

Luke's Gospel 22:24-46 After the Supper and Gethsemane

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Today we continue our series in Luke's gospel with chapter 22 verses 24-46, After the supper and Gethsemane. All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version.

We will break down our passage into three sections with the titles:

1. The disciples are out of step with Jesus – vv.24-34
2. The times are a changing – vv.35-38
3. All about prayer – vv.39-46

We start with...

1. The disciples out of step with Jesus – vv.24-34

In truth, this is a recurring theme throughout the whole of today's passage. Jesus is marching to one drumbeat, the drumbeat of God's purpose in this world and His own role as a faithful servant, and the disciples are following the rhythm of their own ambition and selfishness. To stretch the analogy about as far as it will go; Jesus shifts drumbeat several times as the situation or topic changes, but the disciples are perpetually out of step. Imagine the man at the front of a marching band, striding along and swinging his stick to keep time, and the rest of the group all being out of step with him, and with each other as well! The effect would be less impressive, more comic.

Before we get sucked into one of our favourite games of smiling, or shaking our heads, at the disciples' slowness and congratulating ourselves on being much better followers of Jesus, perhaps we should ask ourselves, honestly, just how often our priorities, actions and reactions are significantly at odds with the life of Christ as recorded in the gospels.

I will just read verses 24 to 27, which form the first sub-division of this section.

“Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And [Jesus] said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.’”

I've entitled this subsection, "Define greatest!" The disciples had a very clear definition of 'greatest', and it was very close to 'boss', or 'master.' They were disputing which of them should have most authority and honour. Jesus enters the conversation by completely redefining what greatness means for His followers, and He didn't just mean to do it for the twelve, but for all Christians down through the ages, including ourselves. He tells them that their thinking is far too much based on the society around them and its values. They were reasoning like Gentile monarchs rather than God's children and the change of perspective Jesus wants to instil is not just a gentle shift, it is a radical divergence. His words are, "Not so among you; on the contrary", which are designed to suggest that the followers of Christ need a totally different mindset. It is the mindset of a servant rather than that of a master.

"You want to be great? Act like the younger person, who always has less respect and must show more deference", says Jesus. "You want to govern other people? Learn to serve them." The Lord knew this would leave their brains reeling as they tried to comprehend what He meant, so He explains it with reference to the position He has taken Himself. Jesus asks them whether the person sitting down to a meal is greater than the person serving the food. The obvious answer, in all normal social situations, is that the person **being** served is greater; but Jesus simply reminds them that He has taken a position of being the servant rather than the served. The logic of Jesus reasoning is that nobody can be greater than He is, (He is God after all!), so, if we want to behave like the greatest person on the planet, we need to start forgetting our own reputation and status, and serving other people.

No wonder people thought Jesus and His disciples were turning the world upside down. What Jesus was teaching is truly counter-cultural. I have heard plenty of management training in my career about 'servant leadership' and 'inverting the leadership pyramid.' The concepts are sensible enough in the world of work, but Jesus was calling for something rather more radical. It will take much more than some managerial insight and good intentions to put Jesus teaching into practice.

It will take faith, lots of courage and a willingness to believe that, in the end, only what God thinks matters. Whether other people appreciate what I am doing, or even whether it always feels right to me, are not the measuring sticks I need.

Unfortunately, the disciples proved that doing things like the rest of society leads to arguments and ill-feeling. They were not having a philosophical discussion among themselves about the meaning of authority; they were bickering about which of them would get to call the shots! That is where misdirected ambition and pride always lead. I must assert **my** rights and have **my** sensitivities respected. I regard **myself** as more important than you and therefore put **my** priorities first. As Christians, we don't just need to understand and live out Christ's teaching, we need to follow His example as well. When Jesus says, "Yet I am among you as the One who serves", He isn't just making an interesting observation about how He lived His life; He is telling the disciples, and by extension us as well, what Christian greatness and leadership look like. If I'm honest, I can think of lots more times in church history, and in my own experience among Christians, when actual or would-be leaders have looked much more like the 'Kings of the Gentiles' than Jesus. What different churches we might have if we all learned to model our behaviour on Christ!

I will now read verses 28 to 30, which form the second sub-division of this section.

"But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

I've given this sub-section the title, "Future greatness." These three verses close out Jesus' remarks about greatness and service. Much of Christianity only makes sense when you consider

the heavenly and eternal, as well as the here and now. Peter, in his first epistle, balances our suffering now with the glory that will follow in heaven. If we only had the suffering, then Christianity would look like a poor option. Time and again, the Psalms point to the final punishment and suffering of the ungodly, to make sense of the way God sometimes appears to let evildoers get away scot-free for a lifetime. Paul goes so far as to state that, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor 15:19)!

The disciples were probably trying to understand how being the first followers of God's long-awaited Messiah could result in them having such low status! Surely such a close connection with so great a King should produce a bit more glory. These verses spell out the special blessing that those who followed Jesus in His trials in this world will receive in an age to come. They do seem to apply primarily to the twelve, but the principle holds good for us too, and it echoes in the teaching of 1 Peter that I mentioned a moment ago: lowliness and suffering in this world, exaltation and glory in the next.

Let me read the last sub-section, verses 31-34.

"And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

I've given this final sub-section the title, "Bravado between warnings". These verses begin with the Lord giving Peter a gentle warning, softened with encouragement. Peter responds with typical bravado, whereupon Jesus gives him a second, starker warning. The Lord gives Peter the rather unusual experience of telling him part of his future! He explains Satan's malicious interest in the disciple, assures Peter that He is praying for him, indicates that, despite the Lord's prayers, Peter will in fact fail, but reassures him that he will be restored, and will then have important work to do.

