

Week of February 17, 2013

Being Served or Serving?

Passage Outline:

1. Remember Jesus' Example (Luke 22:19-23)
2. Avoid Worldly Perspectives (Luke 22:24-27)
3. Adopt Kingdom Perspectives (Luke 22:28-30)

What's This Lesson About?

True greatness requires humility and a servant's spirit. Remembering what Jesus did for us should promote these qualities. This lesson focuses on the question, "For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving?" (Luke 22:27). This lesson can help you achieve true greatness by living a life of humble service.

1. Remember Jesus' Example - Luke 22:19-23

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." ²⁰ 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. ²¹ But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²² The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him." ²³ They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Jesus exhibited humility and a servant's spirit throughout His earthly lifetime, especially this final week as He prepared to go to the cross. As Jesus gathered with His disciples to celebrate the Passover, He reinterpreted the great Jewish feast in light of His impending death. Originally, Passover represented the remembrance of how God had led His people out of slavery in Egypt and spared them when they applied blood to the doorposts of their home to prevent each family's eldest son from dying in the final plague (Ex. 12:1-20). After the event, the Lord commanded the Israelites to celebrate the Passover feast to ensure that future generations would remember the event (Ex. 12:12-28; Lev. 23:5-8).

Read the article "Preparing for Passover" contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

One of the focal points of the Passover celebration was the breaking of bread. The Israelites had eaten unleavened bread because of their rapid departure from Egypt. They could not wait for the bread to rise because of the haste in leaving Egypt. Throughout the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, which was the entire week following the Passover celebration, the people were to eat only unleavened bread in remembrance of how God delivered them from slavery.

Read the article "Bread and Bread Making in the Ancient World" contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

Jesus reinterpreted the bread as He gave thanks and broke it. During the Passover ceremony, He declared the bread, "His body." The history of Christian interpretation of these words varies greatly. But if we simply take Jesus' words, "This is My Body," we can only conclude the "bread of the Lord's Supper is His Body. Do we understand how this happens? No, not at all. But since Jesus is true God, and He said these words, that's really good enough. Jesus emphasized that His body was "given for you," a reference that anticipates Calvary, when Jesus would give His life on a cross as a vicarious sacrifice. Jesus' death was more than an example, but it certainly demonstrated a servant's heart to all who would follow Him.

The Passover celebration included four cups of wine. Two of the cups came after the meal. Jesus used the third cup to continue explaining His death. He called the cup "the new covenant established by My blood." If Passover reminded the people of the covenant God had made with Moses and the Israelites in Egypt, then Jesus'

death established the new covenant predicted by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34). People would no longer have to recall Egypt and Sinai for examples of redemption. They would no longer have a Day of Atonement and His followers would no longer celebrate Passover in the same way. All eyes would be on His death on the cross, and His blood became the blood of the ultimate Passover Lamb.

Jesus proclaimed His blood was “shed for you.” Again, this emphasized Jesus’ substitutionary death on behalf of sinners. He died their death and spilt His blood to cover their sin. Jesus’ death not only made salvation possible for the sinner, but it set an example to those who had trusted Him. His self-giving approach to life was the attitude He expected in His followers (Matt. 16:25). Jesus modeled greatness by humbling Himself and serving others. Without His sacrifice, they would have had no hope for eternal life, yet Jesus made it possible through His death on the cross. Whoever believed and trusted in Him would have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus’ death was more than an example of servant living, it provided atonement for sin, and in doing so Jesus provided the ultimate example of selflessness.

Unfortunately, not all of Jesus’ disciples had the same attitude of humility. Jesus announced that “the hand of the one betraying Me” was seated with them “at the table.” Since He had not identified the betrayer yet, the disciples began to argue among themselves about who could do such a deed. Certainly Judas’s attitude was far from humble. He betrayed Jesus because he was greedy. John said Judas stole money from the treasury that he kept for Jesus (John 12:6). Jesus previously had called Judas “the Devil,” indicating he had a heart filled with pride and self-interest, just as Satan did when he rebelled against God (John 6:70). But Judas, even though his heart was filled with pride and selfishness, was not running the show. Jesus had to die. God had determined Jesus would die. Jesus’ death fulfilled a God’s plan and purpose, and Judas’ greed was used by God to betray Jesus.

2. Avoid Worldly Perspectives - Luke 22:24-27

²⁴ Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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.

As the disciples debated who was bad enough to betray Jesus, they quickly turned to who was the greatest, deserving a place of honor next to Jesus when He came into His kingdom. The debate revealed their worldly perspective of greatness, which included fame, power, money, and position. Notice how quickly the disciples got sidetracked to position and power from the example Jesus gave them in the bread and the wine.

Read the article “Standards of Greatness in the First Century” contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

Jesus contrasted the worldly view of greatness with what they had witnessed at the Passover meal. He said that kings of the Gentiles exercised dominion over those that they ruled. Earthly kings were supposed to care for those under their authority, but instead ended up using people for their own purposes. They were called Benefactors, a term often applied to those who had absolute authority over their subjects, looking out primarily for their own good. Jesus laid down His life for the good of those who would follow Him, while the earthly rulers often took the lives of their subjects for their own whims. The contrast could not be more pronounced. Jesus’ desire was that His disciples embrace His attitude of service, not the world’s way of domination.

The greatest of Jesus’ disciples are the ones who become like the youngest. In the world of the New Testament, a person’s privileges and standing in society were closely tied to age. People considered the youngest as lowliest with the least standing. The way up for Jesus was down!

