

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message

Scripture Luke 22:7-38

I hope our study of the Gospel of Luke has been very enlightening and spiritually beneficial. My objective was to discover spiritual lessons from the interactions Jesus had with many different kinds of people. He encountered individuals who were blind, lame, diseased, demon possessed, even dead. He was with individuals who raised objections to His ministry and other individuals who left behind everything they had in order to become His followers. From each encounter we tried to discover spiritual lessons which were significant and helpful to us.

This week we will concentrate on the final hours that Jesus had with His disciples. Our reading will explain to us the setting.

Read Luke 22:7-13

Jesus' final hours with His disciples were at the Passover meal. The preparations for this meal were on the 14th of Nisan according to the Hebrew calendar. This was the day in which all leaven was removed from Jewish houses and the Passover lambs were killed and food was prepared. Passover, also known as the Day of Unleavened Bread, began after sundown. Sundown was the beginning of Passover because, in the Jewish calendar, night came before day.

Luke indicates that Jesus initiated the preparations for the Passover meal. Some commentators think that Jesus had prearranged the location. Commentators have also suggested that Jesus needed to keep the location a secret so that Judas Iscariot, who had already agreed to betray Him, would not be able to tip off the authorities about where to arrest Him. During the meal, Jesus had some additional important information to explain to the eleven Apostles, and He wanted to institute the communion ritual which would be observed in the future by the Church. Therefore, according to the commentators, there was the need for caution and secrecy. The assumptions of the commentators might be correct.

The verses reveal that Jesus was in control of circumstances. The preparations for the Passover meal substantiate that fact. Jesus selected Peter and John to make everything ready. They were given some very specific instructions about finding the location. It was somewhat like the “cloak and dagger” routines I had to follow in my travels in Soviet republics in the 80s! Peter and John followed the instructions carefully and they found everything “just as Jesus had told them.”

Read Luke 22:14-23

I am not going to comment very much on these verses. I hope you sense the intensity in Jesus’ words as He said “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” The Passover was a time to give thanks to God for His great deliverance in the Exodus. Jesus knew that his earthly ministry was drawing to a close. He knew that He was approaching the climax point of His incarnation. He understood the pain He would experience within the next few hours, and yet He was eager to get on with His mission — namely to die as the sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

Jesus was aware that His next opportunity to share a meal with His followers would not occur until He and they would be united permanently in the future kingdom of God. These moments with the disciples must have been bittersweet for Jesus. His destiny required separation from them. Only after the purposes of His suffering and death were fulfilled, and after the kingdom of God was established visibly and in reality at the end of this age, only then would they be able to celebrate again.

Until that time comes, the followers of Jesus must cling to their memories and hopes. We celebrate communion “in remembrance of Jesus.” That’s our look backward. We hold on to the promised assurance of being with Jesus in the kingdom of God. That’s our look to the future. Jesus was prepared to offer His body and shed His blood for His followers. In accordance with the Father’s divine plan, He had to be delivered up and put to death for the sins of humanity. His death was linked to the establishment of a new covenant. Throughout Biblical history, covenants were always established with the shedding of blood.

There is a second heartbreak mentioned in these verses. Even as Jesus was readying Himself to die for the human race, one of His close companions was making plans to give Jesus over in betrayal. Judas Iscariot was the human agent through which the purposes of God were accomplished. Scripture indicates that God uses human agents to accomplish His eternal purposes.

There was speculation among the apostles about which one of them would betray Jesus. Think about the impact Jesus' statement had on the Apostles. There would suddenly be distrust and suspicion among them as they considered who the betrayer might be. It was this uncertainty about the disloyalty to Jesus that became the basis of the next two sections of Luke chapter 22.

Read Luke 22:24-30

The apostles began to quarrel among themselves as to which of them should be considered as the most important, and hence, the least likely to be the betrayer. The text indicates that a "rivalry" existed between them over this matter of ego and personal importance. Even after being with Jesus for more than three years, the apostles still did not understand the need for Jesus to be the suffering Savior. They could only think of Him in terms of His presumed political and military triumph over earthly enemies and the position to which He would ascend as the Ruler of Israel, and the positions they would be given as His close associates.

