

Luke 22:1-38

Introduction

Last Sunday, we began to read the Easter story together. You may remember that we read of Jesus making a big entrance as he came into Jerusalem. He rode on a donkey, which was a very clear and public claim to be God's King. The crowds who had travelled with him on the journey from Galilee, celebrated his arrival. But you may remember that as he approached the city itself, he was heading straight into rejection and opposition. The religious leaders didn't want him as their king and were trying to kill him. You may also remember the tears he shed for them as he foresaw the consequences of their rejection of him.

The drama is heightening. That's because God's plan of salvation is nearing its fulfilment. And as we carry on reading the story the plot continues with a friend's betrayal - our first heading.

A friend's betrayal

Please look down with me at verse 1 to 6.

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Jesus had spent much of his ministry in and around Galilee in the north and he was popular with the crowd of pilgrims who had travelled down from there to Jerusalem. If the religious leaders in Jerusalem were to act against him, then they would need to find a way of doing so when the crowds weren't present. So they were waiting...looking for an opportunity to get rid of this nuisance who undermined their teaching and threatened their power.

And someone else was waiting too. In fact, he's been waiting for an opportunity to act against Jesus since chapter 4. It's Satan. He would do anything to stop Jesus from establishing his kingdom and liberating God's people from his grasp. Now he senses that what he's been waiting for may be close at hand. He sees an opportunity in the form of one of Jesus' friends, Judas Iscariot, whom he prompts to seek out the chief priests with a treacherous proposal.

We're not told why Judas betrayed Jesus but we are given some insights in the Bible. Firstly we're told that he never really believed.

In John's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples: **'The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe'**. And John adds: **For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.** (John 6:63-64)

And then a few verses later, Jesus says: **'Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!'** And again John adds: **(He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)** (John 6:70).

Later in John's Gospel, we're told that Judas was motivated by personal gain. John tells us that he was a thief and that, **as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.** (John 12:6)

And that greed for money seems to be, in part at least, what motivates Judas here, in Luke's Gospel. Having discussed with the religious leaders how he might betray Jesus, we're told that **they were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.**

So these opening few verses of chapter 22 end with the chief priests, Satan and Judas Iscariot, all conspiring together to engineer an opportunity to strike against Jesus. The vague sense that he was heading towards rejection and opposition has now got very personal indeed.

Jesus has always had his enemies, both outside of and among his people. He faced opposition wherever he went, and he warned us that we would face it too.

It's not a particularly appealing idea, but when it gets up close and personal like this, then it can be decidedly frightening. We can talk about having opponents in vague, general terms, but when we can put names to them, and discover them among our friends, or in our social media feeds, or even among our family, then it can be unnerving.

We need to remember that we live out the Christian life today as part of a far bigger battle that spans the centuries. When we face hostility and opposition, Jesus knows what we're going through because he faced it before us.

And our greatest encouragement comes from knowing that he is in full control.

So, as we read these verses, we should also notice the Lord's resolve. That's our second heading: the Lord's resolve.

The Lord's resolve

Please look down again at verses 7 to 13.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.'

'Where do you want us to prepare for it?' they asked.

He replied, 'As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, "The Teachers asks: where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.'

They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

When we read the account of Jesus' approach to Jerusalem we noted his divine foreknowledge of the events involved in getting a donkey for him to ride into the city. Once again, that foreknowledge is evident here as he sends off Peter and John to prepare the Passover meal. Everything happens just as Jesus had said.

We're meant to see that a divine plan is unfolding. Satan might think that he's the one who's masterminding the events that are taking place, but God has his own plan and it is God's plan that's unfolding.

As we read on that truth becomes clearer and clearer.

As the day goes on, Judas might be feeling pleased with himself and with the little deal he's struck to set himself up financially. But, Jesus knows all about it. In fact, it's part of his Father's plan too. He has decreed it in advance.

Look at verse 22. Jesus says: **'The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!'**

The chief priests might be congratulating themselves on their clever plan to secure their position as the rulers of Israel. But from now on they won't be the ones who rule over God's people. Their position is forfeit on account of their rebellion and deceit. Rather, from now on, it will be the apostles who will have prominence in his kingdom.

Look at verse 28. Jesus says to them: **'You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'**

Satan might think that it was a stroke of genius to recruit Judas to his cause and send him on his treacherous mission. But now Jesus reveals that it wasn't only Judas that Satan wanted, it was Simon Peter too, and all of the disciples.

Verse 31: **'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'**

Satan could have Judas. But he wouldn't have Peter or the others.

