

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?

Luke 22

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Among the classified ads in the *Quay County Sun* was this ad: “Farmer with 160 irrigated acres wants marriage-minded woman with tractor. When replying, please show picture of tractor.” (AP release, June 1978, Tucumcari, NM)

All of life is a matter of priorities. What do we put first? What do we think about? Where do our hearts and heads reside?

In Luke 21:37-38, Jesus is busy teaching during his last week in Jerusalem, just before his crucifixion. Every day of that week the masses gathered at the temple to listen to Him. With His growing popularity and His growing audience, the religious authorities wanted to silence Him, to forbid Him from teaching in the temple area. But with the crowds on His side – at least for the moment – they could not afford to do anything, not now. In the evenings, after teaching during the day, Jesus retired outside Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives.

The feast was drawing near. It was the reason Jesus had come to Jerusalem with His disciples. They were to celebrate the Passover together.

Passover memorializes the time when God spared the firstborn of Israel and delivered them from their bondage. It would now be remembered by Christians as the time when God’s firstborn would die, and all humankind would be delivered from bondage to Satan and sin. (David Garland, *Luke, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 845)

Everyone in Israel was thinking about the feast. It had been the subject of discussion in the academies, the discourse in the synagogues. Everyone was going to Jerusalem. All had watched the festive processions of pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was a celebration that remembered the birthday of a nation. It was the time of the year when friends who had not seen each other for so long would meet to celebrate life once again, to catch up on the family gossip. The journey was long and the roads were dusty. The kids would ask, “How much longer, daddy? How much longer until we are in Jerusalem?”

It was the time of year when offerings, long overdue, would be brought to the temple, and purification long needed would be obtained. National and religious feelings were stirred afresh – reaching back to the Exodus and stretching forward to the future and final deliverance.

Some in the crowd had even said that this Jesus, this new teacher at the temple, just might be the one to usher in God's Kingdom.

The Jewish authorities wanted none of that. They tried with rumor to subtly bring Jesus into disfavor with the people so that they could have Him arrested. But all of their attempts were unsuccessful. They had to figure out a way to have Him silenced without causing commotion. But for now, until the crowds had died down, they would have to wait.

It must have seemed too good to be true. Just as the authorities were pondering how they might silence this would-be Messiah, one of Jesus' own disciples offered to help devise a scheme to get to Jesus without causing a mob scene. Judas, the treasurer from among the disciples, offered a deal to the chief priest and the captains of the temple. What a surprise. One of His followers was going to bring the enemy into their hands. Elated to hear of a plan that would avoid a riot, they willingly pay him off. Judas promised to be ever mindful of finding an opportunity to betray Christ over to them. The timing, however, had to be just right.

As I read the text, I could not help but note the various emotions and intents that had captured the minds and heart of the parties involved.

1. Jesus is thinking about doing God's will, about tirelessly teaching the people that the Kingdom of God had arrived with His presence. He is dreading the cross, hoping the Father will devise another plan, but knowing that suffering will ultimately be His fate – suffering on our behalf. Jesus is thinking about you and me. (Luke 22:42)

2. The chief priest and the temple officers, on the other hand, are only thinking about themselves, about keeping themselves in power. Jesus threatened them, their conveniences. (Luke 22:2)

3. Judas is thinking about money – thirty pieces of silver. Here he is, walking in the very shadow of God and he chose to think about money and only money – and only the price of a common slave at that. How could you miss the mark so far? Wow, this has to be the greatest miscalculation of all of history. He sits and Satan tempts. "Hey, Judas. Want to make an easy thirty pieces? Just give them Jesus. You'll be safe. They are sure to kill Him." Satan overpowers him. He trades the Son of God for a few lousy dollars.

Luke 22:5

"Agreed" is to negotiate a contract with mutually agreeable terms.

It sounds insane, but some of us here have traded Jesus for a whole lot less – for a sexual escapade, for the right to steer our own lives, for the right to serve ourselves rather than others. It does not take much. Many of us will trade devotion to Jesus and His church for the smallest price. We look at the character of Judas, and never see a reflection in our own mirror. We look at the religious leaders and see someone who is uncomfortable when Jesus disturbs their status quo, the day-to-day securities. But, if I were playing the part of one of the characters, which one fits me best? Am I thinking about suffering for the Kingdom of God or solidifying my own place, my own power structure? For what will I seek to silence the Savior?

Enough about me. What about you? What are you thinking about?

Henri Nouwen thought about missing the eternal.

I often think: “A life is like a day; it goes by so fast. If I am so careless with my days, how can I be careful with my life?” I know that somehow I have not fully come to believe that urgent things can wait while I attend to what is truly important. It finally boils down to a question of deep and strong conviction. Once I am truly convinced that preparing the heart is more important than preparing the Christmas tree, I will be a lot less frustrated at the end of a day. (*Christianity Today*, Vol. 36, No. 5)

Busyness is the enemy of spirituality. It is essentially laziness. It is doing the easy thing instead of the hard thing. It is filling our time with our own actions instead of paying attention to God’s actions. It is taking charge. (Eugene Peterson, *Christianity Today*, Vol. 36, No. 5)

I watch the crowds, busy and curious, wanting to get close to Jesus, but not so close as to change their lives. I watch Jesus teaching in the temple. I listen to scribes whispering in the distance, and I smell the stench of betrayal as I draw close to Judas. And I wonder, “Where am I in this picture?” I wonder where you are in this story, and what you would have been thinking about.

Are we are right there with the crowd?

A friend of Bruce Larson’s was driving in the apple country with his wife. As they were passing a beautiful orchard, they saw a man filling a bushel basket with apples. They stopped and asked if they could buy some. He said, “No, just help yourself.” They opened their trunk, took out large brown paper grocery sacks, and filled them with the choicest fruit. On leaving, to be polite they asked again, “Are you sure we can’t pay you?” “Oh, no. I’m just here stealing them, too.”

Verses 7-8

On Thursday, the day before His crucifixion, Jesus sends Peter and John into the city to make arrangements for Jesus to observe the Passover with His disciples.

If Judas had only known where the Master and the disciples were to celebrate Passover. That would be perfect. On the Passover Eve, hundreds of thousands will be off the streets, all tucked away indoors in small groups. Hardly a single Jew could be found in the street. This would be a great evening to have Jesus taken in by the authorities, if he only knew the place. Sometimes you just have to count your losses and go for it. If Jesus were allowed to remain in Jerusalem for the seven days feast following Passover, he might gain even more influence with the people.

But Jesus was in control. Jesus was not trapped by Judas. Judas had not a betraying thought of which Jesus was unaware. But Jesus could not let Judas have his murderous way. There was still much to be said with the disciples – a farewell meal to be shared. Shhh! He kept the place of the meal a secret.

“Peter, John, go to the city. Go get things in order for the Passover.”

“Where Lord? The city is surely full. We have no accommodations.”

Verses 10-12

“When you enter the city, a man carrying a water pot – follow him into whichever house he enters. Once inside, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher wants to know where is the guest room in which He may eat the Passover with His disciples?’ He will show you a room, all ready to go. Prepare the meal there.”

These words were, in effect, passwords.

Jesus is not a pawn in the hands of fate. No, He is the agent in control.

In verse 13, notice the phrase “all just as Jesus said.” Only women carried water jar in those times. Men carried water skins. The unusual sight of a man doing a women’s work would be a sign.

Peter and John – here the first time we see them together joined by the Lord, these two who from here after would be closely joined together – the man of quickest action joined with him of deepest feeling.

A disciple in Jerusalem gives Jesus the use of his room, the best room, the room with outside stairs, the table and couches already in place for the meal.

No “guest room” had been available to Jesus and his family at his birth (2:7), but now he has the authority as “the teacher” to request and expect hospitality in the guest room of this house. (Garland, 853)

Verse 15

“I want to prepare this farewell meal with you before I suffer.”

Traditionally, the Passover is celebrated with one’s family. But Jesus is going to the cross. He sees these men as his family. What are the disciples thinking about?

“This is farewell. I will never eat the Passover again until the end of this age, until the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus takes some bread. “This represents my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Now the Passover would have new meaning. It represented a new freedom – not only a freedom from Egyptian bondage, but freedom from the wrath of God for our sins, freedom from the powers of sin and death.

“This cup is my blood spilled for you.”

