

The Gospel of Luke

Luke 22:1-24:53

The Cross and the Crown

Up to this point in the Gospel story the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leadership (the council) has been building to a heightened crescendo. In the final chapters of the Gospel, the barriers which have been preventing this conflict from reaching its dramatic resolution gradually fall one by one.

The People Barrier

The barrier to Jesus Crucifixion has primarily been the people:

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. --Luke 22:1-2

The forces of evil, spiritual and worldly, collude and unintentionally fulfill the plan and purposes of God for the salvation of the world through Jesus. With Satan's infiltration to Jesus inner twelve (22:3), the priest then looked for the "opportunity to betray" in the "absence of a crowd". (22:6) Fear of man is the governing force behind everyone, but Jesus.

Structure

The New Covenant	22:1-30
The Time of Trial	22:31-22:62
The Innocent Transgressor	22:63-23:49
The Resurrection and Victory	23:50-24:53

The New Covenant (21:1-30)

Luke explicitly names the feast of Unleavened Bread and the night of the Passover Sacrifice. He is not one who emphasizes the Jewish scriptures and customs. However, in this case Jesus pending crucifixion finds its significance in this festival and ritual: his body is the bread and his blood is the Passover sacrifice.

Then he took a loaf of 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."²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying,

*“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.
—Luke 22:19-20*

The application of the Passover and Festival of the Unleavened bread to Jesus will be a theme that Luke will re-emphasize in his telling of Jesus appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Passover sacrifice and festival of Unleavened Bread was originally established in Israel’s history to be a perpetual remembrance of God’s salvation of Israel from Egypt and the entire story of the Exodus. Jesus is bringing about a new Exodus through a New Covenant.

Who is the Greatest?

Ironically, as Jesus is explaining his own sacrificial death, the disciples begin arguing over who is the greatest. Luke is brining this teaching in at this point as a direct contrast for his readers—particularly leaders. The leader is to be one who serves—this is in direct contrast to the ways of the world. (cf. Romans 12:1-3) Jesus sets himself as an example to be followed in servant leadership. In this world, it is humility and perseverance in suffering that will be rewarded. (22:28-30)

The Time of Trial (22:31-22:62)

Sandwiched between the prediction of Peter’s denial and his actual denial, stands several scenes that highlight the wrong way to be a disciple at the critical moment of trial. Jesus models the right response.

Prayer

When considering ones own “time of trial”, the first task is to pray.

“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” —Luke 22:40

Jesus models a wrestling prayer for deliverance and protection in the temptation. He wrestles with the time of trial itself. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” It is never for another person to say this is your day to “pick up your cross”. That is an appropriate discussion with in the councils of prayer. Jesus models for his disciples and calls them to wrestle with God over their own witness to the truth. This is their first failure.

And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation. —Luke 22:45-46

The Power of Darkness

Evil uses coercion and force to accomplish its will. The disciple’s second failure is to act out of their own human strength—with the power of the sword. When the crowd came to arrest Jesus at Judas betraying kiss, the first instinct was to resort to the sword. However, Jesus used the moment to reveal that violence was merely the power of darkness.

The Power of Confession

The third failure of the disciples was manifest in Peter's denials at the moment of truth. The disciple of Jesus is called to face the time of trial with bold confession that Jesus is Lord. Peter does not "know him."

Consider that Luke's readers would face many trials of their faith. The temptation would always be to respond to force with force or denial. The Gospel response is to find strength in prayer first and stand boldly in the power of God rather than the power of darkness. Jesus shows us the way of the Kingdom in his bold and faithful witness.

The Innocent Transgressor (22:63-23:49)

The key to the understanding the way of the Cross is in following Jesus. As he is placed on trial for his actions the key theme in Luke's Gospel is in his innocence. Jesus maintained absolute integrity in boldly facing the trial and remaining faithful to the Kingdom. His transgression was his innocence.

The judgment of the world was to crucify the innocent. Both Pilate and Herod find no basis for any charges against him. (23:4, 14, 22; cf. 23:41, 23:47) Clearly for Luke, the key to understanding the nature of the crucified life is in boldly facing persecution in humility and innocence.

Jesus showed complete trust of the Father's plan for his own life. Knowing that own of his death would come a new covenant and a new life, he says,

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit! And having said this, he breathed his last. –Luke 23:46

The corrupt powers of evil cannot help but to seek to destroy such a bold witness to the Kingdom of God. It is in that very witness that sin is revealed and condemned by showing it for what it is. It is in that very witness of martyrdom that the Lord calls others to himself. The thief on the cross and the centurion see the cross of Jesus and his innocent crucifixion, and they believe in him.

The Resurrection and Vindication (23:50-24:53)

The resurrection narratives in Luke emphasis two main things for the disciple of Jesus, Luke's reader. The first is that Jesus resurrection is not an "idle tale". The second story, the Road to Emmaus, illustrates how faith is strengthened.

No Idle Tale

Throughout Luke's Gospel he has presented a serious call to a costly discipleship that requires giving up everything for the Jesus, even life. The only reason why anyone would pick up such a cross is because of the hope of resurrection life. The story of the women illustrates that even the first disciples struggled with believing the testimony of the women that Jesus tomb was empty and that he had in the words of the angel, "risen from the dead".

Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened. –Luke 24:10-12

This does raise the question of how does one come to a stronger and more certain faith in Jesus?

The Road to Emmaus

On the road two Emmaus two disciples come to interact with the risen Jesus—only in their despair and discouragement they do not recognize the Lord. The Lord reveals himself to the disciples in two ways: First, he explains the Old Testament scriptures to them and connects Jesus life to the Word of God. The second way he reveals himself is through the breaking of bread.

They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. –Luke 24:32-35

Remember, Luke’s point is to help his reader Theophilos “have certainty regarding the things he had been taught.” (1:4) The heart of the disciple is set on fire through the study of the Scriptures. Jesus makes himself known to his disciples through the breaking of the bread.

In Acts 2:42, Luke will describe the practices of the early church:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42

Have you ever faced a time of trial in your life where you were called to be a witness for Christ? What did you do for strength and courage? How did you stand? He reveals himself to us on a regular basis through his word and his sacraments.

Jesus is calling his disciple to a victorious life in him, by faithful witness to his name in a corrupt and godless world. The path to victory is a cross.