

# Northolt Park Baptist Church

## Meals with Jesus – Luke 22:7-30

In the weeks since Christmas, we have been looking at Jesus in Luke's gospel – particularly the picture that Luke paints of Jesus *eating*, because who Jesus eats with and why he eats with such people tells us things about who Jesus is and what he came to do.

We have seen him eating at the home of Levi, the tax collector, along with all his dodgy tax collector, stockbroker and banking friends.

We've seen him eating in Simon's home, where he has his feet anointed with perfume by a dodgy woman.

We've seen him eating in Mary and Martha's home, teaching those women what matters most of all.

In chapters 11 and 14, we see him in the homes of Pharisees; but he uses both occasions to speak to his hosts and those gathered about the kind of faith God really wants – not the sort of commitment that's obsessed with minute details of purity while it misses what's most important in life; and not the sort of hope that's looking forward to the great banquet at the end of time, but makes excuses about missing all that God is doing meanwhile, right here and now, in Jesus' ministry.

Last time we saw him at Zacchaeus' home, bringing salvation to someone else who was viewed as an outcast of society, but who, says Jesus, is a Son of Abraham.

And so we come to chapter 22 and *another* meal, which takes place in a house in Jerusalem. And this is perhaps the most well-known meal of all, sometimes called the Last Supper.

The meal has certainly captured the imagination of artists over the years. Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the last supper is perhaps the most famous of all, and Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* sparked renewed interest in it. In the novel, one of the

characters explains that the figure at the right-hand of Jesus in Da Vinci's painting is not the apostle John but actually Mary Magdalene. Of course, there's absolutely no historical basis whatsoever for that assertion.

Still, the influence of Da Vinci's painting is seen in how many times it's been copied and parodied. A quick search on the internet finds a Walt Disney version, a Sopranos version, a Simpsons version, an iPhone and iPod version, a Battlestar Gallactica version, and a lego version...

But while Da Vinci's painting is famous and influential, it's also inaccurate! His painting shows western people sitting at one long table. In fact, as we saw when we looked at the story in Luke chapter 7, Jesus and the disciples would have *reclined* at the table. As it happens, that's what Luke tells us in 22:14. We have to imagine low tables set out in a U-shape with the disciples reclining on couches, and with one side left open for servants to serve food. (Some paintings of the Last Supper by Nicholas Poussin try to capture this reclining aspect.)

Art aside, it becomes clear as we read the passage in Luke that this is a meal with significance. We can look at its significance by thinking about three things in particular.

### 1. A passover meal which looks back

Luke seems to emphasise this by referring to it lots of times. He begins with it in verse 1. Then, in verse 7 he tells us that the day of unleavened bread arrives. And in verse 8, Jesus sends some disciples to prepare for it. Then the passover is mentioned again in verses 11 and 13.

There are some odd goings-on here, with what feels like secret passwords and hidden rooms. These are not necessarily miraculous events; they're more like carefully pre-planned

arrangements. The point is that this meal is important, and Jesus wants to make sure it will go ahead. In fact, that's what he himself tells the disciples, as we can see as we read on (22:14-16). One cup is mentioned in 22:17. There were four cups used in a Passover meal, so this was probably one of them.

How many times does Luke tell us it was a Passover meal? Six times. Well, what was the Passover all about? Passover reminded Israel of God's deliverance of them out of Egypt centuries earlier under Moses, recorded in the Book of Exodus. The Passover was to Palestinian Jews what the 4th July is to Americans, or what the 12th July, and the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, is to Protestants in Northern Ireland. It was a time for nationalistic zeal – a national celebration of the time when God liberated his people from slavery.

Of course, we can imagine that people would celebrate it also hoping and looking forward to the time when God would liberate them again... maybe this time from these oppressive Romans who shouldn't be in their land – *God's* land – anyway!

For Jesus, this was a significant Passover meal, because he has come to bring about a new exodus, to do for Israel – and not just for Israel, but for the whole world – what God did at that first exodus.

The means of judgment on Egypt and the means of salvation of Israel was a slaughtered lamb, with the angel of the Lord killing all the firstborn in Egypt, but 'passing over' those whose houses were marked with the blood of a lamb. What a tragedy that must have been for Egypt. The Bible tells us that there wasn't a family in the whole of Egypt where someone didn't die that night. But for those who were God's people, they were able to look at the slain lamb on their tables and the blood on their door-frames, and realise that the lamb had substituted for them.

Now Jesus would deliver his people by taking judgment on himself, and his own death as the lamb of God would release his people from slavery.

So, already it seems clear that this is a significant meal. But there is more. Not only is this a Passover meal which looks back; it is a memorial meal which interprets Jesus' death.

## **2. A memorial meal which interprets Jesus' death**

Jesus has perhaps been eager to eat the Passover meal with his disciples before his suffering, because it will provide him with an opportunity to explain to them what his death will mean. Not only does the meal look back, then, it also interprets what's about to happen as Jesus moves towards the cross.

Jesus is taking what to this point has been over 1,200 years of history, of looking back in celebration, of looking forward in anticipation, and is saying: 'It's all about me... from now on, this will be about me...'

