

Maundy Thursday - Eating with Jesus

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Preacher: Sam Lenton

[0:00] The next reading is taken from Luke chapter 22, verses 7 to 38, the Last Supper.

Then came the day of unleavened bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover. Where do you want us to prepare for it, they asked. He replied, as you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you.

Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, the teacher asks, where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?

He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there. They left and found things just as Jesus told them, so they prepared the Passover.

[1:05] When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table, and he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, take this and divide it among you. For I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

And he took the bread and gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them, saying, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

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.

But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The son of man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.

[2:16] They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest.

Jesus said to them, the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. 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. 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. You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you a kingdom just as my father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

[3:38] But he replied, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. Jesus answered, I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.

Then Jesus asked them, when I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything? Nothing, they answered.

He said to them, but now, if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag, and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.

It is written, and he was numbered with the transgressors. And I tell you this, I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.

The disciples said, see, Lord, here are two swords. That's enough, he replied. Good evening, everyone.

[4:48] Good evening. It is a privilege to be here with you this evening at our Maundy Thursday service, and have the opportunity to explore such an important moment in human history, as we remember the last supper that Jesus ate with his disciples.

Look ahead to the sorrow and celebration of the Easter weekend, and come together around the Lord's table. As a cathedral chorister, between the ages of eight and twelve, Maundy Thursday was a big deal, and has forever gone down in Lenten history as the day that I sang for the Queen. It has certainly been a useful story to draw on whenever asked to play a game of two truths and a lie, or to introduce myself with an unlikely fact.

Though if you are picturing me performing a solo of Ave Maria, tears rolling down the Queen's face, a record company hiding behind the pillar, ready to offer me a contract, I am sorry to have to crush that fantasy, and change the picture by surrounding myself with many other choristers and choral scholars, desperately trying to stay in time and in tune, as Her Majesty processed down the aisle with barely even a glance in my direction.

Still, I did technically sing for the Queen, and I haven't got too many other claims to fame to cling on to yet, so I'll keep rolling that one out for a few more years at least. On Maundy Thursday in 1996, I joined with my fellow choristers to sing for the Queen.

[6:27] On the first Maundy Thursday, the disciples sat at the same table as the King. They ate with Jesus. They broke bread and drank wine with Jesus, the King, the Saviour, the Promised One, for one last time.

The Last Supper was not simply the final sit-down meal Jesus shared with his disciples, though. It was the Passover meal, a meal established in Exodus chapter 12 and eaten for centuries since. Jesus uses a meal that was already established to remember God's salvation of his people, to establish a new act of remembrance for the once-for-all act of salvation.

The Passover meal provided protection from the final plague, the death of the firstborn son. Only the blood of a lamb painted on the door frames would provide protection and salvation from the angel of death.

The Passover meal reminded the Israelites of God's salvation, but also of God's judgment and the seriousness of sin. It highlighted the necessity of the shedding of blood, the death of innocent lambs, emphasising the cost that needed to be paid, and pointing towards the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God himself.

[8:01] Just picture the scene at the Last Supper, as Jesus, the Lamb of God, as John declared him to be when he first spotted him.

Not only reminds his disciples of the blood of the lambs that was shed to save the Israelites from the final plague, but makes the extraordinary claim that he will now be the lamb whose blood is shed for them, and for everyone to come who believes in him.

He is taking them back into the past by sharing the Passover meal, reminding them of what God has already accomplished. He is breaking bread and pouring wine with them in the present to highlight who he is and what he is about to do.

He is establishing an act of remembrance for the future and pointing ahead to the day when we shall eat and drink with him in glory. Past, present, and future, with this meal joining God's children together through history.

Focusing in on our passage, note in verse 15 how Jesus says he has eagerly desired to eat the Passover meal with them. He knows what is to come.

[9:26] And openly refers to the fact that he longs to eat this meal before he suffers. And yet this meal is not something he participates in reluctantly.

He is eager to eat with his disciples and clearly establishes this as the final time he will be able to share this meal with them. Unimaginable suffering awaits.

And those who share the table with him will disperse and deny him. This is such a striking moment of intense intimacy and a perfect picture of God's grace and mercy as the undeserving are drawn in, told that the body of Jesus is to be given for them, that the blood of Jesus is to be poured out for them.

