

## Luke's Gospel 22:1-23 The Passover Night

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### **The Passover Night (Luke 22:1-23).**

We are going to look at the Passover night in Luke 22:1-23. It was the final meal Jesus had before going to the Cross. It was also the occasion of the Lord instituting what we now know as the Lord's Supper.

The celebration of the Passover goes back to Exodus, chapter 12. Of all the Old Testament illustrations of Christ, the Passover lamb stands out so clearly. In John chapter 1, John the Baptist introduces Jesus with the words, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (verse 29). A few verses later, as John the Baptist sees Jesus walking, he simply declares, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (verse 36). These declarations relate to the prophetic fulfilment of the word of Abraham to Isaac in Genesis 22, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (verse 8).

In the Jewish mind, the expression "the lamb of God" would remind them of the Passover Lamb sacrificed just before God delivered the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Moses was given precise instructions from God about the Passover lamb. Each house had to take a lamb. The year-old lamb was to be without blemish, in other words, not diseased or injured. It was kept before it was sacrificed to ensure its perfection.

Interestingly, the ram sacrificed by Abraham in Genesis 22 was caught by its horns in a thicket. If captured by its neck or one of its legs, it would have been damaged and unfit for sacrifice. On the original Passover day, the lamb was killed. Its blood was placed on the door posts and lintel of the house. Afterwards, the lamb was roasted and eaten. God declared on the Passover night, "... when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). The sacrifice of the lamb saved the house from God's judgement on the Egyptians.

### **The Passover is a picture of Christ.**

In Exodus 3, God appeared to Moses and said,

"I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land [into] a good and large land" (verses 7-8).

This began to be fulfilled after the Passover night when the Children of Israel left Egypt and started the journey to the promised land. But God's promises and actions looked on to greater salvation that was not limited to one nation and time but to the whole world and eternity. It looked forward to

the coming of God into the world that He had made to reveal His heart of love and to undertake the work of redemption in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

### **Christ our Passover.**

Luke begins by explaining the Passover was immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which started on the evening of the fourteenth day and lasted until the evening of the twenty-first day of the month (Exodus 12:18). Before this feast, Luke informs us the chief priests and the scribes were planning how they could kill Jesus. But they were afraid to arrest the Saviour during the day because they feared the people. Judas solved this problem by going to the chief priests and captains and agreeing to betray Jesus for money.

In John 11, Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life" (verse 25), and a little later, He raised Lazarus from the dead. At the beginning of John 12, only six days before the Passover, Jesus is in Bethany, and they made Him a supper. It is a beautiful picture of gratitude to the Saviour. At this meal, Lazarus, full of life, sat in fellowship with Jesus. Martha, served the Saviour with a full heart. Mary worshipped Jesus with a full spirit, by breaking a box of costly spikenard, anointing His feet, and filling the house with fragrance. In stark contrast, Judas complained that such an act of worship was wasteful and self-righteously complained the spikenard could have been sold for money given to the poor. At this point, John provides us with further information about Judas. John plainly tells us Judas had no care for the poor and that he was a thief. Judas looked after the finances of the disciples and used to help himself to those funds. Days later, he took the opportunity to betray the Saviour of the world for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16).

So the dark background of this final Passover is explained. I say, final Passover, because the Passover lamb prophetically looked forward to the Lamb of God coming into the world. The Passover was fulfilled in the death of Christ, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

### **Preparation for the Passover.**

Jesus asks Peter and John to prepare the Passover. It is worth commenting that the Lord gives the responsibility for what seems a straightforward task to two of His leading disciples. But the Lord personally made the arrangements for the large, furnished upper room to be available to Peter and John. In these simple arrangements, the Holy Spirit shows us how the Lord prepares for and directs His disciples' service. There are those things which the Lord prepares independently of us, and there is the service He calls us to do under His direction in those prepared circumstances. Often we think we serve God in fallow and unprepared areas. But this is rarely the case. God goes before us. He can work in the hearts of people we have never met. In Philippi, God had prepared Lydia's heart and made sure Paul and Silas passed the possessed slave girl on the way to prayer. God also caused an earthquake which was used to open the Philippian jailer's heart to Christ. And Jesus ensured the upper room was ready for Peter and John to prepare the Passover.

