

# **Stealing the Master's Cup**

by Mack Wayne Craig

Genesis 44:1-5

The coming of my Lord to this earth was an event of such tremendous importance that it occupied the attention and concern of my Father from all eternity. As the history of man began to unfold on the earth and promise and prophecy followed one after another looking toward that time when Jesus would come, our Father in His great wisdom provided for us not only by word of mouth, but also by the example of many who lived during Old Testament days a foreshadowing of the mercy and love and kindness which would characterize the life of our Savior. In a striking way this can be seen in the life of Joseph. His was a record of hatred conquered by love. It was a story of heartache and despair swallowed up by joy. It was an account of providential care which guided and directed through lonely years to bring about both blessings. In many ways it suggests all that Jesus came to do, all of the kindness which came to show as the answer to bitterness and unhappiness, all of the forgiveness with which He would conquer hatred and envy, all of the love which He would show as the solution to every problem which men could ever know.

## **THE STORY OF THE MISSING CUP**

In the life and story of Joseph there is perhaps no single incident that is more important for our time than that which occurred when his brothers were accused of stealing the master's cup. You recall that they had come to Egypt to buy food, with no intimation that their own brother, long ago sold as a slave, ruled now as second ruler of the land. When Joseph recognized them it was his purpose immediately to learn of the situation at home and then to decide as best he could what attitude they were taking toward Benjamin, the only surviving son of his mother, Rachel. Joseph insisted that they could not come again to buy food unless they brought Benjamin with them. When they went home and discussed with their father the experience they had, they told him that the ruler of Egypt had forbidden them to see his face again unless their youngest brother came. At first Jacob was determined that Benjamin could not go, but when the food was gone and there was no means by which they would supply their needs, at last he reluctantly consented.

Joseph had waited eagerly for his brothers' return. When he saw Benjamin it was almost more than he could endure not to reveal himself unto them. But he had a plan by which to determine the attitude which they would take and consequently the attitude which he should take toward them. And so he entertained them in his home. They were amazed to find that when Joseph seated them at the dinner table they were seated in chronological order according to age. They could not understand how he could know in what arrangement they should have been placed. And, of course, they did not understand

because Joseph spoke to them through an interpreter that he knew all that they were saying. When he had finished, and had spoken kindly to them, he bade them farewell.

Early the next morning they arose to make their journey home to Canaan. I can imagine how eagerly they waited the time of departure, how with every step which they took away from Joseph's land they began to breathe a little easier in the supposition that now at last this strange event which had befallen them there would come to an end. They did not know that Joseph had given instructions that their money was to be returned and that in the mouth of the sack of Benjamin his steward was to put the silver cup from which Joseph drank.

Just as they supposed that all was well, suddenly they were overtaken by the servants of Joseph who insisted that the men had stolen from their master. They denied vigorously such a charge; they plead that if they had been interested in stealing they would not have attempted to return the money which had been given back to them after their first visit; and in complete self-confidence they demanded that their belongings be searched. They made the rash statement that if any property belonging to the master of Egypt should be found with them, the man who had it could be put to death and the rest of them would be slaves. And so the search began. I am sure that as they searched the property of Reuben and then Simeon and Levi and Judah and continued on down through the group they began to relax a little and to think that this was all some terrible mistake. And then at last when the mouth of Benjamin's sack was opened, there was the cup.

In desperation the brothers returned to Egypt to face Joseph. His question was, "Why have you dared steal from me?" Their insistent cries that they had not stolen—that there was some mistake, that this could not possibly be what he thought—was overshadowed by the charge, "You have stolen what is mine." Although it was true that Benjamin had not taken the cup, and they were accurate in their protest that they had not stolen from the master's table, yet the charge was true. For I should like to point out that in a very real and vital sense, they had stolen from Joseph far more than the cup which he used on this occasion to focus their attention on the problems which they had created. By their actions of twenty years earlier they had stolen from him those things which could not be replaced with money, nor could their guilt be set aside by any plea on their part that they were innocent of stealing the cup.

### **ARE WE STEALING THE MASTERS CUP?**

I am concerned about this incident, not because they had stolen from Joseph, but because Joseph, in the likeness of my Lord, stands today to resent the charge brought against you and me that we are stealing the the Master's cup. We immediately rebel such an idea, as they, and answer, "But this is foolish. Of course I am not taking that which is the Lord's. I have not stolen from the Savior anything which belongs to Him." But are we sure?

