddo ivory illustrated in E. W. Heaton, *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times*, 1956, p. 164, fig. 80, or W. F. Albright, *Archaeology of Palestine*, 1960, p. 123, fig. 31.

Nehemiah (1:11) was cupbearer to Artaxerxes I of Persia (c. 464–423 bc) and, like his earlier colleagues in Egypt, enjoyed royal trust and favour, and had access to the royal ear. For a picture of an Assyrian cupbearer, see H. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 1954, plate 89.

K. A. Kitchen.

Kitchen, K. A. (1996). Cupbearer. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 248). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Cupbearer (מִשְׁקֵה, *mashqeh*). An officer of high rank in ancient Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, and Jewish courts.

It was the duty of the cupbearer to fill the king's cup and deliver it to him. Pharaoh's chief cupbearer is mentioned as part of Joseph's story (Gen 40:1–23; 41:9). Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia (Neh 1:11). King Solomon also had cupbearers (1 Kgs 10:5; 2 Chr 9:4). According to Xenophon, ancient cupbearers drank some of the king's wine to see if it was poisoned before they offered the cup to him (*Cyropaedia* 1.3.9). Cupbearers could also have other duties, as indicated by Tobit 1:22: "Ahikar was cupbearer, keeper of the signet ring, administrator, and accountant."

Selected Resources for Further Study

Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Archaeological Backgrounds of the Exilic and Postexilic Era Part 4: The Archaeological Background of Nehemiah." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980): 288–304.

Elliot Ritzema

Ritzema, E. (2016). Cupbearer. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

CUP Drinking vessel made of pottery or various metals such as gold, silver, or bronze. During biblical times cups came in two different forms. Some resembled their modern counterparts. However, most ancient cups were shallow bowls that were produced in a multitude of sizes. They also could be used in divination (Gen. 44:5). In addition, the term "cup" was used to designate the receptacles for holding lamps on the lamp-stand of the tabernacle (Exod. 25:31–35 NASB). In the Bible the word "cup" frequently is used in a figurative sense. The contents of the cup are accentuated, since symbolically God serves the drink. Thus the cup might represent blessings or prosperity for a righteous person (Pss. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13). Likewise, it portrayed the totality of divine judgment on the wicked (Pss. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15; 49:12; 51:7; Ezek. 23:31–34; Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6). Jesus voluntarily drank the cup of suffering (Matt. 20:22; 26:39, 42; Mark 10:38; 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 18:11). For Jesus that cup was His death and everything that it involved.

The cup had a prominent place in the liturgy of the Jewish Passover meal and so, subsequently, in the Lord's Supper. In the Christian ordinance the cup is a symbolic reminder of the atoning death of Jesus (Matt. 26:27–28; Mark 14:23–24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25–26).

See Divination and Magic; Lamps, Lighting, Lampstand; Lord's Supper; Passover; Pottery; Vessels and Utensils.

LeBron Matthews

CUPBEARER High-ranking official in the courts of ancient Near Eastern kings. The cupbearer was responsible for serving wine at the king's table and protecting the king from poisoning. The cupbearer was often taken into the king's confidence and had no small amount of influence on the king's decisions. The "chief cupbearer" of the Joseph story (Gen. 40:2) was one who was overseer of a staff of his own. Nehemiah was the highly esteemed cupbearer for Artaxerxes (Neh. 1:11; 1 Kings 10:5; 2 Chron. 9:4). The Rabshakeh may have been the title given to cupbearers in the Assyrian court (2 Kings 18:17–37; Isa. 36:2). See Occupations and Professions.

Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). Cupbearer. In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 372–373). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.