

JESUS LAST WEEK

WEEK 5: THURSDAY – THE LAST SUPPER

LENTEN STUDY - 2009

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INTRODUCTION

We have been on an epic journey with Jesus as he goes through his last week on earth. Each day has taken us a day closer to the cross and Jesus ultimate triumph over death for the forgiveness of our sins. The start of the week had its highs and lows but through it all Jesus was in total control of all the events and marched boldly towards the ultimate sacrifice. After Jesus and his followers had a quiet day on Wednesday the next days will become hectic and full of action and drama.

Wednesday starts out quietly with Jesus planning his final meal with his disciples and ends with Jesus before Caiaphas and the religious leaders. The major events of the day that we will follow through are:

- Jesus sends two of his disciples to find a room where they can celebrate the Passover meals.
- Jesus and the disciples gather in the upper room to celebrate what will be their last meal together. At this meal Jesus institutes what we have come to know as the Last Supper. Once the meal is over Judas leaves on his way to his “devilish” cohorts to lead them to Jesus.
- They leave the Upper Room and Jesus takes them to Gethsemane where he goes to pray. His heart is heavy with what he knows is ahead and he needs time alone with his father. During this time we get an image of Jesus at his most human and most vulnerable but he overcomes all the challenges.
- Following the moving prayers we find Jesus heading valiantly to his betrayal

by Judas and his capture. Jesus does not turn away from this but faces it knowing his future will affect all men from this point on.

- The night moves on and we see Jesus before the chief priests and elders under trial as they tried to find some reason to have Jesus put to death.
- We end this day with Peter’s denial of Jesus as he was seen in the courtyard where Jesus was being tried. Jesus had told Peter earlier this would happen but Peter would not believe it would happen until after the event when he was mortified by what he had done.

This was a long day and we have taken license with the timing taking us from Thursday morning until daybreak on Friday. Nobody has had time to rest so all would be tired with frayed nerves.

GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

All four Gospels cover this period of Jesus life. The three synoptic gospels are very similar but John has a more in-depth coverage. Read the following accounts of Thursday’s events:

- Matthew 26:17-75
- Mark 14:12-72
- Luke 22:7-21
- John 13:1-18:27

As you can see John gives much greater exposure to what happened this day. John has Jesus giving a great deal of teaching at this final meal on the role the disciples will play after he has left them. John does not have the institution of the Lord’s Supper but has Jesus lowering himself to the role of a servant and washing the disciples’ feet.

- **What to you is the most important thing about Jesus washing of the disciples' feet?**

For our study we will take the events as told by Mark. Mark covers the events on a precise way but gives a detailed account of what happened on that day nearly 2000 years ago.

BEHIND THE GOSPELS

The passages we have looked at portray what we celebrate as Maundy Thursday. "Maundy" derives from the Latin word for the "mandate" – the new commandment which in John gospel Jesus gives his disciples at the meal. John 14:34 says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

John's account is very different from the other Gospels.

1. The dating is different. The Synoptic gospels the meal Jesus shares is a Passover meal. In John the meal is the day before Passover, the day the lambs for Passover are being killed and this makes Jesus death be at this time. John's timing seems to be more theological to tie in with John making Jesus the new Passover sacrificial lamb.
2. John devotes a lot more time to this meal and has Jesus giving a lot more teaching. It is "Jesus Final Discourse."
3. John does not have Jesus breaking the bread and sharing the cup. Instead of this John has Jesus becoming the lowly servant and washing the disciples feet.

For our study let's primarily focus on Mark's account. In Mark's usual way this gives the most concise account of the events while still retaining the basic message of what was happening. We will also break this up into the areas given above.

PREPARING FOR PASSOVER – MARK 14:12-16

Here we see Jesus and the disciples preparing for the Passover meal. Mark is very explicit about the day and by his account the day will be Thursday night.

The Passover meal or Seder is to celebrate the Israelites escape from Egypt and each part of the meal is to commemorate one aspect of this escape and release from slavery. The high light of the meal was the Passover lamb. The lamb that each Israelite family killed, and marked their house with its blood so the angel of death passed over them, was then eaten as their last meal in Egypt. Jesus was to become the new sacrificial Lamb slain for our sins.