More than this, he is saying these words to the very person who will betray him. Look at the language of verse 21. The hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. Isn't this just incredible? Jesus explicitly draws attention to just how close his betrayer is to him. Luke doesn't tell us who Jesus is looking at when he says that his body is given for you and his blood is poured out for you.

[10:52] But just imagine if his eyes were locked on Judas at that moment. That is the love of Jesus. His body will be broken and his blood will be shed for everyone.

Now move from the image of Jesus looking at Judas and see him looking at you in that moment. Looking beyond his disciples around the table, through the door of the upper room and across history to face you where you are right now.

When he says his body is given for you and his blood is poured out for you. You are the you. It is for you that he dies. Whoever you are and whatever you have done. Just take a moment to breathe that in and if you feel so moved breathe out a word of praise to him.

[12:02] For my birthday many years ago a friend bought me the DVD of a film called The Last Supper. He knew me to be a Christian and so I thought it was particularly gracious of him to seek out what I presumed to be some sort of dramatisation of Jesus eating with his disciples.

To my disappointment initially at least there was no sign of Jesus as the film began and I wasn't sure which disciple Cameron Diaz was supposed to be playing. There was a table with food and drink on it sure but the script was deviating massively from Luke's gospel so much so that it was fair to suspect that there might be nothing more than a title connecting this film with Maundy Thursday. While I wouldn't necessarily recommend everyone rushes to rent it the film is in fact an intriguing thriller that raises a fascinating philosophical and moral dilemma.

If we could see that someone was going to go on to cause suffering would it be right to put a stop to them even if that meant taking a life?

As the character Luke no relation to our gospel writer asks what if you kill somebody whose death makes the world a better place? In taking matters into their own hands the friends become increasingly ruthless inviting controversial figures to share dinner with them their last supper unbeknownst to them and killing off anyone whose world view they find problematic and at odds with their own.

[13:39] In doing so they become murderous and arguably no more morally upright than the people they are killing. It is a chilling example of what it might look like for people to take the law into their own hands and purge society of the evil they see.

It is a stark contrast to the last supper we see described in Luke's gospel as evil is conquered not through the death of many wrongdoers but through the death of the best person who ever lived. The one person who absolutely did not deserve to die and yet went to the cross so that we might be saved. Luke's record of the last supper highlights so powerfully the contrast between the sacrificial selfless love of Jesus and the competitive selfish love of sinful men.

Given what they have just heard from Jesus and how the act of sharing the bread and the wine has drawn them together in communion it is shocking to read the changing tone of conversation as the disciples indulge in discord and dispute.

they have witnessed the greatest man who ever lived explain the greatest sacrifice ever to be made and yet their discussion turns to which of them is the greatest.

[15:03] Jesus has emphasized that it is all about him and that he is doing it all for them but the heart of sin is the belief that it is all about us and we see here in verses 23 and 24 the disciples following a pattern that is all too familiar distancing themselves from responsibility and promoting themselves above others.

They desire to be great to assert their place in the hierarchy despite already being in the enormously privileged position of belonging to Jesus' closest group of followers. others. In verse 23 we read that they began to question among themselves which of them it would be who would do this in response to Jesus' declaration that he would be betrayed by one of them.

Luke does not record the details of the conversation but you can imagine what it must have been like were they I wonder looking suspiciously at one another bringing up things from months perhaps even years ago that others had said all done making competing claims of just how trustworthy they were and feeling offended at the slightest suggestion that it could perhaps be them who would betray Jesus.

How obvious was it to them that Judas would be the one or did they draw up a short list of most likely betrayer and start shuffling in their seats as their suspicious eyes flashed from side to side?

[16:38] All we know is that the conversation swiftly moved on from who might betray Jesus to who might be the greatest verse 24 telling us that a dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Now there is a trend on social media for ranking things in various tiers be they football teams albums by a particular band or different types of biscuits. I'll leave you to argue between yourselves afterwards whether you agree with the biscuit ranking on the screen.

I'm not sure if the disciples employed a similar system but if so I wonder what criteria they were using to determine who rose up the rankings and who languished near the bottom.

Whatever shaped their argument it seems that hierarchy mattered just as much then as it does today. And before we consider Jesus' response to their argument I think it's worth us taking a moment to acknowledge how tempting it can also be for us to think like this.