This topic of greatness had come up previously, in Luke chapter 9 (*see Luke 9: 46-48*). At that time, Jesus had a little child stand beside Him. He then pointed out that the Apostles should not seek status for themselves, but rather, should identify themselves with those who had no status at all, like the child. Jesus had modeled this attitude throughout His years of ministry to the physically needy people of rural Galilee and Judea. Jesus pointed out that "He who is least among you all, he is the greatest." On another occasion He declared that "individuals who would not receive the kingdom of God like a little child would never enter it" (*Luke 18:16-17*).

Unfortunately, Jesus had to again deal with the ambitions and selfish thinking of His close companions, even in their final hours together. He had frequently taught them that His kingdom was a spiritual and heavenly kingdom, and He had carefully explained that His time on earth would end in death, not in political and military conquest, but all this information just went over the heads of the Apostles.

Jesus response to the dispute of His followers began with His description of two unacceptable characteristics of secular leaders: They “lord it over others,” and they claim for themselves the title of “Benefactors.” Let me tell you about my observations. I have lived in and traveled in countries which were ruled by despots and egomaniacs. These leaders, some were kings and some “presidents,” were really just conceited autocratic dictators. Their pictures had to be prominently displayed in every public building and their statues were at every major intersection of roadways. Their power was exploitative.

Jesus declared that His followers were not to be like earthly rulers. He then made two points about true greatness: First, His followers were not to exploit their positions as people who were highly regarded but must, instead, regard themselves as young people who were not yet accorded any honors. In other words, leadership must not be regarded as a privileged position with benefits, such as an elder of advanced years might have. Rather, the godly leader must have the child-like humility of someone who was at the bottom rung of society.

Secondly, Jesus pointed out that His followers must carry out their responsibilities as those who serve as slaves. Jesus illustrated this point in verse 27 by comparing the person who sat at the table with the person who carried the food from the kitchen. Jesus wanted His followers to be like the kitchen servant. He wanted them to direct their service efforts to people who were more important than themselves.

Jesus then used Himself as the illustration. He said that He had come to earth to serve the physical and spiritual needs of people. Just few days before the triumphal entry He had announced that “the Son of Man had not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Matthew 20:28*).

The Gospel of John describes how Jesus, in order to drive home this point about servanthood, “during the meal, got up, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples” (*John 13:2-5*). After He had done this, He said to the Apostles, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him” (*John 13:12-16*).

Jesus had served hundreds, maybe thousands, of people by reversing the effects of illness, disease, and death. Yet He washed the disciples' feet in humble service. These actions demonstrated His greatness, which was defined by His attitude toward and service to others, not by any position of privilege or authority. On the basis of His teaching and example, He insisted that His Apostles not act like secular leaders, but to put concern for people ahead of concern for themselves.

After Jesus had expressed His disapproval of the apostles' ambitions and bickering, He acknowledged the loyalty of those who had stood and were standing with Him in His trials. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, had by this point left the Upper Room, so Jesus was directing His statement to the remaining eleven Apostles. His reference to “my trials” would have included all the hardships He had endured in His ministry journeys. His statement in chapter 9, that “foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (*Luke 9:58*) is a possible explanation of the hardships He experienced. Other trials would have been the hostility of the Jewish authorities. The Apostles, because of their close association with Jesus, would have faced these same pressures, and, to their credit, they had faithfully stood alongside Him.

Jesus rewarded their faithfulness with a promise. He conferred on them a kingdom in the same way that the Father had conferred a kingdom on Him. This was further assurance that these eleven men who were with Him would share in His rule. They would “eat and drink at His table in the kingdom,” a picture of the celebration and joy that would be theirs; and they would “sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” a picture of their leadership authority.

This promise relates back to the previous statements of Jesus that He would celebrate with the Apostles in the future kingdom of God. The Apostles were thus instructed to not argue over earthly status and worldly power, but to serve faithfully here on earth and to anticipate the heavenly joys and spiritual leadership privileges that would be theirs in God's eternal kingdom.

When the Apostles were arguing about their importance, the Apostle who probably assumed he was the most deserving of recognition was Peter. He had been among the first to respond to Jesus, he had been the most adventuresome of the Twelve, and he often was the spokesman for the group. Peter was also a very self-confident individual, as revealed in the next few verses.