It was traditional that the Passover meal was eaten in Jerusalem so this is why we see the disciples wondering where they would eat this meal. From what we see it appears that Jesus had arranged for a place to go for this meal. Knowing the plans of the religious leaders he has kept this secret as it would have been extremely important to him that he have this last meal with his closest followers. He would not have wanted Judas in particular to know because he did not want this meal being disturbed by his arrest.

We see Jesus sending two disciples; John names the two as being Peter and John. As we saw in Jesus sending two disciples to get the donkey for the triumphal entry, so again we see Jesus sending two, not one but two. Jesus tells the disciples to look for a man carrying a jar of water. This indicates Jesus planning as this would be very unusual for a man to be carrying a water jar, this was women's work. The two disciples went and found everything just as Jesus had told them. The upper room was therefore prepared for the Passover meal. There is much speculation that the house was that of the young Mark's family but he kept this fact secret for his safety at the time of writing.

THE LAST SUPPER – MARK 14:17-25

We know from John's Gospel that a great deal was said during the Passover meal. Peter and John had gone on ahead of the others, as directed by Jesus, and the others followed from Bethany later in the day. The meal would be after sunset as prescribed by the religious teachings. The 12 and Jesus gathered to celebrate Passover together. They took their places on the reclining couches around the table. During such an important meal as the Passover, everyone would recline at the table, symbolizing the freedom the people gained after the very first Passover and their subsequent release for slavery in Egypt. The

meal is organized around drinking four cups of red wine symbolizing the four-part promises of redemption found in Exodus 6:6-7

1. "I will bring you out"
2. "I will rid you of bondage"
3. "I will redeem you"
4. "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God."

There was a traditional program for the meal. First would come a blessing of the festival and the wine, followed by drinking the first cup of wine. (The wine made the meal special as normally water was served with meals.) Then the food is brought out. The youngest son would then ask why this night was distinguished from all others and the father (Jesus in this case) would tell the story of the Exodus. This would be followed by praise to God for past and future redemption by using the first part of the Hallel in Psalms 113-115. Then the second cup of wine would be drunk. After the second cup, the bread would be blessed, broken and distributed and then eaten with bitter herbs and a fruit paste dish. This would be followed by the eating of the meal, which was not to last beyond midnight. The Passover meal included roasted lamb sacrificed in the temple. At the end of the meal the father would bless a third cup of wine which would be followed by the singing of the second part of the Hallel, Psalms 116-118. A fourth cup of wine would conclude the meal.

It was during this meal, probably at the point of eating the bread with the bitter herbs that Jesus stunned the disciples with his declaration that one of them would betray him. This causes a stir among the disciples as they all wonder what Jesus is talking about except Judas.

It is during the meal that we see Jesus instituting the ritual we celebrate that we call the Lord's Supper, or Communion, or the Eucharist. This is a very familiar story to us. We celebrate it every month and use the words Jesus gave us. As we have just seen from the description of the Passover meal above Jesus took two parts of this meal, the passing of the bread and the drinking of wine, and gave them a new meaning as representations of his body and blood. He used the bread and wine to explain the significance of what he was about to do on the cross. Just as the Passover celebrated deliverance from slavery in

Egypt, so the Lord's Supper celebrates deliverance from sin by Christ's death.

JESUS PREDICTION OF JESUS DENIAL – MARK 14:26-31

Following the meal we see Jesus and the disciples leaving the upper room and going to the Garden of Gethsemane which is on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. This would not have surprised the disciples as each night they left Jerusalem and returned to Bethany and the Garden of Gethsemane was a favorite place if Jesus to stop and pray. It had been a long day and no doubt they were all tired and ready for some rest. Judas had left them at this point and had gone off to the house of Annas to instigate his treachery. Jesus was not finished with shocking the disciples. He now shocked them again by letting them know they would all desert him at the time of greatest need. Peter, the impetuous denied that he would be part of that and Jesus warned him he would do it three times before the night was over.