Whether we're ranking the trendiest theologians or looking around the congregation in Union Baptist to determine who is a truly top tier Christian. In all likelihood the disciples weren't just lining up to praise and promote Peter and Andrew they were probably putting their best arguments forward for themselves recalling the moments they had been truly Premier League disciples worthy of the highest level of recognition.

[18:06] May the Lord forgive us and show us the correct way if we find ourselves experiencing similar temptations. When Jesus interrupts the disciples dispute his response superbly disarms them dismantles their arguments and realigns their way of thinking.

He focuses them on who they are and establishes expectations for their conduct and perspective in contrast to the kings of the Gentiles who lord it over others.

As Luke records in verse 26 Jesus says to his disciples 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. Jesus directs their attention to how a warped sense of greatness wrongly shapes how people treat others. Stating that his disciples are not to be like that.

Rather than participating in disputes about greatness and considering who might be worthy of a higher place they should be seeking opportunities to serve one another.

[19:21] Remember who the greatest at this table actually is. Jesus is saying and observe what he is doing. verse 27 I am among you as one who serves.

If the greatest man who ever lived is one who serves that should tell the disciples everything they need to know about what true greatness looks like.

It should tell us what true greatness looks like. The last supper shows us the greatest love imaginable the greatest grace ever offered.

The greatest sacrifice ever made. And as we see the greatness of Jesus at the heart of this passage at the start and the end of it we are presented with the undeniable truth of God's sovereignty.

We noted earlier that Jesus was eagerly desiring to share the Passover meal with his disciples. And yet we learn in verses 8 and 9 that preparations for probably the most important meal in human history have yet to be made.

[20:30] What might sound like poor planning and a last minute panic in fact proves to be a powerful sign of the sovereignty of God. Listen again to verses 10 to 13.

He replied as you enter the city a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters and say to the owner of the house the teacher asked where's the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples he will show you a large room upstairs all furnished.

Make preparations there. They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise to us at all.

Indeed only a couple of chapters earlier in Luke 19 Jesus instructed his disciples to go to the village ahead of you and as you enter it you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden untie it and bring it here.

If anyone asks you why are you untying it say the Lord needs it. The message is clear if Jesus needs something it will be done.

[21:40] God is in control. God is sovereign. It was not good fortune that there was a suitable room available for the Last Supper. It was God. God knows what is needed and God knows what will happen.

Nowhere is this more chilling than in the closing section of our passage where in verse 34 Jesus tells Peter that before the rooster crows today you will deny three times that you know me.

Rather than thanking Peter for claiming he was ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death Jesus informs him that he will fail to live up to these words. With the earlier argument about which disciple might betray Jesus and which was the greatest still fresh in the memory you can imagine just how devastating it must have been for Peter to be told that he would deny he even knows Jesus.

Yet God knew exactly what he would do and he knew too that Peter would ultimately be restored to play a central role in the growth of the early church.

Peter's denial provides us with a perfect opportunity to shake our heads at this supposedly great disciple and wonder how could he ever do something so shameful as deny he even knew Jesus.

[23:05] But let's be careful. We may not be singled out by Jesus and told that we will deny him but it is almost certain that this is exactly what we have done on many, many occasions.

Watching Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* in 2004, while the graphic depictions of Jesus' suffering were incredibly difficult to watch, I remember vividly being most struck by the moment that Jesus slowly turns round to look at Peter after his third denial.

You see, instead of showing us Peter's reaction first or Jesus looking disapproving at his disciple, what dominates the screen, it's just Jesus' eyes staring right down the camera, right at every one of us watching his pain and suffering.

No words are spoken, no accusation is delivered, but the message that convicted me was this, you too have denied Jesus.

A shiver ran through my whole body at that point. In that moment I felt the challenge of Peter's denial and the truth of God's sovereignty. He knew Peter and he knows me.

[24:24] He knows how I have denied him. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Following the prophecy that Peter would deny that he even knows Jesus, Luke concludes the narrative of the Last Supper with an exchange between Jesus and his disciples regarding their preparation for what is to come.

While Peter's denial has been prophesied, this is only one part of what lays ahead and there's a real sense in this exchange that Jesus is preparing his disciples for a change and a challenge.