They would all abandon Jesus. Peter would outright deny him not once but three times before daybreak. But Jesus would first restore Peter and then, through him, all the others. Satan's success would be very small indeed.

The chief priests, Satan and Judas Iscariot, may be colluding together against Jesus, but Jesus knows exactly what's about to transpire. He knows that he's heading to his death and all that will entail. And he doesn't shrink away from it. Rather, he heads straight for it...because he knows that the events that are unfolding are his Father's plan. He trusts his Father to bring him through them triumphant and victorious.

We should be in awe of his obedience to his Father's plan. We should marvel at his trust in his Father's care. And we should delight in the depth of his love for you and me.

Of course, that should challenge us to think about our own obedience to our Father in heaven. It should challenge us to think about how much we trust his care of us when obedience to him is costly. But, primarily, as we read these verses, we should be marvelling at Jesus and at his resolve to accomplish our salvation.

And as he finally sits down to celebrate the Passover with his disciples, he gives it new meaning. So I've called our final heading: the Passover transformed.

The Passover transformed

Please look down with me at verses 14 to 23.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.'

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'

As Jesus shares this Passover meal with his disciples, there's a sense that something's coming to an end.

This is the last time that he will eat this Passover meal with them until, he says, it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.

This period of fellowship with his friends is drawing to a close. For three years, he has lived with them and travelled with them. He has spent all his time with them, teaching them and revealing his Father to them. But, very shortly, his time with them will be brought to an end when he is arrested, tried and executed on a cross. Yet, even now, Jesus knows that death will not have the final word and his fellowship with his people will be renewed.

He will enjoy the company of his friends once again when this Passover meal finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.

Elsewhere, Jesus spoke of the final coming of the kingdom of God in terms of a great banquet at the end of the age. In Luke chapter 13, he said: **'People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.'** (Luke 13:29)

It's a picture of God's people enjoying God's blessing in eternity.

This is what Jesus is about to lay down his life for - to enable his people to enjoy God's blessing with him forever in heaven.

This is what Jesus wants for you and me. This is his number one priority for your life and mine. It's to see us safely home to heaven where we will enjoy fellowship with him and with all his people in eternity. This is what he's working in our lives today to accomplish. Even though we might face hostility and hardship in the world today, this is what lies ahead for us if we belong to him. We begin to enjoy God's blessings now in this life, and we will enjoy his blessings fully with Jesus in eternity. And it's all because of the cross.

So, just as something is coming to an end, so also something is beginning.

Verse 19.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'

A new act of remembrance is instituted.

The Passover meal looked back to God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt. But at the cross, Jesus is about to accomplish an even greater rescue, not from slavery to the Egyptians but from the power of sin and death. From now on, his death will replace the Passover as the thing remembered.

And a new covenant is formed.

Having rescued his people from slavery in Egypt God established them as a nation, at Mount Sinai, through a covenant of blood. But now through the blood of Jesus, poured out at the cross, a new and better covenant is formed, which promises an even closer relationship with God. This covenant is one of eternal life, secured through the full and final forgiveness of sins.

The cross, then, is an end but, more than that, it's a new beginning. At the cross, Christ would form a new people, made up of Jews and Gentiles alike, who would belong to God and enjoy God's blessing forever, through faith in his blood.

That's why Jesus is heading so intently and deliberately towards it. This is God's plan of salvation.

One person at the table, however, will have no part in it.

Verse 21.

But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him! They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Those verses tell us two things. Firstly, Jesus' betrayer was present with him at the Passover meal. And, secondly, the disciples had no idea who it was.

It highlights the fact that someone can appear to be one of Christ's people outwardly yet inwardly their heart can be cold towards him.

Merely being in the company of Jesus and his people does not guarantee salvation.

I can spend all my time in the company of Christ's people, saying and doing all the right things, yet without truly belonging.

It's not spending time with Christians that makes someone a member of Christ's people but sharing their faith in him.

Judas knew all along that he wasn't a believer. As he shared this meal, he knew what he was about to do. But he hid his lack of faith well. It only became apparent to the others when he betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

If you haven't truly put your faith in Jesus as your King and Saviour, then you will know it, even if the rest of us don't.

But please don't follow in the steps of Judas.

This Easter, reflect again on all that Jesus has done for you. Reflect on his resolve to go to the cross and on all that he accomplished there. Reflect on the glorious future that he holds out to you, which he offers to you as a gift, purchased with his blood.

And open your heart to him. Receive him as your King and Saviour.

And with the rest of us, rejoice in him this Easter, and in the heavenly banquet that we will share with him on the day that God's kingdom comes.

Let's pray.