Jesus goes further into the garden to be alone with his father, Abba. He took Peter, James and John with him to keep watch. At this time we see Jesus at his most vulnerable and human. He throws himself on the ground and prayers that the coming events may be avoided. He tries to talk God out of what will happen to him. I am sure if I was in Jesus place I would want to avoid the events knowing what I would have to go through. The human Jesus wanted to avoid the events but the divine part knew what he must do and that he must submit to God's will no matter how horrific and painful it would be.

- **As I write this I wonder if I were in this situation would I do my will or God's? How about you?**
- **We also see the disciples falling asleep from physical and mental exhaustion. How often have you been too tired or just plain lazy to do God's work?**

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED – MARK 14:43-52

All four Gospels tell of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Mark in his usual way is the most concise and rapidly moves through the sequence of events. Jesus

has completed his talk with God and is resigned to what is going to follow. He knows exactly what will occur but is totally resigned to it knowing it is God's plan not just for his life but what it will mean for all mankind. He knows he will carry our burden of sin to the cross. He knows that this path is essential for the redemption of mankind. He knows that he will die an excruciatingly painful death as a human but that this is necessary for him to conquer death so that we all may live. This is put in contrast who thought that with Jesus they were prepared for anything but when the "going-got-rough" fled in the face of adversity leaving Jesus alone.

Judas after leaving the meal would have gone in the middle of the night to the waiting Annas to tell him that all was ready for the arrest of Jesus. Annas was probably waiting with the guard ready to go and arrest Jesus. Judas would know exactly where Jesus was going when they left the upper room.

From the accounts we see the Temple Guard coming stealthily in the middle of the night to arrest Jesus. They knew there would be no one around to confront them and so they could steal Jesus away without upsetting followers Jesus had. The temple guard had authority to arrest people for minor infractions so it was this group sent by the Temple leaders to arrest Jesus. John has a small group of Roman soldiers being there but they were probably only sent to put down any major confrontation that would have arisen. This whole scenario is a farce and shows the concern of the Temple authorities for the following Jesus had and his condemnation of how they were using the Temple for their own gain not the glory of God. As Jesus tells them he has been out in the open at the temple and they could have arrested him at any time. The Temple leaders knew they had to whisk Jesus away in the middle of the night to avoid confrontation with the people. Fresh in the people's minds would have been how John the Baptist, who had a large following, many of whom were probably now following Jesus, had been taken from them and executed. Hence the need for a midnight arrest and a way to just make Jesus disappear. Even though the Temple Guard came ready for a fight Jesus was passive and totally resigned to what was happening. He put up no resistance, which probably surprised his captors. As usual Jesus was totally in control of the situation.

There are several instances to take note of in the story, such as Peter trying to defend Jesus and cutting off the ear of one of the arresting party. The most surprising part is at the end of this part of the story when we read of a young man wearing only a linen garment being grabbed as he was fleeing stripping the garment from him and so he fled the scene naked. Many scholars think this young man was Mark, the writer of the gospel, and he inserted this as his own account of what he remembered of that night. Mark would have been in bed at his home whole the Passover meal went on upstairs. When the group with Jesus left Mark probably stole out of the house to follow the group to see where they would go, a curious teenager. He would have been in his night attire a linen shirt. When the temple Guard saw him they wanted him as witness but he fled and was stripped of his garment as someone tried to grab him. He therefore fled through the streets back into Jerusalem naked. The inclusion of this shows how we are all stripped bare before the cross and we hide nothing as we come before our Lord and Savior as he suffered for our sins on the cross. We are to remember that it is for us Jesus took this path to the Cross and suffered and we can hide nothing from him as we come before him. Even if we flee he can see all we are.

CAIAPHAS QUESTIONS JESUS – MARK 14:53-65

In this passage we find Jesus being taken to the home of the High Priest, Annas who had assembled the chief priest, elders and scribes. It is obvious that these leaders had already determined Jesus fate. Jesus' opponents just wanted to solidify their case against him. This was just a preliminary hearing the real hearing was about to happen. Jesus was now taken to the home of Caiaphas. Annas was Caiaphas's son-in-law. Caiaphas had been Chief Priest and under Jewish law should have held that position for life, but the Romans changed the position regularly to avoid one person having too much power. Caiaphas must have had a lot of favor with the Romans as he was able to get the position for Annas which meant that in effect Caiaphas retained power. Gathered here for the trial was the Sanhedrin which was made up of seventy one leaders that were the ruling body of Jews. During the

trial many gave evidence against Jesus but all the evidence was in conflicting. Under Jewish law it required three people to give incriminating testimony for a conviction. They were unable to do this and so the conclusion should have been that Jesus was innocent. As the testimony was being given Jesus remained silent as he knew they were incriminating themselves.

