

LUKE—WEEK 27

THE LAST SUPPER



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is “The Last Supper” by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640)
on display at Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan*

Judas is portrayed looking away as the others are shocked to learn of Peter’s future denial

The action really picks up as we approach Jesus’ arrest. Satan enters Judas, and he plots with the authorities to betray Jesus. They eat the last supper, and the disciples, clueless about what’s coming, get into a silly debate about who’s the greatest. Jesus turns this into a teachable moment, then predicts Peter’s denial.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Luke 21:37–22:34 — *The Last Supper*
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1 Luke 21:37–22:6 (ESV)

And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

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.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

The priests and scribes are done arguing with Jesus; they got their hats handed to them every time they tried that. Now they're thinking in strictly military terms. They're *seeking how to put him to death*. They just need to figure out a way to capture Him.

The problem is the crowds. Jesus is always surrounded by throngs of admirers. Remember, these people throw stones at folks they don't like. The priests have a clear mental image of how this could go bad.

Judas to the rescue! He'll figure out a way *to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd*—for a price, of course.

All he needs is *an opportunity*.

In one of the greatest plot twists of all time, Jesus gives Judas this opportunity. He's virtually a co-conspirator in His own death.

Of course, God controls all opportunities anyway. This includes any opportunity to share the gospel.

We all know people who need Christ. The trick is finding the right time and place to tell them about Him. Sure, we can force the issue, but that usually doesn't feel right—for good reason.

This leads to a simple and effective form of prayer—asking for a sign. Rather than just deciding to explain Christ to someone, pray first and ask God to open a door.

And if a door doesn't open, stick a cork in it. But if the door does open, be ready to step through it.

And note that there's more than one door. God may want you to help this person in a non-evangelizing way. If that's the door that opens, then that's what you're being called to do.

Don't get frustrated if what God directs doesn't feel glorious. You want to explain the resurrection, but end up just helping someone move. Revel in the fact that God is using you, and don't get cranky about how.

He does know what He's doing, you know.

2 Luke 22:7–13 (ESV)

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.” They said to him, “Where will you have us prepare it?” He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

This has a “mission impossible” vibe to it. Peter and John must have felt like asking, “What guy with a jar?”, “How do you know this?”, and a zillion other questions. Instead, they held their tongues and did what they’re told.

But imagine the conversation they must have had on the way to the city—discussing the wild coincidences in this plan. The unanswered questions cry out for an explanation.

Coping with the abnormality of life with Jesus would have needed talking through. Every moment of every day was supernatural. Prior to meeting Jesus, everything worked normally. Fish were caught where fish are supposed to be caught. People behaved rationally. Life was uncomplicated and uninteresting.

Now, nothing is normal. Huge crowds follow them. People love them—though some hate them. Miracles are everywhere. Peter and John have even worked a few miracles themselves. It’s exciting but scary.

But if you think that’s scary, wait ‘til you see what’s next. This is just a warm-up. Jesus is intentionally making even simple dinner preparations feel like a high drama mission. Stress is about to show up by the truckload, and they need to get acclimated.

This is boot camp.

Life in Christ isn’t supposed to be normal. Almost anything is possible—persecution, spiritual attack, success, suffering, surprising new directions and challenges, you name it.

The one thing that should not happen is nothing—boredom, the same-old-same-old.

I could handle suffering (I think) but I definitely couldn’t handle life in Christ being a big, fat nothing. Faith without action is almost as dead as faith without works.

We need to invite Jesus to take us out of our comfort zone—to really take over. This is just different words for the classic confession of faith, “Jesus is Lord.” It’s what “Lord” means.

But be forewarned, this isn’t far from the exact opposite of many prayers. Comfort is not the objective. Healing is good only insofar as it advances the kingdom.

Remember, many disciples had short lives.

3 Luke 22:14–23 (ESV)

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took 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.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

There’s something shocking here; Jesus did not drink at the last supper.

The Greek word that’s translated here as “for” is “gar” and it’s a connector of explanation. Why has Jesus *earnestly desired to eat this Passover with them*? Because *He will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*.

Why does He ask the disciples to divide up his cup of wine? Because *from now on He will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes*.

This ends up affecting how Jesus dies. Frederick T. Zugibe, in his book “*The Crucifixion of Jesus, a Forensic Analysis*,” concludes that Jesus died of hypovolemic shock. Basically, the blood loss and dehydration killed Him. Not drinking the evening before and then pulling an all-nighter—praying, being arrested, and being tried—significantly reduced Jesus’ fluid levels. This hastened His death.