The Lord's life was very orderly. He was never rushed but calmly undertook his ministry, and when disturbing things happened, He brought His peace into the situation. We read of the Lord's "custom" in Luke 4 of habitually going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. I am old enough to remember when Sundays were a day of rest and peacefulness, and calm reigned. Today, it is one of the week's busiest days. We have forgotten what it is to be still, and we are almost afraid of quietness. The Lord was not governed by time. He created it. But Jesus shows the value of making time our servant and devoting it to Him. As the Lord approached the Cross, He took time to have the Passover meal with His twelve disciples, "When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him" (verse 14). We can be casual and careless about time. My mum brought up seven children, and Christ was not the Head of our house. Our home was small and like a thor-

oughfare, but it was ordered. We were taught to be good timekeepers. Yet my father never told me to be a “clock watcher” but to give myself plenty of time to get to an appointment and never to be in a rush to leave. In the Lord’s service, we are always best served by following the Lord’s example of being prepared and on time.

### **The Lord uses the Passover to demonstrate His love.**

But the Lord’s movements were not governed by a timetable. His actions manifested His love and His grace. We see this in His opening words, “Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”” (verse 15). In John’s Gospel, we read,

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

The Lord’s love for His disciples and, by extension, His love for all His people filled His heart. You might have expected Jesus Christ to be thinking about Himself and all the suffering that lay ahead of Him. You would have thought He might want to be alone with His thoughts. Instead, He surrounds Himself with His disciples. In John Gospel chapters 13-17, we see the extent of His care for His disciples as the Cross approached. In chapter 13, He washes the disciples’ feet, leaving them with His example of lowly service. In John chapter 14, He says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” and declares Himself to be, the way, the truth, and the life. In chapter 15, He describes Himself as the “true vine” and explains that by abiding in Him, we can glorify the Father by bearing fruit, more fruit and much fruit. In chapter 16, He continues to unfold the work of the Holy Spirit, promises them joy and the power of asking in His name. And in John 17, we have an insight into His priestly service as He prays to the Father for his people.

The Passover night was the final example of His giving heart and the extent of His love and grace. It begins with the words Jesus used to convey how much it meant for Him to be with the friends He loved before that love was seen in all its fullness at Calvary. He said, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (verse 15). He was happy to be with them and wanted them to have an abiding sense of His care for them and He assured them it would continue when He was glorified in heaven.

### **A future Passover.**

He also adds,

“For I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (verse 16-18).

The Lord looks on from the place of His rejection in this world to the future joyous millennial kingdom when He will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Passover will also be celebrated then (Ezekiel 45:21).

### **The Lord’s Supper.**

After the Passover meal, the Lord then institutes what we refer to as the Lord’ Supper. It was the simplest of meals. First He takes a loaf, “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (v..19). The ordinariness of what the Lord does is extraordinary. He represents the giving of Himself as the

Saviour of the world in a loaf of bread. Down the ages, Christendom has embellished and complicated what the Lord did in lowly grace. He took a loaf of bread as an illustration of his peerless, powerful and glorious life. He takes the most uncomplicated object to describe the most profound act of grace. In John 6:51, the Lord describes Himself as, "the living bread which came down from heaven" and that he would give His life for the "life of the world." The Lord broke the loaf to symbolise the giving of His life.

Then He gave thanks. In Hebrews, we read, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (Hebrew 12:2). There was thankfulness in the heart of Son of God as He did the Father's will, and there was thankfulness that, through the sufferings of the Cross, He would form a Church which would eternally bear witness to the love of God.

This love is expressed in two ways, in the heart of every child of God who, like Paul can say, "... the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Like the dying thief, every one of us will be in heaven, not based on who we are or what we have done but because Christ loved us and sacrificed His life for our salvation.

This love is also expressed in Christ's love for the Church,

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The broken loaf of bread expresses how Christ gave Himself for us, and as each of us eats of that loaf, we remember the cost of our salvation, and we rejoice in the love of Christ. We know we are eternally redeemed, and we give voice to the worship in our hearts as we remember the Saviour. We do this in each of our hearts, and we do this as we join our hearts together as members of the one Church Christ gave Himself for.

## **The New Covenant.**

It the same way He took a cup of wine,

"Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you"" (verse 20).

The old covenant of the law was confirmed by the shedding of blood at Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:7-8,

"Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.""

The cup of wine represents the Lord's shed blood, the ground of the new covenant of grace. By this new covenant, we can be saved, brought near to God and enjoy all the blessings of our position in Christ. For us, it is a cup of blessing. But drinking of it, we never to forget the cost of our salvation. After the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, John writes, "... one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34).

This was the last malicious act of the world's rejection of Christ. But through it, Christ blood was shed. The senseless act of a callous soldier served not to show Christ had died, for He had already committed His spirit to the Father, it revealed the blood through which we are given life. In Genesis 2, to create Eve, God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam. As he slept, God took one of his ribs to make Eve. Matthew Henry writes,

“That the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved” (Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary).

Paul adds in Ephesians 5:30, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.” Jesus was alive and present with His disciples, but soon he would go to the Cross and sacrifice Himself. It would no longer be types, pictures, prophecies and parables but the reality of the Lord of life, subjecting Himself to death, even the death of the Cross. Christ instituted His supper in the place where He bled and died.

### **The Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians.**

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes,

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (verse 23-26 NRSVAE).

The Lord instituted His supper on earth, but He affirmed it to the apostle Paul from heaven. When we remember the Lord, we do so in terms of the past, the present and the future. We look back to the journey which led from glory to the Lord's suffering and death at Calvary. In doing so, we look up to our resurrected and glorified Lord and Saviour in heaven. And we proclaim His death in the sure and certain promise of His return. We look back to worship in love. We look up in faith to behold his present glory, and we look on in the hope of His certain return.

Paul uses the expression, “... the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread.” In Luke 22:22-23, the Lord says, “But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.” We should not forget that in the course of the events leading to the Cross, the Lord felt the rejection and hatred of His people and Judas's betrayal deeply. Psalm 41:9 describes the Lord's feelings. “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” Judas betrayed the Lord with the kiss of friendship. The Lord later heard the crowd cry, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!” (John 19:15).

The Lord endured utter rejection and cruelty and it broke His heart. He passed through the deepest waters of suffering, but His love was stronger than death. What the Lord wants us to remember, understand and never forget is the depth of His love. The depth of His love to His Father in becoming the Lamb of God. The depth of His love for His Church. And the depth of His love for each and every one of His people.

## **Christ's perfect sacrifice.**

Hebrews tells us that all the centuries of sacrifices could never take away sin (see Hebrews 10:11). As we have seen, John the Baptist announced when he saw Jesus, that the Lamb of God was present in the world. For the next three years, Jesus demonstrated Himself to be the perfect Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world. At the end of this ministry and at the time of the Passover, Pilate announced to the assembled representatives of Israel that he found no fault in Jesus. He presented Jesus to them with the words, "Behold the Man" and later, "Behold your King" (John 19 verses 5 and 14). Despite Pilate's attempt to release Jesus, the chief priests and elders force His execution and Christ, the true Passover lamb, was sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). Peter writes,

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The Passover focused on deliverance. The focus of the Lord's Supper is the Deliverer, Jesus. This is summed up in His words - "Do this in remembrance of Me." We do not celebrate the Lord's Supper to remember our sins even though Christ died to deliver us from them. Nor do we celebrate the Lord's Supper to think about our blessings. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to think about the Saviour. Through it we can reflect on His life, His love and especially His sacrificial death. When Joseph interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's chief butler he said to him, "Remember me when it is well with you" (Genesis 40:14). The Lord Jesus has made it "well" with us. Let us not be like the butler and forget what He did for us.

Of course, it is impossible not to think of our sins when we think of what it cost Christ to redeem us. And it is difficult not to think of our blessings in Christ now we are saved. But these matters are not central to the Breaking of Bread. This simple feast is about remembering Christ. Amid a world where He was rejected and crucified and where He is still blasphemed, Christians recall in the bread, and wine His body given and His blood shed for our redemption.

## **Remembering the Lord today.**

We need a specific meeting to remember the Lord Jesus. In such a meeting, the hymns we sing, the prayers we offer, the Scriptures we read and the thoughts ministered should focus on the Person and the work of Christ. And central to the meeting should be the Breaking of Bread. I have attended the Lord's Supper for well over fifty years, and I have come to realise what a vital occasion of worship it is. In our hearts, we ponder the Saviour's pathway to the cross and the power of His resurrection. We raise a hymn of praise to the One who died but now is alive forever. The meeting does not have to be large. "Where two or three are gathered together to My name there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Not only did the Lord Jesus provide a simple expression of remembrance, but He also values the smallest groups of His people meeting to fulfil His request.

Then there are the scriptures we can read together. There are figures of Christ and prophecies about Him in the Old Testament. Scriptures, such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, beautifully express the sacrifice of Christ. In the Gospels, His life, death and resurrection are all recorded for our contemplation and worship. In the epistles, we have His ministry expounded, and His love, grace and glory unfolded to us. Many passages bring the Saviour's love and sacrifice vividly to our hearts and minds. And, when this happens, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus we can say, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

In Mark 14:26 we read, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." It is amazing to think of Christ singing on the Passover night before He went to Gethsemane. Just as

it is amazing to recall that He gave thanks for the bread before He broke it and used it as a picture of His own body given. It is important to trace the Lord's pathway on that evening because it helps us to understand His love to His Father in doing His will and the depth of His love in dying for us.

It also helps us to understand His desire for His people to think of Him in His suffering. In Mark 14:34, Jesus asked Peter, James and John to watch with Him while he prayed. He returned to find them asleep. And Jesus says to Peter, who had made bold promises to go into death for His Saviour, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Mark 14:37). I have heard some Christians, happily only a few, say that they find the remembrance of the Lord's death a morbid affair. If we think like that, we have entirely failed to understand the heart of Christ. What was in His heart when He instituted the Breaking of Bread? It was that we would never forget how much He loved us and how much He sacrificed for us. If like Peter, we think we have the strength to serve Christ whilst being asleep to His sufferings for us, we are deceiving ourselves. The greatest servants are those who know they are serving the "Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." When Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus, He met a suffering Christ, who said to Him, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute Me?" He never forgot the vision, and he never forgot to serve. Once we stop remembering the cost of our salvation, we begin to forget the Lord who saved us. That is why He instituted the Lord's Supper so we would never cease to recall His death on Calvary.

The bread represents Lord's body and the wine, His blood. These are the meanings Christ Himself gave to these emblems. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, we express our fellowship together as the redeemed people of God - "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we recall His sacrificial death and are also doing something else. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." In the Lord's Supper, there is a continuing testimony in the world to the death of Christ. The world may have forgotten that Christ was crucified, but God's people are to continually proclaim the Saviour's death until He comes again. The Lord's Supper reflects the past - the Lord's death, the present - responding in worship to our risen glorified Lord, and the future - a returning Lord.

It seems that the early Christians began to meet at the beginning of the week to remember the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:7). Collections were associated with this day (1 Corinthians 16:2). I can see why this happened. When we understand the greatness of God's giving for us, we respond by giving to Him. Of course, sacrificing is never restricted to monetary gifts, but it does include them. In 1 Chronicles 29, we read about what David gave to build the House of God and all the elders, leaders and ordinary people offered willingly. The whole nation rejoiced with David, who said, "Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name" (v.13). Sacrifice and giving are at the very heart of true Christianity. Barnabas is a wonderful example of this. He is introduced at the end of Acts 4, where it says of him, "having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." This great Christian pastor was marked by sacrifice. It is not out of place that, at the time we remember the greatest sacrifice, we should respond in worship and practical giving.

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