

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
August 29 – September 4

Monday, August 29 – Luke 22: 7 – 38

Luke, along with the other Gospel writers, makes a point of noting that the Last Supper took place as part of the celebration of Passover. Passover was celebrated once a year by the Jews to remind them that when they were slaves in Egypt and Pharaoh refused to let them go, God sent ten plagues to break the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. The last plague involved the Angel of Death going throughout Egypt and killing the firstborn son of each family. The Angel of Death passed over the homes of the Israelites because they had obeyed God and painted the doorframes of their homes with the blood of a lamb. Passover, being saved by the blood of a lamb, clearly pointed to Jesus and what he would do on the cross. When we celebrate communion it is good for us to remember that by Christ's blood we too pass over from death to life.

As Jesus celebrated this Passover Last Supper with his disciples he talked about the Kingdom coming, which is probably what caused the dispute among them that Luke records in verse 24. The disciples get into an argument over which of them was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom Jesus spoke about. When you consider all that Jesus taught them and what the Kingdom of God is all about this is a pretty amazing discussion for them to have. It is even more amazing when you remember what we looked at earlier in the year in John's Gospel. John's Gospel records the fact that right before the Last Supper Jesus humbled himself and washed the feet of his disciples, because all of them were too proud to do it for each other. It could be that this dispute in Luke and John's account of the foot washing are related. Notice Jesus' point in verse 27 that he is the one who is serving them. Notice also in verse 31 that Jesus prayed for Peter that Peter's faith would not fail. At first glance it appears that Jesus' prayer wasn't answered. But remember, even though Peter denied Jesus three times, his faith ultimately did not fail.

Tuesday, August 30 – Luke 22: 39 – 62

Luke records in great detail Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Notice Jesus' exhortation to his disciples to pray that they do not fall into temptation, and then Jesus goes and does exactly that for himself. This moment in the Garden was without a doubt Jesus' greatest moment of temptation. How easy would it have been for Jesus to walk away from the whole thing? Notice in verse 43 that Jesus needs an angel to come to strengthen him, and then in verse 44 notice

that Luke records the detail that Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood. What proof that Jesus was human just as we are. What proof that this was not an easy thing for Jesus to go and do.

It is clear that the disciples did not pray as Jesus warned them to pray, and as a result, when Peter's own moment of temptation comes he easily falls prey to it.

Wednesday, August 31 – Luke 22: 63 – 23: 25

Jesus' suffering starts with the soldiers who were guarding Jesus mocking him and beating him. Stop and think for a moment of the humility of Christ, that even though he was God, he allowed this to happen to him. Jesus suffering continues as he is first put on trial by the Jewish leaders (22: 66-71) and the charge they level against him is blasphemy for saying he is the Son of God. Of course it wasn't blasphemy because it was true, but that was all the reason the Jewish leaders needed to want have him put to death. However, their problem was that they could not condemn anyone to death themselves, only the Romans could do that, so they take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea. But blasphemy is not a capital offence under Roman law, so they trump up charges that Jesus is trying to cause a revolt against Rome by trying to be the new king of the Jews. They even claim that he has urged people not to pay taxes to Caesar, which is an outright lie (Luke 20: 20 -26). Pilate doesn't want to condemn an innocent man to death so as soon as he finds out Jesus is from Galilee he sends Jesus off to Herod, the Jewish puppet governor of that region.

Herod wanted Jesus to put on a good show for him and do a miracle. How tempting on so many levels it would have been for Jesus to do that. He could have vindicated himself, he could have avoided death, and he probably could have ended up in a position of power, but Jesus didn't come for any of that, and Jesus is no one's puppet. So Jesus refused Herod's request and his suffering continued. Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate and again Pilate tries to find a way out of condemning an innocent man to death. So he offers to punish Jesus and then release him, but the mob would have none of it. Instead they insist that Pilate release Barabbas a murderer and an insurrectionist, and put Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, to death instead. In the end Pilate was a people pleaser, so Barabbas is released and Jesus, though innocent, is condemned.

Thursday, September 1 – Luke 23: 26 – 49

Under Roman law a condemned man was forced to carry his own cross to the place of execution, but apparently Jesus was so worn out from the ordeal he has been through that he is physically unable to do that. Remember Jesus has been without sleep for more than 24 hours, he

has been severely beaten and whipped, which would have caused him to have lost an enormous amount of blood. So the Romans grab Simon from Cyrene to carry the cross. This is an interesting detail that Luke gives us. Remember Luke's account is based on eyewitness testimony (Luke 1: 2), and Simon is one of those eyewitnesses. After Luke's Gospel was put into circulation people could have gone to Simon and questioned him about the accuracy of Luke's account. Luke is inviting those who read his Gospel to investigate these facts for themselves!