Read Luke 22:31-34

Jesus' warning to Simon Peter came immediately after His commendation for the Apostles' faithfulness. It seems that Satan had asked for and received permission to test the loyalty of the Apostles to Jesus in the hopes that they would be divided. Jesus directed His warning to Simon Peter, but He said that "Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat." The pronoun "you" (*Gr. hymas*) in that statement is plural, referring to all the Apostles. The phrase "sift like wheat" was a Jewish idiom roughly equivalent to the American expressions, "run through the wringer" or "tear to shreds."

Jesus did not prevent Satan from bringing pressure on the Apostles. It is interesting that He prayed only for Simon. His prayer was that Simon's faith "would not fail," a term which had the meaning of "not die out or disappear completely." Yes, Simon would deny his relationship with Jesus, but because of Jesus' intercession, it would not be a total renunciation. Jesus predicted that Simon Peter would turn back, and after his faith was restored, he would have the responsibility to strengthen the other Apostles, who, apparently, would also fail their test of loyalty.

Simon Peter was a man not lacking in self-confidence. He protested that he was "ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death." He was confident that he could handle whatever threat would come his way. Jesus, however, knew about the powers of temptation and the inability of humans to resist Satan. He knew what Peter would do when the enemies would ask about his allegiance to Jesus. He would, on that very night, deny Jesus three times. The point is, behind the scenes there is an evil spiritual enemy, Satan, who is bent on our destruction. Often we forget or fail to see him.

This story of Peter is a warning to every believer about the dangers of self-sufficiency. The encouragement in this story is the power of Jesus' intercession. He did not pray that Peter's failure be prevented, but that there not be any permanent damage. More than that, God is able to bring good results from negative circumstances. Peter eventually was the key to the restoration of others to faith. Peter was able to strengthen fellow believers after his fall because he understood how easy it was to fall. Failure is regrettable, but sometimes the best lessons come to us after bad experiences.

Now we come to the final section for today.

Read Luke 22:35-38

These verses are Jesus' final instructions to the Apostles. Verse 35 refers back to chapters 9 and 10, where Jesus sent out His disciples with a minimum of supplies. At that time, the disciples were learning to trust God for everything they needed and wanted to accomplish. Jesus had instructed them to "take nothing for the journey, no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic."

In verse 36, Jesus told the Apostles that there was going to be a change in their circumstances. They would now need a purse, a bag, even a sword because He was about to leave them on their own for a period of time. He reminded them, again, that He would be treated as a criminal, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He knew that they would be confused by events affecting His death, and would be without His presence and guidance.

Jesus was preparing the eleven Apostles for the events of the next few hours and days, but unfortunately, the disciples, once again, failed to grasp what Jesus was saying. They accepted His words in a literal sense and not in the figurative sense He intended. Jesus was not advocating battles with real swords. The Apostles were being drawn into a great cosmic struggle. They were going to be "sifted by Satan," and perplexed by His death. They would be in a spiritual battle where spiritual swords and resources would be needed.

[A short time later, when the crowd came to arrest Jesus, He commanded His followers to put away their swords and then He healed the man who had been wounded. He had clearly taught, and then demonstrated, that the use of the sword was not appropriate in defense of His cause.]

This passage ends on a “downer,” rather than being “upbeat.” When the disciples uncovered their two swords, I imagine Jesus getting a look of resignation on His face and shaking His head. It was too late for Him to rebuke the Apostles concerning their false notion about the weapons; too late for further teaching. He had taken them as far as He could in the time available. At this bittersweet moment, He could only say, “That is enough,” after which He cut off further discussion.

But Jesus knew that the Apostles had been specially chosen for their future responsibilities as leaders of the Church. He knew that He had implanted the essential truths about God’s kingdom ways in their minds. He knew that they would not get their spiritual understanding all together until He sent to them the promised Holy Spirit. And He had prayed that their faith would not fail in the next few difficult days. Even though they would be on their own for a period of time, Jesus’ authoritative protection was with them. They would come through the trauma of Jesus’ death “sifted like wheat,” “wrung through the wringer.” Surprisingly, they would soon be the leaders in the Church.

Lessons from this intimate time of Jesus with His Apostles:

1. Jesus cares enough for us to prepare a place for future fellowship (see John 14:1-6).
2. Jesus has taught us His way of living; no grabbing for greatness, but serving others for His glory.
3. Jesus prays for our steadfastness and loyalty.
4. We are always under the umbrella of Jesus’ authority.