

OpenTheo

Q&A#38 What Does Jesus' Abstention From Wine Mean?

September 3, 2018



Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "Does Christ's abstention from wine until the consummation of the Kingdom have any connection to Lemuel's mother's counsel in Proverbs 31 regarding the kingly use of alcohol? If so, what's the best way to present this connection?"

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account:
<https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these videos, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>.

My new Soundcloud account is here: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, does Christ's abstention from wine until the consummation of the kingdom have any connection to Lemuel's mother's counsel in Proverbs 31 regarding the kingly use of alcohol? If so, what's the best way to present this connection? So, Christ's abstention is in Mark chapter 14, verse 23 following. The other reference is Proverbs 30, beginning at verse 4. That reference to the king and his judgement in chapter 30 of Proverbs, I think is referring to the king in the practice of judgement.

For the king to give himself to drink would be to undermine his capacity for judgement when he needs to judge. However, the king is also associated with the drinking of wine. The king is someone who has a cup bearer.

The king is someone who is associated with the wine of wisdom, the wine of rest. Wine is something that tests the heart. It reveals whether someone is wise or foolish.

This is something that we see in Proverbs and elsewhere. Wine is good. It's a drink

associated with rest and fulfilment and completion.

And the end of the day, it's also a Sabbath drink. But it's not the sort of thing that you should drink on the job. And so priests and kings are not to drink on the job.

But yet the king, as he enters into the rest of his kingdom, does drink. And it's appropriate for him to drink in the rest of his kingdom as an expression of his forming of peace. Now, what we see in scripture is a number of references to kings drinking, kings with cup bearers, kings associated with vines and things like that.

Christ is associated with the vine. Christ is someone who drinks. Christ does not drink, however, when he's about to undertake his great work, whether that's just before he's going to undertake this or whether it's during his work when he's offered something to relieve the pain, something alcoholic.

He refrains at that point. But yet he does drink at other points to the point that he's told that he's a glutton and a winebibber, that he's obviously drinking. He's obviously associating with people who drink.

This is not something that's inappropriate. Now, who are the people that don't drink in scripture? Among others, you have the Nazarites. The Nazarites have to refrain from wine, and that might be a long term, lifelong thing like Samuel or John the Baptist.

Or it can be a short term thing as someone goes into warfare and takes a vow or takes on a particular mission. So we see Paul taking on a vow at a certain point and Christ, as he faces his great work, takes a vow. And I think this could be connected with a Nazarite type vow, that his refusal to drink at this point is associated with that entrance into holy warfare.

There's more going on here, though, I think. I think we need to read this passage of Christ's abstention from wine against the background of some sort of Passover liturgy that was already in place. The Passover liturgy in various ways had already become associated with the Messiah.

We see this early on in we see it in documents from Qumran. We have other references that suggest that these associations were already being drawn. And so Christ takes bread and wine, things that already bear meaning and meaning within a worked out liturgy of the supper.

This is not just one cup, for instance. There are a number of cups that are drunk and then there are hymns sung at certain points. So Christ takes one of the cups and associates it with his blood and does not partake in the final cup, which is associated with the coming of the kingdom.

And that he's going to delay until the actual coming of the kingdom. And so there's a

connection of this. It's a symbolic action within the framework of a ritual that already bears great symbolic import.

So the fact that Christ takes this bread, this cup and gives them that particular charge meaning associated with his presence and his being the Messiah. That has weight to it because it's not just any old bread. It's not just any old wine.

This is bread and wine that's already freighted, laden with meaning as a result of the Passover and then the later developments of the liturgy from that. And then Christ's abstention on the cross is his holy warfare, preparing for the time when in the kingdom, in the age to come, he will partake of wine as he enters into his rest, the completion of his work. But that is going to be delayed.

So it's an incomplete celebration until that point. This is one of the things that we see more significantly in our celebration of the supper. Every celebration of the supper is an anticipation of what will be enjoyed on that last great supper as we enter into the fullness of the kingdom.

There is something incomplete about our celebration. Now, we may not practice the same liturgies that they had within the first century, but we still have a sense of this celebration as pointing towards a completion that has not yet occurred. That we are celebrating until he comes.

We are celebrating until we join in that great wedding feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb, until that point where we drink the cup new in the kingdom. Now, another connection that some have drawn, one person has drawn that I think Peter Lighthouse had a blog post on this a while back, is a connection between Joseph and Jesus at this point. That Joseph, the suggestion is that he was cut up.

He was some separated as not just a prince type figure, but also as a Nazarite type figure that he did not drink until he was reunited with his brethren. And at that point, they had a feast of wine to celebrate. And in the same way, Christ, as he eats with his brethren, he delays that final celebration of the final cup until there is that point of reuniting with his brethren in the kingdom in the age to come when they will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

Now, Joseph and his brethren were reunited in Egypt and reunited with a celebration of wine. And we see also the association with kings and wine at this point. Kings and bread and wine.

The king has a butler and a baker in prison, one associated with wine and the other associated with bread. And Joseph is the one that gives bread, ends up giving bread to Egypt. And he's the one that ends up being the person who's associated with the cup.

And so there are connections there as well. But I won't go into those. I think it's

significant then to realize that this is an event that probably makes most sense against the background of a liturgy that existed within the first century that had already developed around the Passover liturgy that had connected that with the Messiah, with the coming of the kingdom.

And that Christ abstains from the final cup in order to attach that final cup with the fulfillment that is awaited within the kingdom to come. And the cross is his great work of battle. He's again, it's like a Nazarite vow in this respect that he's preparing to go into that battle.

He abstains for that period of time so that when the final cup comes, he can share it as he's reunited with his brethren. Now, those are suggestive thoughts. I wouldn't put too much weight on most of those.

I think the suggestion that it has some basis within liturgies of the first century probably has. You can put some weight on that. But some of the other suggestions around Joseph, some other suggestions around the Nazarite connection, those hold some weight.

But I would be cautious of putting too much weight on them. But I would not associate it directly with the instruction concerning wine in the statements given to Lemuel. There is, in that period of judgment, the king is supposed to abstain from wine.

But Christ's abstention from wine, there's a few more things going on there. And while there may be some connections, I don't think that those are prominent within the context of Jesus' teaching or within the context of the gospel more generally. I hope that this helps.

If you have any further questions, leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support my videos, then please do so using my Patreon account. Thank you very much for watching and I hope that you found this helpful and I look forward to being back again tomorrow, hopefully with a book review.

Thank you.