

Luke 22:1-13

The Preparation for the Passover

It is Super Bowl weekend, and it seems that the game is all people can find to talk about. Strategies are being discussed, bets wagered, analyses considered all about how each of the teams will do. And as for the coaches and players themselves, they are focused on preparation. Studying video, planning new wrinkles to their offense or defense, it is all about preparation.

The same is true for those hosting the event. Hiring extra workers to staff the concessions, preparing enough garlic fries, ordering enough beer. The field must be made perfect as well. Even the city itself is adjusting traffic patterns and hiring extra security as the weekend approaches. And let's talk about the halftime show. I cannot envision how much preparations is going into that!

And we haven't talked about the commercials, which are months in the planing. Clearly this is one event that has been prepared for from every possible angle. And so it should be because billions of dollars are being invested in it. And those in charge know, that preparation is everything.

It is, perhaps, curious, that only Matthew and Luke remark in detail about the birth of Jesus. Mark begins virtually at the baptism of Jesus, and John begins with a discourse on Jesus' divinity. But all four writers comment in detail on His death. Surely, the crucifixion of Jesus, and His ensuing resurrection, are the center of Christianity. Christ had to die to be raised and ¹⁷if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

But while the death of Jesus is not in doubt (after all most people, even atheists, agree that he lived and no one lives forever), the circumstances surrounding His death are. How did He die? More importantly, why did He die? These are questions that demand an answer, and upon that answer depends salvation.

We must emphasize that Jesus had predicted His death. As He said "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9:22). After His resurrection, He would remind His disciples of their conversations when ²⁵He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24: 25-26). Even the Jewish leaders remembered that Jesus had said He would die. In pleading with Pilate for extra soldiers to guard the tomb they argued, "we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'after three days I am to rise again'" (Matthew 27:63).

Jesus not only predicted His death, but He alone had the authority to give His life. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:17-18). At His trial, when Pilate grew frustrated that Jesus would not respond to his questioning, he tried to assert his authority. ¹⁰Pilate said to Him, 'You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" Putting him in his place,

“¹¹Jesus answered, ‘you would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above’” (John 19:10-11).

Finally, Jesus died precisely when He chose to. There had been attempts on His life throughout His ministry. It began when He first preached in His hometown of Nazareth, “²⁸and all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. ³⁰But passing through their midst, He went His way” (Luke 4:28-30). And Jesus remained a hunted man until the end, “⁴⁷and He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, ⁴⁸and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on to every word He said” (Luke 19:47-48).

We must affirm that Jesus knew He was going to die for the sins of believers, that He chose to make that propitiatory sacrifice, and that He did so when the timing perfectly please God the Father. Anything else is inconsistent with Scripture and the orthodox beliefs of Christianity.

We return now to our theme of preparation. At this point in Luke’s gospel, he begins to tell the story of the final seventy-two hours of Jesus’ life. For the last few days, Jesus had made daily journeys from Simon the leper’s house in Bethany to the temple in Jerusalem to teach. Now, with Passover approaching, the scene shifted to the preparations for a meal, eaten by Jews throughout the Roman empire and beyond. To understand the sequence of events, if we conclude that Jesus was crucified in 30AD, then the 14th of Nissan fell on a Thursday and the 15th on Friday. So, that would give us the following chronology of the last few days. Jesus ate the Passover lamb and celebrated what we call the “Last Supper” on Thursday evening. He then went to Gethsemane on Thursday night, where He was arrested. Friday morning found Him before the Sanhedrin and then before Pontius Pilate. He was crucified later that day, from noon until about 3:00 pm when He died. He was buried that same afternoon and evening and rose on the ensuing Sunday morning.

The Feast

The time had finally come. “The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching” (v. 1). That Luke explains what the Feast of Unleavened Bread is serves to remind us of the Gentile audience for whom he was writing. They would not necessarily have made the connection. This particular feast was one of the three major feasts of the Jewish calendar year. The two others were the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated from the 15th to the 21st day of Nissan (usually corresponding to April in the Gregorian calendar). It had been instituted during the time of captivity in Egypt and was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets, the suspension of normal business, bonfires, sacrifices, and other celebrations.

“¹⁴Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut

off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you” (Exodus 12:14-16).

³Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
At the full moon, on our feast day.
⁴For it is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob.
⁵He established it for a testimony in Joseph
When he went throughout the land of Egypt.
I heard a language that I did not know” (Psalms 81:3-5).

The Passover, inaugurated simultaneously by God to remind the Israelites of their deliverance from Egypt, was celebrated on the day before the Feast began.

³On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. ⁴Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. ⁵Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight” (Exodus 12:3-6).

²¹Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover lamb. ²²You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. ²³For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. ²⁴And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever” (Exodus 12:21-24).

Over the centuries, these two celebrations were merged into one weeklong event. They were a high point of the Jewish year, and hundreds of thousands had gathered in Jerusalem and in the surrounding countryside to celebrate it.

Not all, however, were making preparations for the celebration. “The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people” (v. 2). We have met these people before. The chief priests included the reigning high priest, Caiaphas, as well as the leadership of the temple. This group was generally composed of Sadducees. The scribes, who were generally Pharisees, had devoted themselves to the study of the Law. The elders were family heads, and these three groups composed the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Judaism under Roman authority.

As often as they disagreed with each other, they were united in their hatred of Jesus. Some resented Him for political and economic reasons.

“⁴⁷Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, ‘what are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ ⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘you know nothing at all, ⁵⁰nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish’” (John 11:47-50).

In other words, if this rabbi actually did lead a revolt to overthrow the Romans, they would counterattack in such a way as to ruin the position and authority of the local Jewish leadership. Others despised Jesus for His constant challenging of their false and legalistic religious practices.

“⁴²But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. ⁴³Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. ⁴⁴Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it” (Luke 11:42-44).

Resentment had increased over the three years or so of Jesus’ ministry, but in the last few months the intensity of their passions had reached a boiling point. They were no longer able to tolerate this itinerant rabbi. Though there was a long standing plan to kill Jesus, the occasion of the Passover was not a good time. The Passover was a perfect time for a leader of the people to try to unite them in an effort to break free from Roman oppression. Jesus seemed to be such a man, and the people found Him captivating. To try to assault Him now and in public would mean disaster for these Jewish religious leaders.

But Jesus returned to the outskirts of the town at night and apparently they were unable to track Him down. What they needed was someone on the inside; someone who would let them know where Jesus would be some quiet night when He was away from the people and only in the company of His closest followers. Then, with some help from the local Roman magistrate, they could take Him away quietly and without drawing the attention of the masses.

The Betrayal

They were approached by such a man. According to Mark, Judas negotiated the betrayal of Jesus on the Tuesday before the Passover (Mark 14:1). Luke bluntly informs us that “³Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. ⁴And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them” (v. 3-4).

It is important to clarify the different roles played here. Surely, Satan acted wickedly to try to undermine the plan of God. His motives are clear and deliberate. But despite the role of Satan, Judas is still to blame. He did not resist the devil. Believers are commanded to “⁸be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9). “The devil made me do it” is simply a child’s excuse.

Judas was one of the inner circle, something all four evangelists note. He had eaten, slept, and traveled with Jesus for nearly three years. He had lived intimately with Him and, in turn, seen Him live His flawless, sinless life. Think of what he had seen. Judas had seen Jesus' power over nature when He quieted the storm and cursed the fig tree. He has seen His power over disease when Jesus healed lepers, the woman who had been afflicted with bleeding, and many others. Judas had seen Jesus' power over the supernatural when he witnessed the exorcism of demons. And he had even seen Jesus' power over death when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow in the village of Nain.

Also, think of what he had heard. Judas had heard the wisdom of Jesus' teaching during countless presentations in the synagogues around Galilee. He had heard the longer discourses such as that known as the Sermon on the Mount. And, not doubt he had heard the countless other times Jesus simply talked with His followers around an evening fire. It is not possible to calculate the wisdom that was placed at his disposal.

History is replete with famous, or rather infamous, traitors. Guy Fawkes tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Benedict Arnold tried to sell the plans of West Point to the British army during the American Revolution. Brutus and Cassius turned on their friend Julius Caesar and orchestrated his assassination. Ephialtes of Trachis showed the invading Persian army a way around the Greeks at Thermopylae. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg sold atomic secrets to the Soviets. But Judas is universally known.

One must wonder why. Perhaps because he was from southern Israel (he was called Iscariot probably because he was from the village of Kerioth) and not from Galilee, so he never really fit in with the other disciples. Perhaps he had placed too much hope in an earthly kingdom of God and had no desire for a spiritual kingdom when it seemed that that was all Jesus had to offer. However the human explanations, this treachery, too, was planned by God. David's psalm is strongly prescient,

“¹²For it is not an enemy who reproaches me,
Then I could bear it;
Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me,
Then I could hide myself from him.
¹³But it is you, a man my equal,
My companion and my familiar friend;
¹⁴We who had sweet fellowship together
Walked in the house of God in the throng” (Psalm 55:12-14).

And Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. This was equal to about five weeks wages for a worker. Not an insignificant amount of money, but hardly life changing in an earthly sense. Yet it did him no good, as it had been prophesied in centuries past.

“¹²I said to them, ‘if it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!’ So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. ¹³Then the Lord said to me, ‘throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.’” So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord” (Zechariah 11:12-13).

“³Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said, ‘what is that to us? See to that yourself!’ ⁵And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. ⁶The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, ‘it is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.’ ⁷And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter’s Field as a burial place for strangers” (Matthew 27:3-7).

Naturally though, the Jewish religious leadership recognized the boon of Judas’ betrayal. “⁵They were glad and agreed to give him money. ⁶So he consented, and began seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd” (v. 5-6).

The Preparation

From Judas’ meeting with the chief priests, the scene now shifted back to Jesus and the twelve. It is “the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed” (v. 7). We may assume that the lamb had been purchased earlier, but there was still much to be done. So, “Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, ‘go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it’” (v. 8). Obediently, “⁹they said to Him, ‘where do You want us to prepare it?’ ¹⁰And He said to them, ‘when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. ¹¹And you shall say to the owner of the house, “the Teacher says to you, ‘where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” ¹²And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there’ (v. 9-12).

Recall that Jesus was fully human, but also fully divine. Therefore, He was not necessarily omniscient, but He did have the ability to know what God the Father intended Him to know. And one of those things was that He would be betrayed. “⁷⁰Jesus answered them, ‘did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?’ ⁷¹Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him” (John 6:70-71). Therefore, the instructions Jesus gave were specific enough that Peter and John would be able to find the location, but not so detailed as to give Judas the opportunity to betray Jesus before dinner was finished. If Judas had known the exact location, it would have been an excellent time to hand Jesus over to the authorities since every Jewish family would be in their homes eating the Passover meal, and Jesus still had more to say to His disciples and wanted a time to pray with them.

The instructions were to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water. That would not be easy to find, since women did that, but it would certainly be noticeable. The man who carried the jar was not necessarily the same man who owned the home. More likely it was a servant. By finding him and following him, Peter and John were able to locate the room. And the room had been furnished. That is, it was provided with carpets, cushions and tables that would make the evening comfortable. The role of Peter and John would have been to make the other preparations for the meal, such as obtaining the unleavened bread, bitter herbs, dates, nuts, and cinnamon that was often eaten. All of that was done smoothly, and Luke remarks with some hint of astonishment that “they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover” (v. 13).

There we must leave the story. But we cannot fail to observe the unmistakable connection with the Passover being prepared so diligently. That celebration is mentioned five times in this passage alone. We can never forget the sacrificial nature of Christ's death. He was not the victim of botched judicial proceedings. He was not martyred for a cause. He was not a failed revolutionary. He was not a lunatic. He was crucified "by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). He is "Christ our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). But more of that in the weeks ahead.

Takeaways

Let us remember that a high position in the church is no guarantee of righteousness. Rank is no preventative against sin. Those who set themselves against Jesus were the privileged religious leaders of their day. It was the scribes and Pharisees who plotted against Jesus from the very beginnings of His ministry. Those who had the most knowledge and best opportunity for faith missed the mark greatly. Being a leader in the local church is not insurance against error. We are to respect the leaders God has placed over us, in our nation, in the home, at work, and in the local church. But we also must be on our guard against allowing that respect to become worship.

It is also important to note how far we may fall. Judas ought to be studied more than he is. He ought to be a symbol of what can happen to a person despite having complete access to Jesus. He personally experienced Jesus presence in a way we cannot. He taught. He preached the word. He was one of the seventy no doubt. Perhaps even then he rejoiced with the others at the work of God. We do not know when he turned; when he began to doubt. But clearly there was a time when he was like Peter, James, and John. Let us be on our guard that we never become complacent in assuming we are beyond temptation and great failure.

Finally, let us also beware the power and influence of money. "The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). There is no sin in being either rich or poor. Money itself is simply a thing. But like so many other things, it has the power to corrupt. And make no mistake, a poor person can sin in this as easily as a rich man. We need not have money to love it. Let us cultivate a habit on contentment. "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5). Let Christ be sufficient for us in all things.