The Last Supper
Luke 22:7-30

You don't have to live long before you can look back on certain events in your life and realize they have been influential in shaping who you are. Now those may be pleasant or unpleasant, and you may be glad they happened or wish they never had, but they've formed you and made you the kind of person you are, they've left their mark upon you. And the same can be true of nations. There are some events that in some way define a nation. Now for the Americans, I suspect that the event that defined and formed America as a nation, was the War of Independence. Independence from us Brits! And sadly the idea seemed to catch on and soon everyone wanted to be rid of us. And so nation after nation can look back at such nation-forming moments, when they came out from under the power of someone else and became a free and independent nation in their own right.

Now, for ancient Israel, that defining moment, that nation-shaping event was the Passover. And it happened around 1300BC.

God had promised Abraham that his offspring would posses the land of Canaan – the Promised Land – and that all nations would be blessed through him. But for hundreds of years, the people of Israel had been enslaved in Egypt as an oppressed underclass. And they might have been tempted to think that God had forgotten His promises, just as when you face hard times you might be tempted to think I've been abandoned by God. But God never forgets His promises – not to them and not to you - and so through Moses, God told Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let the people go free. But despite multiple chances and plague after plague, Pharaoh wouldn't budge. So in one last great act of salvation and judgment, the people of Israel were told to take a lamb, and slaughter it. And then they were to take its blood and paint it on the doorposts and the lintels of their houses. And that night the Angel of the Lord would pass over Egypt, and the firstborn in any house protected by the lamb's blood would survive, but in every house where a lamb hadn't been sacrificed, and there was no blood on the door, the firstborn would die.

And that's what happened. The firstborn of Egypt perished, and the firstborn of Israel, sheltering behind their blood spattered doors, lived. And this time Pharaoh got the message and let the people go. And so through the sacrifice of a Passover lamb, Israel was delivered from slavery and oppression of a foreign tyrant, and brought out into freedom as the people of God in the event we call the Exodus.

And that was Israel's defining event. And the Passover feast was to be celebrated in the first month of every year as a reminder – at the start of this new year, this is how it all began, this is how God rescued us and delivered us and brought us out into freedom and made us his people, and we're never going to forget that.

But the tragedy, of course, is that Israel did forget it, or at least they didn't live in the good of it. Instead, rather than live as the free people of God in covenant relationship with God, Israel allowed herself to become enslaved all over again – enslaved to foreign gods and foreign powers who she looked to for protection, until finally, God sent her into exile and captivity in Babylon.

And as a result the prophets began to look forward to a New Exodus, a Second Exodus, when God would once more deliver His people from slavery and oppression but also deal with the root problem – the problem of their heart, the reason why they kept on going astray.

And that is what lies behind Jeremiah's incredible prophecy from around 550BC (Jer 31:31-34): "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

And so by the time we get to Jesus, the feast of Passover had become both a looking back to what God had done in Egypt, and a longing looking forward, "do it again, O Lord. Come and redeem your people once more, from their slavery to sin."

And that's the context in which Luke tells us in v7, "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed." We're into the last 24 hrs or so of Jesus' earthly life and tonight is Passover, and Jesus chooses this moment to go to the cross.

The King is in Command

As we've gone through Luke, time and again, Jesus has made the startling claim to be King. But in these last few chapters, as the cross approaches, there are going to be times when it seems like you'd be mad to believe that, as events seem to spiral out of control. So at various points Luke lets us know that Jesus is anything but a bit of driftwood tossed about by the waves. In fact in this passage alone Luke drops three hints that Jesus is in total command of what is happening.

Firstly there are the preparations for the Passover dinner. In v8 Jesus tells Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover. They're going to need to go and buy the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs and the vegetables and the wine. Then they've got to get the lamb and take it to the temple, and have it slaughtered and then roast it. Then they've got to get the table set and have everything ready, because there is going to be 13 of them for dinner: Jesus and 12 disciples for. And that's a lot of shopping and cooking for two men to do! But the question they want to know is, 'sure, but where Jesus?' Verse 9, 'where will you have us prepare it?' Which is not such a stupid question, because the population of Jerusalem had more than quadrupled with pilgrims coming from all over Israel for the feast, and so finding a table for 13 at this late stage would be like finding a needle in haystack.

But what the disciples discover is that Jesus already has it sorted. Whether by prior arrangement, or by divine foreknowledge, Jesus already knows where they're going to eat the meal. He's already got the bases covered. Like you and me, they just have to follow His instructions.

But it isn't just the preparations that Jesus has in hand. The whole timing is His as well. Look at v14-15: 'And when the hour came, [Jesus] reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Now, when Luke says, the hour has come – he's not just saying, 'it's dinner time'. On the surface level that is what he's saying – the time to eat the Passover dinner had come. But throughout this gospel we've seen Jesus preparing the disciples for His death, and Luke is saying, that time, that hour – the hour of Jesus' choosing - had come. And what a time to choose – Passover, with all it meant. So this was Jesus' hour, He's directing the whole thing, and always has been.