The foot washing in John's Gospel (John 13:1-17) demonstrated these words in a tangible way. Jesus took a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet even though they admittedly thought they should be washing His feet. Jesus' word in Luke for serving often referred to a table waiter, emphasizing that Jesus wanted His disciples to know that faithfully serving in humble circumstances itself qualified as true greatness.

Jesus asked a leading question in verse 27 to help the disciples catch the point. He mentioned the person at the table and the one serving the table, and then He asked which of the two was greater. The world would say that the one enjoying the banquet is more important than the one serving it. Many waiters at restaurants encounter this idea of entitlement from the people they serve each week. However, without the server, the meal would not happen. Jesus explained this reversal of importance when He said that He was at the table "as the One who serves." Though the world found greatness in power and popular acclaim, Jesus described true greatness as found in humble living and self-sacrifice.

3. Adopt Kingdom Perspectives - Luke 22:28-30

²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus promised to give the apostles rights and privileges as leaders in His kingdom. They had adopted kingdom perspectives to order their lives. Jesus would build His kingdom of such people. He called His disciples "the ones who stood by Me in My trials." The disciples had remained with Jesus in spite of plots by religious leaders against His life. They had seen the fickleness of the crowds yet remained with Him. Jesus had no place to call His home (Luke 9:58), and He certainly endured temptations from Satan both in the wilderness and throughout His earthly ministry. The disciples had adopted kingdom perspectives instead of worldly ones. They invested in His kingdom rather than trying to build their own. Those who want to be served are more interested in their own kingdoms. Those who serve are more interested in His kingdom.

Because the disciples stood by Jesus in His trials, He said He would bestow on them a kingdom. To *bestow* something meant to make a covenant with someone. These words reminded the disciples of Jesus' words in Luke 22:20, where Jesus spoke of the cup in terms of "the new covenant established by My blood." The idea (with a different Greek word) appears in Luke 12:32 for the Father making covenant with His people to give them the kingdom. In this case, Jesus makes the covenant and confers the kingdom. Jesus offered to us the same kingdom that the Father had given to Him.

As the disciples embraced kingdom perspectives, Jesus allowed them to participate in the kingdom of God, which had present and future implications. At certain points, the kingdom of God seemed to be present. In John the Baptist's preaching, the prophet said, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Matt. 3:2). Jesus repeated the phrase in His preaching ministry (4:17). When Jesus drove out demons, He explained His actions with the words, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). When asked when the kingdom would come, Jesus answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; no one will say 'Look here!' or 'There!' For you see, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20-21). Certainly the kingdom had present aspects.

The kingdom also had elements that awaited the future. In Acts 1:6-8, His disciples asked the risen Lord when He would restore the kingdom of Israel. He answered that they did not need "to know the times or periods that the Father has set" (Acts 1:7). Paul encouraged the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch that they had "to pass through many troubles" before entering the kingdom of God (14:22). Obviously they had experienced salvation and saw the kingdom of God breaking into their world, but something of the kingdom awaited a future fulfillment.

Read the article "The Kingdom of Heaven" contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet

Theologians have labeled the tension between the present and future aspects of the kingdom of God as *already but not yet*. We begin to experience the kingdom of God when we begin to follow Jesus, but some aspects of salvation await a future fulfillment. Every time we see a lost person receive Christ, we witness the coming of the kingdom. Every time we see a prayer answered or a sick person healed, we see elements of God's kingdom at work. However, we do not see it in full like we will in the day when there are no lost people or sick people. In heaven, we will experience the fullness of God's kingdom without an environment inclined toward sin and trial.

Jesus described two future rewards for living with kingdom perspectives on earth. First, He mentioned that the faithful would eat and drink at His table in His kingdom. Jesus had promised that He would not eat the bread and drink the cup again until He did so in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:16-18). Obviously Jesus believed that an interval of time would pass between His impending death and the future establishment of the fullness of His kingdom. Jesus referred to banquets in His parables (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:7-24). This led to the proclamation, "The one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God is blessed!" (Luke 14:15). John used the same imagery to describe his heavenly vision of the end in Revelation 19:6-10 to describe the marriage feast between Jesus and His bride—the church. Faithfulness in service on earth would not go unrewarded in heaven, and the marriage banquet was part of that reward.

A second reward for living with kingdom perspectives involved a responsibility in heaven. Jesus said that those who belong to His kingdom would sit on thrones. In 2 Timothy 2:11-13, Paul quoted a saying that included the words, "For if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him." In Revelation 5:10, John heard the song of the 24 elders that said of the redeemed, "You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth." In Matthew 19:28, Jesus had previously taught the disciples that in the "Messianic Age" they would "sit on 12 thrones" representing the new Israel by ruling over the "12 tribes of Israel." They had endured opposition and proven themselves faithful, and they had a work to do in Jesus' kingdom. He reiterated these points again in Luke 22:30.

Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus

1. The world has a different definition of greatness than Jesus taught.
2. The world values power and authority; Jesus values service.
3. The Lord's Supper retells the story of Jesus' humility and service, when He gave His life for our sin.
4. People in our world value recognition and honor, but Jesus desires humble service.
5. Jesus will reward those who have a kingdom perspective instead of a worldly perspective.

Concept Study: *Jesus as "the One Who Serves"* (v. 27)

Paul encouraged Christians to have the same attitude of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11. This included a life that put others' interests ahead of one's own interests. Jesus did not hold to His place in heaven but came to earth, humbling Himself as a servant. He took on human form and obeyed the Father, even to death on a cross. Because He lived a life of humility, God exalted Him by giving Him a name above every name that all people would one day revere.

As we live our lives, serving is more important than being served. God sees every act of humble service, and He will certainly reward those who have lived lives like Jesus.