In desperation Caiaphas tried his last tactic by asking Jesus point blank if he were the Christ. There would have been a hushed silence among those gathered as Jesus answer would make or break the case. Would Jesus answer that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and so in their eyes commit blasphemy. Jesus answer went right to the point. He answered by saying "I am." This declaration not only declared him as the son of God but confirmed him as a member of the trinity. We go back to Moses and his questioning of God and wanting a name to take back to the people for their God. God replies in Exodus 3:14 "I am." Jesus had just made the same declaration. This was enough for the Chief Priest who torn his robe, a symbol of deep sorrow, and declared the great blasphemy of Jesus that was enough by Jewish law to have Jesus put to death (Leviticus 24:15-16). The issue now was that under Roman rule only Romans could have a person executed and only then for insurrection. The scene is now set to take Jesus to the Roman authorities and tried for treason against the state. It was now just before dawn on Friday morning and they would have to wait until after dawn before taking Jesus to the Romans. The pace guard and some of the Sanhedrin used this time to degrade Jesus by blindfolding him, spitting on him, beating him and asking him to prophesy. This treatment was based on Messiah 11:2-4 where the Messiah was supposed to be able to sense what would happen without sight. Jesus continued to keep silent; he refused to join their game and so remained in control of what was happening. Jesus knew that all that was happening had been preordained by God and was fulfilling his role as Savior of mankind.

PETER DENIES KNOWING JESUS – MARK 14:66-72

Mark concludes this part of his account by telling of Peter's denial of knowing Jesus, as Jesus had

predicted. We see Peter thinking he was brave going to the High Priest's courtyard where Jesus was being tried. Big brave Peter had fled from the garden when things got rough and left Jesus when he was arrested and fled with the other disciples. Peter alone crept back and into the courtyard to see what was happening. He was probably hoping there was some way he could help Jesus and free him. He was trying to blend in with the crowd. Peter would have been easily identifiable as being a stranger. His fisherman's features and Galilean accent would immediately identify him as probably one of Jesus followers. As we know Peter was challenged three times and each time denied Jesus. Each time his denial became more vitriolic and by the third time he was getting angry at having to continually affirm what he was saying. At this third denial the rooster crowed for the second time and Peter realized what he had done where upon he broke down and wept. Peter was broken realizing what he had done and was truly repentant and greatly distressed. I can see him slinking out of the courtyard, "his tale between his legs," depressed and wanting the earth to open up and swallow him. Fortunately this broken leader would again meet his Messiah and be forgiven and go on to be one of the greatest leaders of the followers of Jesus.

CONFRONTING THE ISSUES

This whole passage has issues that confront us and our lives in the 21st century. Although this happened nearly two thousand years ago and the events are not ones we would face in our society today, there are many issues that confront us and that we should face.

In the account of the two disciples being sent to prepare for the Passover meal we see them becoming real disciples. Their first words are the question, "Where do you want us to go" shows they were prepared to venture out by themselves and only waiting for directions. This would become how they would operate once Jesus left them and in the activities of the early church; willing, waiting, directed, gone.

- **What can we learn from this account?**

Turning to Judas we see a cold-blooded person. He had already agreed to betray Jesus but was brazen

enough to come to the table to share this meal with Jesus and his “friends.” It is easy to become enraged and shocked by what Judas did; yet professing commitment to Christ and then denying him with one’s life is also betraying him. It is denying Christ’s love to disobey him; it is denying his truth to distrust him; it is denying his deity to reject his authority.

