

LUKE

Part 78: "The True and Better Passover"

Luke 22:1-30

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Sunday, March 15, 2020 (The Third Sunday of Lent)

Scripture Reading

"Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.' They said to him, 'Where will you have us prepare it?' He said to them, 'Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.' And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!' And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel'" (Luke 22:1–30, ESV).

Introduction

Our passage today begins with a reference to the Passover feast: *“Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover”* (Luke 22:1, ESV).

For the Jewish people in the ancient world and the Jewish people of today, there is not a more important meal than the Passover meal. That’s because, for the Jewish people, Passover is not just a meal. It is a meal that is imbued with the history and heritage of Israel.

The origins of the Passover go all the way back to the Old Testament book of Exodus. Exodus tells the story of how the Israelites, who were once slaves of the Egyptian empire, were set free and delivered from the tyranny of Pharaoh.

But the story of the Exodus was always understood by the people of God as meaning something much more than political freedom. The Exodus was about how God himself goes to spiritual war for his people.

In fact, thanks to a few movies, the story of the ten plagues is pretty famous, even among people who aren’t that familiar with the Bible. But did you know that the plagues of the book of Exodus were not random displays of power, but instead, each plague was designed to show that God was sovereign over every false god and goddess of the Egyptian religion?

For example, the first of the ten plagues was the Nile River turning into blood. But the Nile wasn’t just a river to the Egyptian people. It represented the Egyptian god *Hapi*. In this plague, Israel’s God is saying that he is sovereign over *Hapi*, and therefore he is sovereign over Egypt. As Mike Wilkerson points out, *“Pharaoh had set himself up as a god over the people; but through the plagues, the true and living God showed that he alone is God, wielding the forces of creation to unmake Pharaoh. Each plague represented God’s judgment against one of the false gods of Egypt... God mocked Egypt’s idols; the very gods they worshiped, he turned into plagues against them.”*¹

This is why in the last plague, God brought judgment upon Pharaoh himself – who was viewed as a living god. In the last plague, God declared through his servant Moses that an angel of death would take the life of every firstborn child of every family. This judgment of death would come for the firstborn of the lowliest slave to the firstborn of Pharaoh himself. This plague was a representation of death that comes from humanity’s sin and rebellion against God. However, God also provided a way of rescue from this divine judgment.

If a family were to sacrifice a lamb and place the blood of that lamb over their doorposts and window, the life of the firstborn child would be spared. God, thus, called his people

¹ Wilkerson, Mike. *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and The Wounds We Carry*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 68-69.

to put their faith in the rescue that he provided so that death might pass over them. This is why this day was called the Passover.

And each year, at the anniversary of this moment, God's people were to eat the Passover feast and to retell the story of how God delivered them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

And the Passover feast is the reason that Jesus and his disciples have now arrived in the city of Jerusalem. But there is something that is very and special about this moment. Jesus has not come to Jerusalem to receive this feast. He has come to be this feast. In fact, he is about to do something that will give this feast a whole new meaning. With that in mind, let's take a deeper look at our passage.

Exposition

1. A New Conspiracy

Ever since Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, the religious leaders of the city have been conspiring to destroy him. They have tried to spar with him, and they have tried to spy on him. They have tried to get him to stumble into heresy, and they have tried to get him to stumble into treason. And they have failed miserably.

At one level, I think this is showing us something very clear. Jesus will not go to the cross because he was outwitted or fell into a trap devised by men. As Luke himself says later in the book of Acts, Jesus was delivered up to evil men only by the "definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

Jesus will go to the cross because it is the plan of God for redemption. But Jesus will go to the cross nonetheless. But after failing so often at capturing Jesus, how will the enemies of Jesus hatch a conspiracy that will finally work?

Let's take a look at the text: *"And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd"* (Luke 22:2–6, ESV).

When the enemies of God's people cannot succeed in attacking them externally, they will instead join God's people and attack them internally. The catalyst to the death of Jesus will be one of the twelve disciples – Judas Iscariot.

I grew up going to a church that had an entry hall that was filled with prints of Kenneth Wyatt's painting of the twelve apostles. In his depictions of some of the apostles, some of them look bold and courageous like Peter (show [1Peter](#)). John (show [2John](#)) looks kind, filled with love, and has a mullet. But if you have ever seen the picture of Judas (show [3Judas](#)), you would think, "I don't know, I don't think I can trust that guy."