It has sometimes been said that there is clearly bread and wine at this meal, but there is no lamb. The lamb – the most important part of the meal – is not even mentioned. The implication might be that there is no need for a Passover lamb because Jesus himself is going to be the lamb.

It may or may not be the case that there was a lamb at the meal. What *is* clear is that Jesus gives the meal new significance in the light of his death.

And so, notice the four verbs in verse 19: he *takes* bread, he *gives thanks*, he *breaks* it, and he *passes* it around the table. This is my body... do this in remembrance... and in that moment it becomes a memorial meal about him and his death.

And then comes the wine in verse 20. The cup is the new covenant in Jesus' blood. His sacrifice brings about a new covenant between God and his people. What comes with the new covenant, as the prophet Jeremiah promised, is forgiveness of sins, the presence of God's Spirit in every one of God's people, the law written on our hearts. What brings about the blessings of this covenant? Nothing less than the death of Jesus.

God's new covenant is an *internal* thing not an external thing; it's the difference between the

law on the wall and the law in your heart. Someone might say – maybe *you* might say – ‘I’ll never become a Christian, I’d never keep be able to keep it up.’ And we might say, ‘Yes, you’re right, especially with your track record! But what if God changed you into someone who *wanted* to keep it up? What if he forgave your sins, wrote his law on your mind and heart, and put his Spirit in you, and slowly but surely changed you into a person who wants to serve him and love him?’

And all of that comes because of what Jesus does for us on the cross in bringing about a new covenant between God and his people.

Jesus wanted us to remember his death. He knew we would need to remember his death – his body given for us, his blood poured out for us. The first Principal at London Bible College, Ernest Kevan, wrote a book on the Lord’s Supper, in which his very first sentence is something like: ‘How amazing that those who have been redeemed should need to be reminded of the fact.’ But we do... and we do so not by anything exotic, but through ordinary bread and wine.

Of course, the disciples aren’t ready for any of this. Judas is about to betray him, as Jesus says (22:21-23). And the disciples are having arguments about which one of them is the greatest (22:24).

But if the meal interprets Jesus’ death, it also provides a model for our discipleship. Jesus turns the notion of greatness on its head (22:25-27). The disciples are interested in power not in service. They don’t realise that disciples are to be different to the world in the way they exercise their roles. Kings and rulers exercise power and lord it over people. They are seen as benefactors, those to whom people are beholden for something. But the disciple is to function like a younger person serving an older person. Jesus is among his followers like a servant waiting on a table.

Sharing the Lord’s supper not only reminds us of Jesus’ death, but reminds us that we are a united body of people who are all accepted by God on the same basis.

How can we serve Jesus and carry on assuming that greatness counts in lording it over others? How can we follow a Jesus who walks the way of suffering and death on our behalf and carry on thinking that what really matters is status rather than service, that what really matters is rank rather than relationship?

Our world sees many battles that revolve around power – in the boardroom and in the bedroom, over the conference table and over the dining table. Will we show the way of Christ, being a people of care, compassion, and nurture, who serve – even when no-one is looking?

But there is one more thing to say about this meal...

### 3. An expectant meal which looks forward

Have you noticed how the whole passage is shot through with a forward-looking aspect too?

It begins back in 22:15-16. He won’t eat it with them again, *until* the Passover finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God, the ultimate moment when God’s people meet in the future at the great end-time banquet.

And then he says something similar in 22:18. Once again, a *future* meal, a *future* coming kingdom to look forward to, which means that there is a sense in which every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper in bread and wine, we are *anticipating* that time, looking forward to the time of the end, and the wedding supper of the lamb and his bride.

And then we go down to 22:28, where Jesus says the disciples have stood by him. But he says more in 22:29-30. God has assigned Jesus the kingdom and now Jesus assigns it to the disciples. They will sit at the banquet table when it comes in all its fulness in the future, and they will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus is making it clear that he is forming a new community from the disciples, and that they will have a unique and central role in God’s plan for his people.

So, shot through the whole passage is the promise of a future – a *future* meal, a *future* coming kingdom, a *future* rule. The details

aren't filled out for us, but it is clear that Jesus' death will not be the end. In fact, his rule will *never* come to an end. And at some future day, the disciples will receive authority to help him exercise his rule.

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What a meal this was, then!

It's a meal which speaks to me about *my sin*. It makes me realise that my sin is bigger than I thought, because it took the death of the son of God to rectify it. It's a meal, like Passover, which reminds me that without a substitute in my place, I would stand under the judgment of God and the sentence of death with no excuse and no way out.

But it's also a meal which tells me that *God's love* is bigger than I thought, and it's a love that is expressed and shown supremely in *Jesus' death*; that he so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that Jesus is the one who loved the church and gave himself up for her.

And it reminds me of *God's plan*, that God's plan is bigger than I thought, that Jesus' death embraces the past, the present, and the future. It covers the whole of God's plan for the ages and for the nations – which can only lead to amazement and praise, because he does it for you and for me, and he says: 'take eat... this is for you; take drink... this is for you.' And we do so with thankfulness in our hearts and on our lips. Amen.

*Notes from a sermon preached by Antony Billington at Northolt Park Baptist Church on 29 March 2009.*