The blood of Jesus that will “poured out,” however, is more efficacious than that of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the doorposts because it establishes a new covenant that brings the forgiveness of sins. (Garland, 852)

“But one of you is going to betray me.”

Do we grasp the shocking statement? “I am giving my all for you – my body, my blood – but one of you, one that I trusted, is about to hand me over.”

Matthew reports that each of them began to say to Him, “Is it I?” Each one was aware that he was potentially a Judas.

Verse 22

You are not in control, you who betray me. But I go to suffer as God has determined, not as you have willed.

Verse 24

What are they thinking about? The Master has just explained His death. He has told them farewell. And now, with the last of those syllables still lingering on His lips, they begin to argue about who is the greatest – twelve disciples who were with Him night and day for three years, and yet, in this final time before the crucifixion, they were guilty of jealousy, ambition, denial, and defection. Being with Jesus for three years had not changed them that much.

Talk about losing the ability to perceive who you really are and in whose presence you stand.

During the Byron Nelson Golf Tournament in Dallas in May 1981, a massive tree limb broke off and fell on a spectator, who was killed instantly. It happened near the third hole where Charles Coody was playing at the time. Shortly after the accident, Coody was interviewed on the radio and, in talking to the reporter, he said, “After running over and seeing the accident, I tried to play golf, yet I had no desire to play after that. All of a sudden, those three-foot putts didn’t seem all that important.”

Perspective and priority.

The disciples still wanted to play golf.

They were filled with ambition, constantly viewing the Savior’s Messiahship in the light of their materialistic expectations. In fact, they frequently bickered over which of them was the greatest – especially James and John. All of this talk about the coming Kingdom of God was too much for them. The excitement was more than they could bear.

He was talking about the spiritual.

They were thinking about the material.

He was thinking about others.

They were thinking about themselves.

He was thinking servanthood.
They were thinking grasping power.

What are you thinking about?

They spoiled the sacred atmosphere of the Lord's Supper even on the eve of the crucifixion. It seemed no matter how much He taught them; they never seemed to understand.

The argument gets so intense – James and John really thinking that they ought to sit at Jesus' left and right hands when He comes into His Kingdom. The others are pushing for the same positions. Odd – so busy arguing over who is the greatest that they miss what Jesus is doing.

He doesn't say a word, John's version informs, but just picks up a basin and pours water into it. Ties the towel around His waist and removes the sandals of a disciple and starts washing his feet – the job of the humblest of all the servants. Even the disciples who had missed the meaning of all of His words could not miss the meaning of this lowly action.

They stopped arguing over who was the greatest. Here was the Master doing the job of the humblest servant. "He should not be washing our feet," they thought. Shame, bewilderment embarrassment comes over each one's face as Jesus comes to wash his feet. It was more than Peter could take.

"Lord, you will not wash my feet!"

"Peter, you don't understand. You will understand later."

"Lord, you will never wash my feet."

"If I do not wash your feet, you can have no part with me!"

"Lord, wash my feet, my hands, and my head."

"Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right. If I, your Lord, can wash your feet, you also ought to wash each other's feet. I am telling you about my suffering so that when it comes to pass, you will know I am He. I am the Son of God."

Here Jesus fills the bowl with water, stoops to wash their feet while they are arguing about power and position. What were they thinking?

What are you thinking about?

Are you thinking about power or service?

Are you thinking about yourself or others?

Are you thinking about the spiritual or the material?

Jesus is trying to get His disciples, His followers, to focus on the meaning of His suffering, the meaning of His death. But they are too shallow. They miss it.

What are you thinking about?

As you are confronted with the gospel story – a story of betrayal, denial, cross and crucifixion, as you listen to the claim of Jesus to be Christ, the Son of God (verses 66-71) – what do you think about Him?

Even as we are confronted with this story, the question is how will we respond to it?

A tourist stood in front of the Mona Lisa at the Louvre in Paris. After examining the painting, for a long time, he was heard to remark, “I don’t see anything so great about that?” The nearby guard promptly replied, “Sir, that painting is not on trial. Your taste is.”

Indeed, that painting has withstood the test of time. As we read the story of Christ, what are you thinking about? Remember, it is the gospel that judges us and not we the gospel.

What are you thinking about?