But, in reality, before he betrayed Jesus, Judas looked just like the rest of Jesus's twelve disciples. Judas had walked with Jesus from the earliest days of his ministry. He heard the Sermon on the Mount with his own ears. He witnessed Jesus heal the sick, feed the hungry, and resurrect the dead. Along with the other disciples, Judas was commissioned with power and authority by Jesus himself to cast out demons, work miracles, and preach about the kingdom of God.²

Yet, Judas conspires with the chief priests and scribes to murder Jesus. Now, we don't know Judas's motive for certain. Maybe it was greed. Maybe he had become offended at Jesus. Maybe Judas expected Jesus to be a political messiah and that if he was arrested, it would force his hand to spark a political revolution. Whatever the case, Jesus's betrayal came at the hands of one who was supposed to be one of his closest friends.

However, there is a small detail that we should not miss in Judas's betrayal. It comes as the result of Satan entering him (Lk 22:3). In other words, there is a spiritual warfare dimension to all of these events.

In the same way that there was an element of spiritual warfare present in the events of the Exodus and the first Passover, so too there is an element of spiritual warfare in the true and better Exodus and true and better Passover of Jesus Christ.

And just as in the Exodus, in which God used the pride of Pharaoh to bring about the deliverance of his people, so too with the Cross of Jesus Christ, God sovereignly allows the powers of evil to do their worst, so that the power of evil itself might be defeated.

As N.T. Wright has commented on this passage, "When the powers of evil do their worst, and crucify the one who brings God's salvation, God uses that very event to defeat those powers."³

2. A New Covenant

Verses 7 through 13 relate a seemingly odd and insignificant account about how Jesus and his disciples find a room in which to share the Passover meal together. Jesus sends Peter and John into the city. They are to find a man carrying a water jug, which would have been unique, since carrying water was a task usually given to children or female servants. They find such a man, they find a room (with a table for a party of thirteen), and they prepare the Passover meal for Jesus and the rest of the disciples.

² "Here is one who was chosen after a night of prayer to be in the inner circle of Jesus. He was taught and then sent to minister with apostolic authority. He enjoyed the same success as the others on those missions to preach, to heal, and to cast out demons. He was in every sense of the word an apostle. What happened? There would be no value in attempting a new theory to explain Judas. The church is at its best when it stops asking, "Why did Judas do it?" and instead examines its own record of discipleship." Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 253.

³ Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 263–264.

So what's the point? The point is that Jesus is showing foreknowledge and power over the most seemingly insignificant details of this story. There is not a single rogue atom in this universe that is outside of his command. God has prepared his provision for the Passover meal for his twelve disciples. But God is preparing and even greater provision for his disciples of all ages.

So Jesus and his disciples sit down, and they share the Passover feast together in a moment that we now commonly call the last supper. Most people, when they think of this moment, think of the famous painting "The Last Supper" (show 4Last Supper) by the Renaissance master Leonardo Da Vinci.

Luke tells us that Jesus shares this meal with his disciples (Lk 22:14). He tells them that he has longed to share this special moment with them, and then he promises them that he will not share in this feast again until the fulfillment of the kingdom of God (Lk 22:15-18).

This promise is not any ordinary promise or oath. Jesus is making a new covenant with his people (see Jer 31:31-34). A covenant is an inherently sacrificial oath that was usually sealed in blood. In the ancient world, covenants were the most powerful and binding promise that persons could enter into.

God had once made a covenant with the nation of Israel after he set them free from the tyranny of Egypt. Now, he will make a new and better covenant with his people, as he prepares to set them free from the tyranny of sin!

And because Jesus is making a new covenant, he presides over this meal in a way that the disciples would have found very unexpected. Whenever the bread of the Passover meal was given to the participants, the one presiding over the meal would show the people at his table the bread and say, "This is the bread of our affliction, which our fathers ate in the wilderness." But that is *not* what Jesus says. Verse 19 tells us, "*And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'*" (Luke 22:19, ESV).

Jesus intentionally changes a ceremony that had performed year after year for generations. He is saying, "No longer is this the bread of our fathers' affliction. This is the bread of *my* affliction."