Jesus was surprisingly weak the next day; the centurion needed to recruit Simon of Cyrene to carry His cross. He said He was thirsty; then He didn’t live long. Since He was already dead, the centurion didn’t break His legs. That was important, as it fulfilled prophecy in Psalm 34.

He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. — Psalm 34:20 (ESV)

It all makes sense. It’s thrilling—and to His glory—that modern forensic pathology can add to our understanding of 2,000-year-old scriptures.

General revelation is important, and science is just the detailed study of general revelation. It’s a pity that science and Christianity are sometimes portrayed as at odds. Christians love science; we invented it.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. — Psalm 19:1–2 (ESV)

The study of God’s creation is exciting and edifying.

It even helps us understand scripture.

4 Luke 22:24–30 (NIV)

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. 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.

I used the NIV translation here because it captures the right feel in verse 25. *The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.*

It’s hard for a modern American to imagine the concept of property in a feudal system. Everything actually belonged to the ruler, and anything he let you keep was a gift. Thus, *those who exercise authority ... call themselves Benefactors*, even if they have done nothing helpful.

This is, of course, nuts from a modern point of view. And it’s not how the kingdom of God works either. That’s Jesus’ point here. *But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.*

The great irony is that in the kingdom of God, this feudal concept isn’t totally illogical. God really does own everything, and anything you have actually is a gift. But Jesus’ point has to do with what they were disputing—*which of them was considered to be greatest.*

The Kingdom of God isn’t multi-layered the way most feudal systems are. There aren’t lots of levels, with local rulers lording it over their subjects, bigger rulers lording it over the local ones, and kings lording it over the bigger rulers.

In the kingdom of God, there’s only one Lord, and everyone else should humble themselves. Jesus even modeled that for His disciples. *For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.*

It’s awesome that the true king of kings did that.

Only the true Lord could prioritize teaching that way.

Consider your church’s staff, particularly the ones who are not the main leaders. These people usually don’t get much praise for the work they do. They just try to make sure things work the way they should—and they only get noticed when things don’t.

Ask the Lord to bless them and encourage them.

He might do it through you.

5 Luke 22:31–34 (NIV)

And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” But he said to Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.” Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.”

In this one short passage, three of the most advanced concepts in Christianity converge.

- 1) Satan has to ask to sift them as wheat. (Yes, “you” is plural in verse 31.) He has to ask!
- 2) When Jesus says, “*I have prayed for you,*” whatever he says next is what’s going to happen next. Jesus’ prayers get answered. (But note that “you” here is singular.)
- 3) Jesus doesn’t pray for Satan’s request to be denied. Rather, he prays, “*that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.*”

Together, these things illuminate the doctrine of Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. (ESV)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God. (NKJV)

Of course, we cannot comprehend how and why God does what He does, but today’s passage gives us a look at how His higher ways play out in Simon’s life. He’s still not ready for the task of leading the church, but the college of hard knocks is about to go nuclear. Satan—clueless as ever—thinks he’s about to launch a brilliant attack on the disciples.

Instead, he will lay the groundwork for spreading the gospel throughout the world. His attacks will strengthen them, then kill them. The result will be unassailable evidence of the truth of the resurrection.

Jesus’ words, “*the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me,*” will haunt Simon for the rest of his life. Remember, Luke wasn’t an eyewitness here; he wrote this passage based on interviews. Try to imagine Simon unloading this on Luke. Every minute of every day, he’s reminded that his failure that night was total.

Or was it? Jesus prayed that his *faith should not fail*. His faith didn’t fail, though his courage sure did. That part must change for Simon to accomplish the next task—“*and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.*”

As painful as all this is for Simon, it’s necessary to turn him into Peter—the rock.

“No pain, no gain” isn’t just about exercise. It’s actually much more apt for growth in Christ. Are you, like Peter, haunted by your past failures?

Good. They happened for a reason; they make you stronger. Don’t try to forget or suppress them. Lay them before the Lord and ask Him to show you how they are working in you. Embrace His forgiveness.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How can you tell when it's the right time to share the gospel?
2. Have you ever had a prayer time where you didn't ask for a single favor?
3. When or how has general revelation or science taught you something that helped you understand the Bible?
4. How has serving helped you become a better leader?
5. Have you ever been strengthened by a trial?