

Pouring Out a Drink Offering
Joel 2:23-32
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
October 23, 2016
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church, Clemson, SC

It is not every day that one can open the newspaper and read your own obituary. But that is what happened to **Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite**. To his surprise he read **“The merchant of death is dead.”** His brother had died, but the paper published Alfred’s obituary instead. Reading how he was portrayed in death shocked him. **“Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday.”** It was a wake-up call for Alfred. He thought about his life and decided to leave his wealthy estate to create prizes for humanitarian efforts in areas that interested him and his wife. Thus the Nobel Prizes were established five years after his death in 1896.ⁱ

Perhaps you have done one of those exercises where you write your own obituary. **What will you do with the rest of your life? How will others remember you? Will the central driving force in your life be evident after you are gone? And what will that force say about you?**

The apostle Paul had thought about it. He often wrote in his letters about **running the race to win the prize**, to complete the journey. He wanted to be remembered as **keeping the faith**, obtaining the prize, the

crown of righteousness. Paul gives Timothy his last will and testament. He speaks of pouring out himself as a libation. Twice Paul writes about this. It is in reference to the **drink offering** mentioned throughout the Old Testament. The drink offering was offered along with the burnt and grain or meal offerings.ⁱⁱ It was never offered alongside the sin or trespass offerings because the drink offering was one that was pleasing to God and gave God joy.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the book of Joel, **the grain and drink offerings were cut off from the house of the Lord**^{iv} because of the locusts destroying the crops of grain and grapes. Thus the ravaged land causes the people of Jerusalem and Judah to mourn and cry out for the day of the Lord is near. Even the animals are groaning. The desolation continues, the trumpet is sounded, a powerful army comes, fire devours, war horses charge, the earth quakes. **Who can endure the day of the Lord?** The Lord calls for the people to return to him with all their heart **for the Lord is merciful, hearing their cry and is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**^v

Only when the Lord provides the grain and wine and oil will the people be satisfied. God will not allow his people to be shamed anymore. God blesses the people. Even more, the promise of the spirit of God being poured out shows forth God's generosity and providence.

This is a salvation oracle that **pours out the Spirit on all flesh—a blessing for male and female, young and old, slaves and free.** The promise is that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. The Lord will call the saved from those who survive.

Both in Joel and in the letter to Timothy, the drink offering comes after difficult life circumstances as the Lord forgives and stands by his people and his apostle. The hardships that have faced Paul during his life—shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, and he expresses being left to stand alone at trial with no one to show up to stand with him as a witness. But he knows that the Lord is standing by him. This same Lord God who restored the grains and vineyards of Jerusalem and Judah, is present with his apostle. Paul has fought the good fight, he has finished the race, and he has kept the faith. The fact that Paul knew he was saved was one thing, but what is greater is how he lived with that understanding of continuously being saved by his Lord. This is a never-ending relationship between Paul and the Christ. Now at the conclusion of Paul's life, he is pouring out his life in the fashion of his Lord, to please his God.

Think of it like this. Paul could have poured his life out tearing down the Christian movement or Paul could have poured his life out building up the Christian church. Which of these is a wasted life? Paul's work would have been his way of offering worship to God. His labors were his libations, his drink to share with God in the victory of the churches that were established in the faith.^{vi}

Paul has patterned his life of sacrifice on behalf of others in the faith on the life of his Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Christ emptied himself as a sacrifice, Christ poured himself out to fulfill his mission. Christ continues to pour himself out for us in the new covenant sealed in his blood every time we come to this table. Christ's drink offering is the complete joy offered to God. We are the benefactors of that sacrifice. The drink offering was a sign of victory and God's Sabbath rest.

How are you pouring out your life? Are you pouring your life into your job? Are you pouring your life into a game? Are you pouring your life into some pursuit of fame, or fortune, or happiness? Are you pouring your life into God?

Let's try an exercise. Repeat after me. "I could die today."

Again. "I could die today."

Again. “I could die today.”

Think about how it feels to say that.

How are you pouring out your life today?

For the next week I invite you to say this every time you open or close a door. “I could die today.”

In his book, *How Then Shall We Live? Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our Lives* author Wayne Muller, who is also a minister and therapist shares conversations he has had with persons who are searching for meaning in their lives. This exercise of saying “I could die today” is born out of one of those conversations.

Muller tells of a man named James who feared dying. He asked James to say “I could die today” as a way of facing his greatest enemy. After a time James began laughing. James still felt the fear arising in his chest, but he said that by saying, ‘I could die today’ he began to be set free. He felt more peaceful about everything. Knowing that he could die makes living less of a battle against death. Instead he lives his days doing what he loves. He is not dying. *He is living.*”^{vii}

Another question that Muller has posed to another person is this one. “What would you want your life to look like if you knew you had 10 years to live?” It is one of those questions that helps us frame our obituary. For when we look death in the face, only then does life become valuable. Muller works with many AIDS patients, PTSD soldiers, cancer patients. In his work he has studied other traditions and worked with global peace leader Thich Nhat Hanh who is a Buddhist Zen Master and shares this insight which points to what Paul’s reflection indicates.

There are some people who believe that they will enter the Kingdom of God, or the Pure Land, after they die. I don’t agree with them. I know that you don’t have to die in order to get into the Kingdom of God. In fact, ***you have to be alive to do so.***^{viii}

Maybe the Zen Master understands our faith better than many of us. Paul understood and he did the basics of the Kingdom of God living—

- he showed up,
- he listened,
- he proclaimed the gospel and
- he did it all over again.

Paul lived his life, poured it out to God in worship and service, and at the end **he knew he had kept the faith**. He remembered that no one came to his defense the first time and even **forgave** them for it.

He was sure of the Lord's presence being continually beside him, giving him strength so that he might proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

The Lord rescued Paul. And the Lord will rescue you and me too.

Don't waste your life. **Pour it out as an offering so that it brings joy to God.**

I invite you to turn to **Hymn 710** and join me in singing as **We Lift Our Voices** this day in prayer.

ⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Nobel accessed 2016.10.22 and <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/wake-up-call-write-your-obituary.html> accessed 2016.10.22.

ⁱⁱ Numbers 15:1-10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Langham, Andrew. "Comments on the Drink Offering," biblecenter.org, page 3.

^{iv} Joel 1:9-12.

^v Joel 1:13-2:13.

^{vi} <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-25-the-theology-of-the-drink-offering/> accessed 2016.10.22.

^{vii} Muller, Wayne. *How Then Shall We Live –Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our Lives* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1996), 168.

^{viii} *Ibid*, 156.