**1. Theft of Time.** Let me remind you that these brothers had stolen time from Joseph — thirteen precious years, rightfully his to with as he pleased, they had taken. In their own selfish purpose they had brought it about that Joseph must spend thirteen years of his life as a slave and a prisoner in Egypt. It was by their action that he had been sold to Potiphar; they had set in motion that chain of circumstances which had led Potiphar's wife falsely to accuse him, which had resulted in Joseph's imprisonment. They had stolen from him thirteen years which he should have been privileged to use in his own interest and to his own good and had denied them to him.

I wonder if you and I are not stealing the Master's cup by taking from our Savior days and months and years which belong to Him for His purposes, but which in our selfishness we are rather using for ourselves. I do not know how much time we have stolen from Him, but every hour and every day which I am privileged to spend upon the earth belongs to Him. It is His by right of creation and by right of redemption, yet I steal from Him the time with which His cup should be filled and use it for myself.

**2. Theft of Honor and Authority.** Not only is this true, but they had stolen from Joseph a position of honor which was properly his because in their household Joseph was the favorite son of the father. He ought to have received from servants and brothers alike the respect and admiration which belonged to him because of the position which he occupied. But they envied him that position; they had been angry when he told them of those dreams in which it was revealed to him that they would bow before him. They despised him because he did not have to work as much as they; they felt that it was their envy that had sold him as a slave into Egypt. But by so doing they had stolen from him that position of dignity and respect and honor which was his right.

Now before you and I decide that we are not stealing the Master's cup, before we convince ourselves that this is a charge of which we are not guilty, do we not need to ask ourselves, 'Have I stolen from my Savior that place of honor and distinction, that place of superiority and authority which is rightfully His in my life? Is it not true that Jesus, who ought to reign as King of Kings in our hearts goes often ignored, that His will and purpose are often despised, that His intention for our lives is completely forgotten?. We act as did these brothers in their unwillingness to give Joseph the position which belonged to him and took, by theft, a place of honor which he richly deserved. My Savior did not come to this earth to be ignored and despised and refused. He did not pay the price of our souls in order that we might live as we please with no regard for His will and purpose. When we satisfy ourselves that because we have at one time or another made some formal declaration of interest in Him, that we have by some mere outward sign indicated allegiance to Jesus and then in the daily activities refuse to honor Him as our King, deny to Him any right to rule in our lives, refuse Him the place of authority which would enable Him to guide and direct us day by day, are we not stealing the Master's cup?

**3. Theft of Love.** But perhaps the most significant theft of all was the theft of love. He was their brother; they were born of the same father; they had grown up in the same

household; there was every reason for Joseph and his brothers to be bound together in bonds of love, and they had stolen from him twenty years' worth of love. They had denied to him the joy of that relationship; they had refused to honor the tie which bound them together; they had kept love from him, which was the greatest theft of all. And in our stealing of the Master's cup, although we do not take some material object that is His, although we would protest vigorously that we are not guilty of the sin of stealing, yet we steal from our Master the love which is rightfully His. He said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." And yet, the days slip by one after another without there being any evidence in our lives of enough love for Him to do what He wants us to do.

When we love the Savior we delight to spend time with Him; yet we find ourselves asking over and over again, "Why do I have to go to church?" or "How often do I have to pray?" as if these were some burdens imposed upon us by a force which could only be tolerated but which has no other rightful claim on our lives. Is this not stealing love from Him? All the gifts which He gave us, all the sacrifice which He made in evidence of His love, all of the anxiety of His great heart over our souls go unnoticed and unanswered while we take the affection which belongs to Him and waste it on ourselves and the world. And after we use it for whatever purposes may seem desirable to us, we wonder why the Master could accuse us of stealing His cup.

## **CONCLUSION**

Now I do not know today what charge Jesus might bring against you or me as individuals. I do not know to what degree we are stealing from Him the time which is His or that rightful place of authority which He should have in our lives or even our love. But each one of us must face for himself the question, "Am I stealing the Master's cup?" Our first reaction, like that of these brothers, might well be to deny the charge. But think back over the last year, or five years, or as in their case, twenty years and ask yourself, "Have I given to Him that which is rightfully His?" If your heart must answer, No, I have taken the life, the soul, the time, the love, the service which belong to Him and kept them for myself; if you must admit, "I have stolen from Jesus that which is His," will you not do something about it now?

You can determine now to be a thief no longer; you can realize today the importance of sharing the benefit of His love and kindness and forgiveness. You can receive in this hour His gracious assurance, "Come unto me." If you are willing to return to Him that love in your obedience, and with faith in His name will by repentance put sin out of your life, confess His precious name before men and be buried with Him in baptism unto the remission of sins, you can give Him the honor, the position, the time and the love which are rightfully His.

-----  
----