- **Do your words and actions match? Do you profess being a Christian but act in a way that does not bear out your profession of faith?**

Jesus actions in the upper room of taking the liturgy of the Passover meal and turning it into a new celebration of freeing us from the slavery of sin, as the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. This meal comes to us with several names each of which brings out a different dimension of it:

- The Lord’s Supper helps us remember it came from the Passover meal that Jesus ate with his disciples. It is a meal shared by his followers.
- The Eucharist, which means thanksgiving, reminds us that we should be thankful for what Christ did for us on the Cross.
- In Communion we recognize that we commune with God and with other believers.

As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we should be quietly reflective as we recall Jesus death and his promise to come again, grateful for God’s wonderful gift to us, and joyful as we meet with Christ and the body of believers.

- **What is the most meaningful Lord’s Supper you have celebrated?**

Even though Jesus told Peter he would betray him, Peter was so emphatic that he would not. It is easy to say we are devoted to Christ, but our claims are meaningful only when they are tested in the crucible of persecution. How strong is your faith? Is it strong enough to stand up under intense trial? We need the Holy Spirit, not boastfulness and human resolve. We must never discount our vulnerability and human resolve. We must never discount our vulnerability to pride, greed, or even indifference.

We see Jesus in his time of greatest trial going to God in prayer. When our road is irreversible and we

are unsure of what lies ahead we also should pray for courage to take another step forward. We all need courage to face tough reality. At the worst moment of his life Jesus prayed. He is now our advocate in heaven and he knows the courage we need. We should turn to Jesus when we need help, he understands.

We may not face execution for our faith, but we face many problems that wear us down. We deal with irritating people whom we must love and serve; we face the burden of unfinished tasks or lack of obvious results; we cope with helpers who let us down or fail to comprehend. We must remember that in times of stress, we are vulnerable to temptation, even if we have a willing spirit. Jesus told us how to resist.

- *Keep watch* (14:34) – we must stay awake and be morally vigilant.
- *Pray to God* (14:35) – this is how we maintain our vigilance
- *Seek support of friends and loved ones* (14:33, 37, 40-41) – this is how we build up our resistance and help one another; when one is weak, others are strong.
- *Focus on the purpose God has given us* (14:36) – this is how we do God’s will and not our own.

We see a disgusted and disappointed Jesus left the slumbering disciples who could not stay awake. This pictures what happens when Christians and their Churches fail to pray. Where no one prays, Jesus as it were, walks away. The church without prayer functions as little more than a vacant structure. The person without prayer is going it alone, in a stupor, in a slumber, not really alive. To have a share of the Savior’s life and power, we must do what links our hearts to his: pray

- **Do you regularly have a time of private prayer? Are you involved in prayer with your community of faith? If you answered no to either of these questions then you need to consider how you can get more in tune with Jesus and let him work through you and his church.**

When we look at Jesus trial before the Sanhedrin we see religious leaders who knew in their hearts that

they wanted Jesus out of the way. They could then go back to their practice of appeasing Rome to keep peace and keep their own power. Their envy of Jesus popularity and fear of losing control caused them to hate Jesus. The next steps they took required them to rationalize away their own law. Plots, hiring a traitor, and finding so-called witnesses all made sense in their hate-filled minds. We must not rationalize sin and guilt. We must guard against the cascading effect of covering up evil desires. If you find yourself suppressing your conscience, or ignoring scriptural truths, or fighting reason to support what you want even though you know it is wrong then such behavior means you're lying to yourself and despising Jesus authority in your life.

In Peter we can all find ourselves. It is easy to get angry at the Sanhedrin and the Roman Governor for their injustice in condemning Jesus, but Peter and the rest of the disciples also contributed to Jesus pain by deserting him. While most of us will not be like the Jewish leaders we are all like the disciples because all of us have been guilty of denying Jesus as Lord in vital areas of our lives.

- **Jesus is now well on the way to the Cross and we have seen him move boldly forward. From the beginning of the week Jesus knew what was in front of him but he did not turn away. As you are taking this path with Jesus are you prepared? Have you cleansed your temple? Have you met with Jesus and communed with him? Have you determined to stand alongside him and call on him when you go through trials? We have seen Jesus go through many disappointments and tribulations on this day. Are you ready to stand with him?**