It seemed like everyone was against Jesus, but as Jesus walks down the road to his death there were many who wept for him. This may have just been out of sympathy or they may have been followers of Jesus who are distraught at seeing this man that they love being executed. Notice in verses 28 – 31 that even as he faced death, Jesus' concern was not for himself, but for those who were being left behind. Jesus' words in these verses point to 70 AD when the Romans came into Jerusalem in full force and destroyed everything.

Jesus' concern for others is further shown by his plea for God to forgive those who were nailing him to the cross, and for the criminal who hung beside him. As this criminal sees that Jesus is the Messiah, he reaches out to Jesus in faith and is saved as he is dying.

Friday, September 2 – Luke 23: 50 – 24: 12

For the Jews the Sabbath started at dark Friday night. So late in the day on Friday the Jews would begin to prepare themselves for the Sabbath. Part of that preparation was to be ceremonially clean, which meant that after sunset on Friday a Jew could not touch a dead body. Luke includes this piece of information so we understand why Jesus' body wasn't properly prepared for burial when he was taken down from the cross. Joseph of Arimathia was a Pharisee who was a follower of Christ. He is the one who made the arrangements for Jesus to be buried in a tomb he owned. Because it was late in the day on Friday, he took the body and wrapped him in a linen sheet and placed him in the tomb. The plan was that on Sunday some of the women would come and wash the body and embalm it in spices for permanent burial. But on Sunday when the women showed up there was no body to embalm, because Jesus had risen from the grave. Instead of finding Jesus, they found the rock rolled away and two angels who told them to stop looking for the living among the dead. The women went back to town to tell the disciples what had happened. Like normal men, the disciples just assumed the women were confused. Peter, probably figuring that he had to be the one to straighten the confusion out, got up and ran to the tomb to see for himself. But there was no Jesus to be found.

Saturday, September 3 – Luke 24: 13 – 35

Today's reading is one of the most amazing passages in the Bible. In just a few verses Luke ties together the whole Bible with this account of Jesus meeting two men on the Road to Emmaus. These two men were apparently two of Jesus' disciples, though not part of the twelve, and they are clearly dejected as they walk and talk about what just happened to Jesus. But then, as Luke tells us in verse 15, Jesus comes up and begins to walk alongside of them. When Jesus asks them what they are discussing, they ask him if he is the only one who doesn't know what just happened in Jerusalem, which is pretty funny if you stop to think about it, because Jesus is the one it all happened to! In verses 19-24 these two men recount to Jesus, who they thought Jesus was and what had happened to him. Then in verses 25 – 27 Jesus, starting with Moses and the prophets explains the Scriptures to these two men and explains how Jesus is the one the Bible is all about. The amazing thing is that, for whatever reason, these two men don't recognize Jesus throughout this whole conversation. It is only in verses 30 – 31, when Jesus gives thanks and breaks the bread, that they realize it is Jesus who has been talking to them. Notice what happened to them as soon as they realized it was Jesus who had appeared to them. They immediately went back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that indeed Jesus had risen from the grave.

Sunday, September 4 – Luke 24: 36 – 53

Next, Luke records Jesus appearing in person to the eleven disciples. The eleven had heard that Jesus was alive again from the two men who had walked with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus, but now they see Jesus with their own eyes. At first they think he is a ghost, but Jesus shows them his wounds, and invites them to touch the wounds and see for themselves that he is no longer dead, but has conquered the grave. Just like he had done with the two men on the Road to Emmaus, Jesus explains the Scriptures to them and how he fits into the big picture of what the Scriptures are all about. Jesus then goes on to tell them that repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name starting in Jerusalem but then going out to the ends of the earth. But he tells them that this preaching cannot begin until the Holy Spirit comes upon them (verse 49). Luke's Gospel comes to an end with Jesus' ascension into heaven. That is where Jesus is today, sitting at the right hand of God until God makes the nations his footstool (Hebrews 10:12-13), and the time comes for Jesus to come back to earth a second time to claim what is rightfully his. The Book of Acts is the second book that Luke wrote, and it begins right where his Gospel ends, with Jesus ascending into heaven, and his disciples waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit.