

Luke 22:7-23: A Meal to Remember

Every Friday night I and a friend lead a Bible study group each at the same location. At present the others in the group include mainland Chinese, a Korean, a Thai, a Swiss and a few Anglos. We always start by sitting around a table together and having lots of food and fun. One week we might have Chinese food, another week Thai, another week pizzas, another week Kentucky Fried, another week Lebanese food, etc. But we always look forward to enjoying one another's company as we eat.

Meals are very important in Luke's Gospel and today we are looking at the most important meal of them all - the famous Last Supper, that is, the last meal Jesus had with his disciples before he died. This was the occasion when Jesus also gave his farewell speech to his disciples. Notice the words with which Jesus begins this last speech: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

There are five important parts to this statement: (1) "I have eagerly desired" (2) to eat" (3) this Passover (4) with you (5) before I suffer."

"I have eagerly desired"

The opening words of Jesus' farewell speech express passion: "*I have eagerly desired.*" Literally, Jesus says, "*With desire I desire to eat this Passover with you.*" Jesus is passionate about having this meal with them. Chapters 22 and 23 of Luke's Gospel are called *The Passion Narrative*. In verse 44 we also see the immense passion which gripped Jesus: "*And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly (or, if you like, 'more passionately'), and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*"

Why was Jesus filled with such passion to have this meal with his disciples? The previous verse informs us "*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.*" The hour has come, the time has arrived! It was not merely time to eat. No! Back in Luke 9:41 we read: "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*" Most of Luke's Gospel is about this time coming nearer, when Jesus would go to heaven after his death and resurrection. Jesus now knows "the hour has come". This is the time to say "goodbye" to his disciples. Jesus wants to prepare them for the enormous changes that will happen.

"To Eat"

What else does Jesus say in this great statement with which he introduces his farewell speech? Jesus says, "I have eagerly desired to eat..."

If I knew I was shortly going to be tortured and publicly humiliated and sadistically murdered then I would lose my appetite. But Jesus has a great hunger to have this meal with his disciples.

There are 19 meals in Luke's Gospel and they have some common characteristics:

(1) *They are inclusive meals.*

In 5:30 the Pharisees and teachers of the law sneer, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus included tax collectors and sinners in this meal. When Jesus has a meal in the home of a Pharisee he shows his acceptance of the immoral woman who bursts in to wash his feet with her hair (7:36-50). So it goes on.

Have you seen the masterpiece painted by Leonardo da Vinci called *The Last Supper*. In this great painting Leonardo captures the moment when Jesus uttered the words recorded in verse 21: "*But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.*" The Last Supper was an inclusive meal. Jesus already knows Judas will betray him, but still includes him in this meal, as if he really was one of his disciples.

Leonardo painted *The Last Supper* on the back wall of the dining room of a convent. He made it look as though the dining room was extended so that whenever the nuns ate in the dining room it seemed that Jesus and his disciples were eating with them too. I Corinthians 11 indicates that every time we have a meal together we need to recall the Last Supper and remember that it is because of what he did for you and me on the cross that we now meet together as one family of brothers and sisters in Christ.

(2) *These meals are symbols of election, forgiveness and ultimate blessing.*

When the Pharisees jeered at Jesus and his disciples for eating with tax collectors and sinners he replied, "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (5:32). Jesus used meals to call people to follow him. I'm sure an important part of your outreach strategy involves having occasional major evangelistic events, maybe two or three a year, to which you invite as many non-Christian friends and acquaintances as you can. A fundamental ingredient of such events is having lots of delicious food. At a personal level a key strategy to use in reaching your own friends and acquaintances with the gospel is having meals with them. This is a key way of showing people we accept them, no matter what they have done. Meals are a wonderful context in which to challenge people to follow Jesus.

Similarly, this last great meal is a meal which symbolizes election, forgiveness and ultimate blessing. In verse 19 Jesus gives them the bread saying, "*This is my body given for you.*" In verse 20 he holds up the cup -the second of the four cups of wine drunk during this meal - saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*" It is at this meal that Jesus tells them, "*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*" (v30).

When you celebrate the Lord's Supper marvel at the way Jesus gave his body for you, the way he poured out his blood. Why does Jesus call this "a new covenant in my blood". Jesus is reapplying the words of Exodus 24:8 where we read: "*Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'*" Similarly Jesus' blood is poured out at his death on the cross in order to underscore God's irrevocable covenant commitment to his people, the disciples of Jesus - the "new covenant."

I always think it is a great pity that when Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper they only eat a few crumbs of bread and have a brief sip of grape juice or wine. Why don't we have a real meal and celebrate the Lord's Supper as the Lord intended for us to do? The slim pickings we receive at the ceremonial Lord's Supper should make us impatient to have the real thing with Jesus in his kingdom.

(3) *Meals stress reversal of roles.*

Remember those words Jesus said to the sneering Pharisees. He reverses roles. Jesus calls sinners, not "the righteous". He puts down those who are proud of their own

morality. He exalts those who humble themselves and acknowledge their sinfulness. At the meal in the Pharisee's home Jesus accepts the immoral woman as one who truly loves him and rebukes the Pharisee for failing to show elementary courtesy towards him as a host should. The Pharisee is put down. The immoral woman is raised up.

Immediately after Jesus gives them the bread and wine his disciples argue among themselves as to which of them is the greatest (v24). Jesus teaches them that they must not be like the kings of the Gentiles and like those who exercise authority in this world. Rather "*the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves*" (v26). The Lord's Supper is a time to remember Jesus as the one who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. This is a time to remember that God opposes the proud but lifts up the humble. This is a time to humble ourselves and dedicate ourselves afresh to be servants.

"This Passover"

Let's return to that opening statement (v15). Jesus says, "I have eagerly desired to eat **this Passover...**" This was not just any meal that Jesus had with his disciples. It was a very special meal - the Passover meal. In verse 1 Luke explains, "*Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching.*" Actually, in the Old Testament these were two separate feasts. First the Jews celebrated the Passover Feast and then immediately after this they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But by Jesus' time the two feasts were treated as one feast, the Passover Feast.

Jesus and his disciples probably ate this Passover meal on the evening of Thursday, April 5, 30 AD. The night before Jewish families had scoured their homes for any bread or cake containing yeast. They burnt all such food on the morning of April 5 because this was the Feast of *Unleavened Bread*, that is, the Feast of Bread Without Yeast.

Verse 7 tells us: "*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.*" On the afternoon of April 5 Passover lambs were sacrificed at the temple. In the evening each family would gather at home and have the Passover meal. Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare for this meal. They didn't know where to have it. Jesus told them that as they entered the city they'd meet a man carrying a jar of water. That **would** make him stand out, because normally women carried jars of water, not men. Upon being told that Jesus, the Teacher, wanted to use a guestroom for the Passover, this fellow would make available his large upper room, all furnished with cushions and a covering and a table. Why tell us how they found the room? To stress that Jesus is in control of all that happens from this point on. The Passover is all about what is going to happen to Jesus.

What else did Peter and John do to prepare for this meal? They would have bought a lamb approved by a priest as unblemished and properly sacrificed, that is, with no bones broken and its body drained of blood. They would have taken some of its blood and smeared it on the facing of the door. They would have roasted the lamb whole. They would also have bought unleavened bread, bitter herbs and wine.

Custom required that Jesus and his disciples eat all the lamb. There would have been a bowl of salt water to remind them of the tears shed as slaves in Egypt and also of the Red Sea. A fruit puree called *Charosheth* also reminded them of clay used to make bricks while slaves in Egypt. Four cups of wine were drunk during the meal and the

wine was mixed three parts water to one part wine. Singing was also part of the meal. Early in the meal Jesus and his disciples would have sung together Psalms 113-114. Later in the meal they would have sung Psalms 115-118.

It was normal to sit at meals and that's how Leonardo painted the scene. However, at festivals the custom was to lie on your side and eat with cushions under your arm and we are explicitly told by Luke that Jesus reclined at table with his disciples.

"With you"

Remember Jesus' opening statement. He said, *"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you..."* Everything Jesus does at the Last Supper is for the benefit of his disciples. When he gives them the bread he tells them, "This is my body given for you." When he lifts up the cup Jesus says contents are "my blood, which is poured out for you." This Last Supper is a meal the disciples of Jesus never forget. We remember, as the apostles remember, that Jesus died for us.

Normally paintings on walls were done on wet plaster. When the plaster dries the paint dries with it and becomes pretty permanent. Such paintings are called frescoes. When Leonardo painted *The Last Supper* he was trying out a new technique or painting on dry plaster. This experiment was a failure. The humidity caused the paint to separate from the plaster and the painting was also damaged by vandals. There is a lesson here. We are not put right in our relationship with the Lord by merely celebrating the Lord's Supper, by eating bread and drinking grape juice. No! These are visual aids which fade as they point us to the death of Christ, the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood which alone saves us.

"Before I suffer"

Jesus' opening words were: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." When Jesus speaks of his imminent suffering he is referring to his death on the cross. In verse 19 he indicates his body will be broken like bread. In verse 20 Jesus compares the wine with his blood about to be poured out in death. When Jesus gives them the bread to eat he says, *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."* At the Passover meal Jews remembered how wonderfully God rescued his people from Egypt. Now there is something far greater than this that Jesus' disciples need to remember. When they eat the Passover they need to do so remembering Jesus and all he had done for them and all he was about to do for them.

What did Jesus accomplish by his death? Luke tells us that when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, they *"spoke about his exodus, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem"* (9:31). The original Exodus involved the exiting of God's people from slavery in Egypt. Jesus' Exodus provides a new exit for us, his people. He enables us to exit from slavery. We are not lashed with whips. Nor are we forced to make bricks out of clay. But we are held in bondage by our sinfulness and Jesus, by his death, frees us from this terrible enslavement.

Jesus promised his disciples would eat at his table with him in the kingdom of God. Later Paul informed the Corinthians: *"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"* (1 Cor 11:26). Jesus' promise will ultimately occur when he returns. Then we will sit down with our resurrection bodies at a solid table with Jesus and consume such delicious food and drink as will make all

the food we now eat seem like mud and all the drink we now drink seem like dishwater. However, Luke places considerable stress on Jesus' post-resurrection meals with his disciples (24:30-31, 41-42; Acts 1:4; 10:41). So Jesus' promise has already been fulfilled in a preliminary way. We already enjoy rich fellowship with Jesus - the kind of fellowship which is symbolized by enjoying a great banquet with him.