Jesus would soon be facing a battle and so would they and so too do we as we take the message of the gospel into the world. Back in Luke chapter 10, Jesus had appointed and sent out 72 of his followers telling them the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

He explains in verse 3 of chapter 10 that he is sending them out like lambs among wolves. A stark image that certainly suggests that danger may await them.

But they're not supposed to strap on their armour, bear a shield and wield a sword ready to beat back the wolves that prowl around them. Rather in verse 4 he instructs do not take a purse or bag or sandals suggesting they are to be utterly dependent on the provision of God through those that welcome them.

[26:01] Back in chapter 22, Jesus references this moment asking them whether they lacked anything when he sent them out like this. Nothing, they answer in verse 35.

They went with nothing but they lacked nothing. And so it seems as if the commission is about to be repeated. Jesus casting their minds back to how God met their needs once and so will surely do so again.

Yet perhaps surprisingly, Jesus makes it clear in verse 36 that something has changed. But now he begins, emphasizing that the new commission necessitates a new preparation.

But now, if you have a purse, take it and also a bag. And if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. The very items they were told not to take in chapter 10 now seem to be essential items for whatever awaits them.

with one unexpected addition. A sword. Or to be more accurate, two swords. For it seems two swords is enough.

[27:15] Enough for what? You may well be asking. Indeed, two swords for the 12 or 11, if we assume that Judas isn't being counted in this number, doesn't sound like the perfect preparation for a battle.

The numbers don't seem to add up at all. Would it not have been worth ensuring they had at least one between two, if not one each? However you look at it, the logistics aren't great.

Sure, Jesus may have fed the 5,000 with only a few fish and loaves of bread, but could a battle be won with two swords? I can tell what you're thinking. Sam, why did you spend all that time focusing on the last supper when we could have had a whole sermon on swords?

Well, tempting as that was, when I wasn't convinced really after my first reading of this passage that the main focus really should be how many swords is truly enough?

Or, what are the swords in your life that you need to have enough of? Yeah, perhaps these words for Matthew Henry might be of some help to us. The disciples must now expect that their enemies would be more fierce than they had been, and they would need weapons.

[28:29] At the time, the apostles understood Christ to mean real weapons, but he spake only of the weapons of spiritual warfare. The sword of the spirit is the sword with which the disciples of Christ must furnish themselves.

Only 11 verses later, as Luke tells us of Jesus' arrest, we see the disciples keen to put their swords to use, asking Jesus, Lord, should we strike with our swords?

One of them, reported to be Peter in John's gospel, doesn't wait for an answer, but instead lashes out and strikes the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

Is this what they needed the swords for? Is this really what Jesus was preparing them for? Verse 51 suggests that this is not at all what Jesus had in mind, as he declares no more of this, touching the servant's ear and healing him in a beautiful act of mercy at the very moment he is being arrested.

In speaking of swords, purses, and bags, Jesus seems to be readying his disciples for the fact that a battle awaits. For him, it will be a spiritual battle beyond anything we can contemplate, taking on the weight of sin and the wrath of the father to conquer death, dispel the forces of evil, and open a way for us to be with him forever.

[30:05] He will face soldiers with swords, and he will be bound to a cross, suffering the worst possible torture and execution.

The disciples, too, would face trials that were both physical and spiritual, many going on to die as martyrs. They needed to be ready to suffer, to speak out for Jesus and proclaim all that he had accomplished to a world that rejected him.

They were not to lash out with swords and convert with force and violence, but they were to stand firm and take their place in the spiritual warfare, furnished with the spirit.

The disciples ate with Jesus. They enjoyed the presence of Jesus when he dwelt with them on earth.

They saw him face to face. This is the future promised to those who believe. Revelation 19, verse 9 declares, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

[31:27] One day, we too will eat with Jesus. One day, we too will see him face to face.

As we gather around the Lord's table for communion in a few minutes, we will have a foretaste of that meal to come. We join believers down the centuries in remembering how Jesus ate with his disciples and how he gave his life for them and for us, rising to new life and conquering death.

Hallelujah. May this evening's meal prepare us to experience Christ's love afresh this Easter weekend. To see him looking across the table, looking down from the cross and looking out from the tomb at us and saying, this is for you.

Amen.