And thirdly, even Judas' betrayal is under divine control. As the meal ends Jesus says, v21-22: 'Behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man [that's Jesus] goes *as it has been determined*.' Now what must Judas have been thinking at that moment? He thought no-one else knew about his little deal with the Chief Priests, he thought it was all secret, but Jesus knows. And that's not because anyone had betrayed Judas, it's God knows his heart, He knows all our hearts, and He is even weaving the betrayer into His plan to once again rescue His people from slavery.

And so, even though, as we saw last week, satan is scheming and the politicians are plotting, and Judas is betraying, what we're discovering is that this whole event is going to Jesus' timetable and no-one else's. It's all been prepared ahead of time. God's divine plan to rescue His people from slavery and oppression, and to finally deal with the problem of the human heart, is unfolding. And the King is in command. And the irony of what happens from Judas' betrayal onwards is that those who think they have power and control over events – satan, the chief priests, Judas, Pilate or Herod, don't. Whilst all the time, the man at the centre of it all, who looks weak and powerless, is the one in ultimate sovereign control.

And there may be times when you feel at the mercy of events or at the mercy of others, when it feels like God is weak and powerless and unable to save you. But the lesson from these last few hours of Jesus' life is, don't be fooled by appearances. God is in absolute control, even of the details, and as the apostle Paul tells us, He is working everything for good for those who love Him and are called according to his purpose; so you can trust Him, whatever you are facing.

The King Who Gives His Life

Now as Jesus reclines at the table, He says to the disciples, v15, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Now why does Jesus say that? Why does Jesus *earnestly desire* to eat it with them? Well, He tells us. V16: "For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

So Jesus is saying that the Passover is going to be fulfilled. As one commentator puts it (Wilcock) – it is going to be filled with its full meaning. So get this: all along the Passover feast was not just about deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It was that but that wasn't its *full* meaning. What is happening now – in Jesus - this is its full meaning.

But how can Jesus say that? How can Jesus possibly fulfill this feast of taking a lamb and slaughtering it, and painting its blood on the doorposts, and saving people from God's wrath and bringing them out of slavery into freedom? What on earth has any of that got to do with Jesus?

Well, look at what He does. V19: 'And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you."' Then v20, 'And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."' So Jesus is saying that He's going to give His life, like the first Passover lamb gave its life. He's going to become the ultimate Passover lamb and do for us what that first Passover lamb did for the people of Israel. And that new covenant that Jeremiah spoke about – the one that will outshine even God's amazing rescue from Egypt, that will deal with the problem of the heart and wipe away our sins, is going to happen by His body being broken for us, and His blood being shed for us.

And so, every Passover lamb that had been slaughtered over the last 1300 years, from the first one that protected the first born of Israel to the one on the table in that upper room, everyone of them had been pointing forward to Jesus and this moment. And that first Passover and Exodus were just a foretaste of what God would do for all people in Jesus.

But what if you're sat there thinking, 'hang on a moment, Martin, I'm already free I'm American – from the land of the free, I'm British – and Britains never, never, never will be slaves, I'm French – *liberte*, egalitie fraternite, I'm whatever – I'm not a slave to anyone!'

Well, the Bible says we are all slaves to sin – each of us has this inbuilt driver to do what pleases us, to put ourselves first, to worship and give the ultimate place in our hearts to something other than God. And if you don't think you're a slave think about the struggle it is to break that habit, that sinful pattern of behavior that you keep stumbling over. If you're not a slave, why do you find it so difficult to control your temper, or your lust, or your fears? And the Bible also tells us the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). The way we think, what we value, what we give our lives to is held captive by things that are anti-god. So in a very real sense we are enslaved and in captivity – it's just not the same kind of slavery as the ancient Israelites endured.

And the question is how do you get out of it? How do you solve the problem of the human heart; how do you come out into true freedom where you aren't enslaved by sin? And on top of that, how do you rescue yourself from the just wrath of God against your sins?

Well, you could try and free yourself, but it doesn't take long before you realize you can't, you don't have the power, this thing you are struggling with has more power than you, and you end up feeling defeated, deflated, slimed and guilty; but maybe worse still, if you do manage to do it, and to some extent you do manage to clean up your life yourself, what you discover is that that comes with a whole load of baggage, and you become more self-righteous and judgmental and proud in the process – because now you're better than everyone else. And on top of it all we have no hope of appeasing God's wrath because we can't turn back the clock and undo what we shouldn't have done or redo what we left undone.

So, to put it theologically we are in deeeeep trouble, we're in a hole and we need someone to free us, to rescue us, to change our hearts, and to step in and take the wrath of God for us. In short, we need a Passover lamb, who will give His life for us. And in His love and grace and mercy, that's Jesus, who gives His life for yours. And through His death and resurrection He brings about a new exodus – not from Egypt, but an exodus, a deliverance from our slavery to sin and all its effects and He rescues us from the oppressive power of satan and, because He bears God's wrath on our behalf, that same wrath passes over us.

And that's how Jesus can say – the Passover gets fulfilled in me – in the kingdom, when all God's people, from every nation are brought into the real freedom of His eternal kingdom.

But did you notice how Jesus conveys all that to the disciples? He takes bread and says, this is my body, which is given for you. And then he takes a cup of wine and says this is my blood; and he says – do this in remembrance of me. And don't you think it's interesting that He does that rather than give us a neatly worked out doctrine on the atonement? He gives us this simple meal, bread and wine, His body broken, His blood shed, to do in remembrance of Him, so that everyone can understand it, that it might humble us and that we might feed on Him by faith: that just as the Passover looked back to God delivering Israel so we can look back to Jesus delivering us at the cross; and just as the Passover looked forward to the day Messiah would come, so we can look forward to the day Messiah returns and there's the feast of the king.

And because His death and His resurrection bring us into a new life of freedom, it's going to change the way we live, including the way we treat others.

Leading Like the King

Now, despite the fact that the King has told the disciples that He's going to lay down His life, they just don't get it, do they? They hear this talk of the coming kingdom and they've heard Jesus says that one of them is going to screw up big time, and immediately the conversation around the table descends into 'well if one of us is going to be the worst, who's going to be the best, who's going to be the greatest.': v24, 'A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.' But it's not as if we would have been any better, would we? Someone once told me that you can always tell whether or not a dream or ambition you have is from God or not. If you're at the centre of it, if you're the guy or the girl in the limelight, taking centre-stage, getting the

applause, you can almost guarantee it's not from Him. And here are the disciples dreaming of power and status.

There was a TV series in the UK some years back called 'Yes, Minister.' And it was a comedy series about the inner workings of government and the civil service. And in one episode the minister, Jim Hacker, said that elbows were the most important weapon in a politician's armoury– because you could elbow everyone else out the way. And here, in the shadow of the cross, the disciples are trying to elbow their way to greatness.

But if they had understood what the true nature of God's kingdom is, if they had understood what the next few hours would hold, they would have realized just how stupid arguments about greatness and power and position really are.

And in responding to them, Jesus refuses to referee their squabble. He simply says, 'boys, that's how the gentiles live'. That's how people who don't have a clue about God live. V25: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors." In other words, for leaders who are outside the people of God, leadership is all about lordship and power and control. They're *called* benefactors. But what you are called and what you actually are, are two very different things.

But the people of God, Jesus says, should be marked by something different. V26-27: 'But not so with you. [Which is pretty emphatic]. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.' You see, real leadership, real greatness is not about status or rank. Now, in that day, age gave privilege, and the youngest was the lowest. And Jesus is saying, in my kingdom, leaders are to take that lowest position.

And to drive that home He uses an illustration: of a man reclining at table, and a waiter serving him. So imagine you're in a restaurant and there's this guy at the table – and it's an expensive place, and he's got the money to eat there; and he can choose whatever he wants from the menu, he can afford it all, and none of the wines are outside his price range – he can order just whatever he wants. And assigned to his table is this waiter – and he works there because he needs the money, and he serves these tables to earn enough to go buy some food from the local supermarket; and the bottle of wine this guy at the table orders costs more than this young man will earn in a week. And Jesus says, which of these two guys is the greatest – the one at the table or the one serving at the table. And everything within us would say – the guy at the table! He's the one who can click his fingers and the waiter comes running; his money gives him power; he can order what he wants and this other guy is there to do his bidding. On a scale of greatness, the guy at the table is at the top and the waiter is as the bottom. And Jesus says, you are so wrong. Because His kingdom is an upside down kingdom. It's the Kingdom where the King gives His life for His subjects. It's an upside down kingdom where the king takes the place of a servant.

And Jesus says in v27: 'I am among you as the one who serves'. And nowhere is that more obvious than at the cross. And that is what true greatness looks like. So

whether it's at home or at work, this is the kind of leadership Jesus is looking for: and it's cross-shaped, self-sacrificing, serving, taking the lowest position leadership. And its hard and sometimes it hurts, because everything within us screams out, 'I want to be the king, I want to be the queen, I want what I want to happen, I want my will to be done. I want to be the guy sat at the table with my wife or my husband or my kids or my parents or my colleagues jumping to attention and waiting on me when I click my fingers.' And Jesus is saying, 'and I came as the servant, as the King who gave His life.'

This is my body, broken for you, this is my blood shed for you. The King is in command – so you don't have to fear whatever comes your way. This is my body broken for you, this is my blood shed for you: the King gives His life for you, so you can be freed from the slavery and the penalty of sin, and liberated from the power of darkness – if you'll put your trust in him and feed on him; This is my body broken for you, this is my blood shed for you, and that should radically transform how we treat one another.