

LUKE 22:1 - 23:49

In chapters 22-23, Luke's gospel becomes a terse, fast-paced narrative. The time of teaching is over. The time of action has come. Jesus reaches his destination, and his mission reaches its powerful and surprising conclusion. As readers we observe and reflect upon the events as they unfold, caught up in the drama, identifying with some of the characters, seeing the final days of Jesus' life on earth through the eyes of Luke.

22: 1-6 - The Plot to Kill Jesus

The authorities need to arrest Jesus in secret, away from the crowds. Judas agrees to help. It is his initiative and choice. Why, we do not know. According to the gospel, Satan enters him. When people make bad, destructive, evil choices, Satan is behind it.

22: 7-13 – The Preparation of the Passover

Jesus asks the disciples to make the necessary preparations, but he has already made arrangements for the space needed. There would be visitors and pilgrims in Jerusalem from all over, for the Passover festival. Booking space would be important.

22: 14-23 – The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Jesus gives meaning to the death he is about to experience. From now on, the Passover meal will become the Lord's Supper. The wine and the bread will represent Jesus body and life-blood. His death will open up a different door for the people and for all people since his life, teaching and healing didn't lead to collective acceptance and following of Jesus. By choosing to come to Jerusalem and confront the authorities on their ground, Jesus knows he is walking into death. But somehow, he believes, his death will serve life in a way that all his living has not been able to accomplish. If the people haven't chosen God's way of love through Jesus' teaching and life, maybe they will choose it through his death. At least a remnant may do so.

Given Jesus' choices, he already anticipates Judas' choice. No one else is aware. In fact, the disciples are totally clueless about the whole thing.

22: 24-30 – The Dispute about Greatness

The disciples' cluelessness is revealed in the focus of their concerns. They're still harbouring dreams of Jesus' kingdom in quite worldly terms. Being greatest means being over others. Jesus talks of serving others as the mark of true disciples.

Regardless of their failings at this point, Jesus sees great promise in the disciples. They will be leaders of a great kingdom. Little do they understand that this is a spiritual kingdom. Practically speaking, they will suffer just like Jesus will suffer. The rewards of the kingdom are of a spiritual nature. They don't know this yet.

22: 31-34 – Jesus predicts Peter’s Denial

Jesus anticipates Peter’s great failure, but also predicts his repentance and restoration. Forgiveness will be the great message of the cross to the people’s rejection and the disciples’ abandonment.

22: 35-38 – Purse, Bag, Sword

These verses are strange and difficult to understand. They speak of preparation for hostilities. The disciples need to be prepared for attack. But why a sword, especially as Jesus will not be using one? Perhaps Jesus himself is having some panic in himself.

22: 39-46 – Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives

Jesus struggles to accept his fate. He struggles to go through with the plan. He second guesses things and hungers for another option. He is anguished, we’re told, and sweating profusely. These are all symptoms of fear.

Jesus is also feeling alone through this. His disciples are clued out, and therefore, not present with him and for him.

22: 47-53 – The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

Judas does what he has decided to do. They get to Jesus in the cover of darkness. The authorities have an armed escort to arrest Jesus and deliver him for questioning. The disciples ask about making a counter attack but Jesus clearly had something else in mind by telling them to prepare with swords and the like. It’s more about inner preparation to be faithful to God rather than external preparations for battle. Clearly they are not prepared, as we will see.

22: 54-62 – Peter Denies Jesus

Peter fulfills the prediction of Jesus about betraying him. When Peter realizes what he has done out of fear, he runs away in tears. He made great promises to Jesus, but he has broken them in a publicly shameful way.

22: 63-65 – The Mocking and Beating of Jesus

The abuse and torture begins.

22: 66-71 – Jesus Before the Council

It is now early dawn. The authorities need to get the process going if they are going to have Jesus executed before the Sabbath when nothing can happen. They accuse Jesus of something that is true: his claim to be the Messiah and Son of God. Yet Jesus refuses to answer directly. They use the words and Jesus pushes them to it. This whole

process is meant to show how corrupt the authorities are. They have already decided what the outcome of their trial is to be. They're just making a pathetic effort to find grounds for execution. The first step is blasphemy, which is a punishable offence in Jewish law.

23: 1-12 – Jesus Before Pilate and Before Herod

The Jewish authorities present their case to Pilate. The way they do so is intended to have the greatest impact on Pilate. This includes a claim (we know it's false from the account a few chapters earlier) that Jesus was telling people not to pay their taxes, and that Jesus was claiming to be a king (Herod was the king appointed by Rome). Pilate questions Jesus who is as evasive as he is with the Jewish authorities. Pilate doesn't see a threat in Jesus. The authorities keep at it until Pilate hears something that can give him a way out and a way of making the religious leaders frustrated at the same time. Since Jesus is originally from Galilee, Herod the king of that region can interrogate him.

Herod has the same response from Jesus as Pilate had. There is nothing threatening about Jesus.

23: 13-25 – Jesus Sentenced to Death

This section is intended to minimize the role of Pilate and Herod in Jesus' death and maximize the role of the religious authorities and the majority of people whom they have managed to turn against Jesus. So intent are they in having Jesus executed that they would rather have a murderer and rebel released in place of Jesus. They need Rome because only Rome has the authority to have someone executed. Pilate consents.

23: 26-43 – The Crucifixion of Jesus

Clearly there are people upset about Jesus being taken to be crucified. Simon of Cyrene is mentioned by name, which most likely means he is one who later became a disciple. This is how he met Jesus for the first time.

Jesus' prophetic words to the women suggest that if they are willing to murder innocent people in their violent ways as a nation, things will only get worse for them as a consequence in due time ("for if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry"). Dry wood is also ripe for burning, which is also a prediction of the great burning that will happen in AD70.

Two of Jesus seven words from the cross come in this section. Jesus prays forgiveness on his enemies in the midst of his painful dying at their hands. He also offers a compassionate welcome to one of the thieves being crucified with him who deserves his punishment. If this doesn't speak of Jesus' vision of God and hope for the world, nothing does. In a world of hateful violence, indifference and hurt, love can only change things if it is capable of forgiving.

23: 44-49 – The Death of Jesus

Jesus dies committing his Spirit to God, indicating a final reconciliation with God. The centurion bears witness to the injustice of crucifying an innocent man and people leave the scene “beating their breasts” (indicating regret and remorse at what’s happened). Jesus’ family and many women followers were watching it all from a distance. His male disciples seem to have vanished, like Peter.

Clearly, Luke is suggesting that much of the information he has for the accounts of the crucifixion come from these eye-witnesses. Were the gospels really composed by women, who provided the most vital accounts for writers like Luke to put it all down to papyrus?