Then Jesus took the cup, a cup that was symbol of God's redemption of his people from slavery, and said, "*...This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*" (Luke 22:20, ESV).⁴

⁴ Traditionally, there were four cups in a Passover meal. Each one represented a promise from Ex 6:6-8. The third cup represented God's redemption. Most scholars associate the cup of Lk 22:19 with the cup of redemption.

Thus, every week when we gather as the people of God and observe the Lord's Supper, what we are doing is observing the Passover feast that comes to us through Jesus.

But I want to show you one glaring omission in Luke's account of this Passover meal. It's also a glaring omission from Leonardo's "Last Supper" painting (show **4The Last Supper** again). In fact, it is possible that if a Jew from the first century were to look at this painting, they would not recognize that this was a Passover feast for several reasons. One, they sitting in chairs, not reclining at a floor table as they would in the ancient Near East. Two, there are white people. But, three, and this is the most important, there is no lamb on the table at this Passover feast.

The lamb was the centerpiece of the Passover feast. In the first Passover, it was the lamb that was God's means of grace by which his people could find rescue. It was the lamb that endured death so that death would Passover God's people. It was the lamb that was slain so that God's people might be set free.

But Luke mentions no lamb at the last supper. Leonardo paints no lamb at the last supper. Perhaps, we might think, there is no lamb at the last supper. But we would be wrong.

Because Jesus is the lamb. He will be the means of grace by which we find rescue. He will endure death on the cross so that death might pass over us. He is the lamb who was slain so that we might be set free.

He is the culmination of the story of Israel. He is the focal point of history, from a time before history began.

How, then, should we respond to the beauty of God's plan for redemption and the sacrificial love of Christ?

Well, I tell you the one thing we should not do. We should not get into an argument about which one of us is the greatest. But that is exactly what the disciples do at the last supper.

3. A New Concept of Greatness

Moments after Jesus has just finished telling them that his body will be broken and his blood will be shed, this happens: "*A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest*" (Luke 22:24, ESV).

Here's how this likely went down. Jesus says, "One of you will betray me." The disciples ask themselves which one of us would betray Jesus?" Then they start pointing fingers, "I bet it's probably you!" "Me, it can't be me! I would never betray Jesus! I'm the greatest of all the disciples!" "No you're not, because I'm the greatest."

This isn't the first time the disciples have gotten into this exact argument. And fascinatingly, this almost always happens directly after Jesus talks about going to the

cross. Look back at Luke 9: *“And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.’ But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest”* (Luke 9:43–46, ESV).

How quickly we can turn from the glory of the cross to the glory of self!

But Jesus then challenges them toward a new concept of greatness. In the kingdom of the world, greatness always is equated with the power to coerce. But in the kingdom of God, true greatness is evidenced by the capacity to serve and love sacrificially.

In the days to come, as the disciples of Jesus, we will have the opportunity to show our capacity to serve and love sacrificially.

In a world of fear, we have the opportunity to bear the spiritual fruit of peace. And from that place of peace that passes all understanding, we can pray for one another. We can make phone calls and check in on one another. We can look for ways to support one another. If we have food or cleaning items that others need, we can share with one another. We can look for ways to serve the elderly and vulnerable by doing grocery runs, providing meals, and other ways of showing practical acts of love.

But when the world sees us as the body of Christ, I hope they don't see a version of the world that is runs from others in fear or beats its chest in prideful bravado. When the world sees us, I pray they see Jesus, with a servant's towel, washing the feet of the unworthy and the unlikely.

In fact, John's gospel shows us that at this last supper, Jesus concluded the meal by washing the feet of his own disciples.

Empires of this world conquer by the power of the sword. But Jesus conquers not with a soldier's sword, but with a servant's towel.

This truly great one will soon endure humiliation and death, but as a result, he will be given a name above all names.

Conclusion

In a few moments, those in this room will have the privilege of receiving The Lord's Supper together. But as I look around, I know there are many people in our church family that are not here today. In fact, we don't know for sure the next time that we will get to observe this sacrament together.

But I look forward to that day with great eagerness. And even more, I look forward to the even greater Passover feast that is yet to come.

The prophet Isaiah paints a picture of that day to come: *“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation”* (Isaiah 25:6–9, ESV).

Long before the priests hatched their plan against Jesus, God has been conspiring from eternity past for this glorious redemption and restoration of all things through his son Jesus.

He is our hope. He is the true and better Passover. He shows us true greatness. In the days to come, may we show his greatness to the watching world.

AMEN.

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