Satan always seeks to damage; God always seeks to refine. The refining process can be very painful, and sometimes, as on this occasion, God lets Satan do some of the work for Him! It can be hard to understand how a loving God can use spiteful, hating Satan to achieve His good purposes. A little reflection will show us that this happens quite a few times in the Bible, perhaps the most obvious, and instructive, is at the cross where Jesus died.

It's hard to imagine Jesus spelling out our immediate future like that, so it is difficult to imagine how we might react. Amazement might be expected. A word of thanks perhaps? Certainly, some respect for such miraculous levels of knowledge. Peter seems to think the appropriate response is to flatly contradict what Jesus has just told him, and to claim that there is no way **he** is going to fail! Since we are privileged to know how the situation actually worked out, we are in no doubt which of them was the better prophet! But we are all prone to being very like Peter when it comes to estimating our own capabilities, and we all have far too much confidence in our own capacity to know what is round the next corner. As Proverbs 16:18 famously reminds us, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Peter's proud spirit is about to lead to him falling. It is just as well Jesus was praying for Peter, and it is just as well that Jesus does exactly the same for us, as our Great High Priest in heaven. The Lord prays that Peter might have resilient faith, not that the trial should be removed. Like Peter, we will sometimes be allowed to fail, and have to go through the tears and repentance that Peter experienced. But Peter's failure didn't disqualify him as a leader and servant of God's people. In fact, it placed him in the perfect position to be able to strengthen his brethren, as the Lord had told him he would.

Since Peter was doing more talking than listening, Jesus once again spells out, very emphatically, the details of Peter's impending failure. It was these words of Jesus that brought Peter back to his senses after he had denied the Lord, and that reduced him to the tears we have just mentioned. At that point he got some hard-won understanding of his own weaknesses and of his Lord's wisdom and foresight.

2. The times are a changing – vv.35-38

We now come to section two – 'The times are a changing' Let me read vv.35-38,

"And [Jesus] said to them, 'When I sent you without money bag, knapsack and sandals, did you lack anything?' So they said, 'Nothing.' Then He said to them, 'But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." For the things concerning Me have an end.' So they said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them; 'It is enough.'"

In these verses Jesus is directing the disciples to look back to previous times of service when the conditions had been generally benign, and to look forwards to new service in much more challenging conditions. Just like the disciples, we don't always get to serve the Lord in the same, easy circumstances. Sometimes the service will be more challenging and the situation more threatening. Often the new circumstances may call for a new approach. Of course, the message we take and the Lord we serve don't change, but Jesus spells out that different circumstances sometimes need different tactics. Refusing to carry a knapsack and a sword would not have been a sign of great faith, it would have been evidence of a foolish disregard for the Lord's warning. Knowing when we need to show more faith and when we need to exhibit more caution, requires some discernment and maturity, and these things usually come with experience. The disciples reveal their lack of maturity by rather missing the point and focussing on the number of swords they have to hand, thus proving themselves out of step with Jesus once again! He was about to go willingly to the cross, while they apparently misunderstood His remarks about preparation for new conditions of service, for a need to be ready for armed resistance.

3. All about prayer – vv.39-46

We have arrived at section three, our final section – 'All about prayer.' This section also has three sub-sections. The first is vv.39-40 where the disciples are encouraged to pray.

"Coming out, [Jesus] went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.'"

How often do **we** pray that we might not fall into temptation? The disciples are exhorted to pray for this twice in today's section. If, like me, you find that this isn't a type of prayer you make all that often, you may ask yourself why. Perhaps you secretly think you are invincible. Like Peter, you are never going to fail, you have more wisdom and strength of character than that! I think we know how that ends! But perhaps you just think you are doomed to failure, so you've given up hope. You've fallen into temptation, perhaps one particular kind of temptation, so many times that praying about it seems almost disrespectful. As with so many spiritual things, neither of these two extremes is helpful.

[We really are totally dependent on God for everything. We know that God doesn't want us to fall into sin. We know that left to ourselves that is exactly what will happen, so we ought to listen to what Jesus says to the disciples and pray regularly for the strength to resist. I will be trying to](#)

remember to check this is something that features in my prayer life regularly from now on, and I recommend you do the same.

The second sub-section runs from v.41 to v.44 and contains the Lord's prayers.

“And [Jesus] was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.’ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

I must confess that when I hear people use the phrase, “If it is your will” in their prayers, it sounds to me like either a cop out, or a bit of verbal punctuation that people throw in because it sounds quite pious! I certainly don't want to level either of those accusations against the Lord Jesus! He was in the unusual position of knowing perfectly well what God's will and purpose were, and since Jesus is God, this was His will too at some level; but every human instinct was crying out for something else. If Jesus had not wanted the cup of death and suffering to be taken away, He would not have been a real human. But if He was not willing to do God's will completely, He would not have been the perfect Son and Servant. He was both; so this is how He prayed.

I think it is a scriptural concept that, as Christian's, we should grow and develop in ways that mean we increasingly want what God wants. When that happens, we will get our prayers answered positively more often because they will align with God's will. But this isn't a simple black and white rule, there are exceptions, and this situation that the Lord was in, was one of those.

Jesus prays with enormous urgency, earnestness and honesty, and has no sin to get in the way, but this particular request is not granted. If this could happen to God's only Son, it can, and will, happen to me.

If I can say so with the necessary respect for my Saviour; the Lord also demonstrates that prayer can be hard work. The fact that He required strengthening by an angel, and that He is described as being in agony, testifies to the effort involved. Perhaps we are used to prayers that are eloquent and lengthy, or maybe short and cursory, but the Lord showed the real effort that genuine prayer may sometimes involve. We should also notice that the Lord's heart and emotions were in His prayers, as well as His thoughts and reason. My personal default setting is logical and measured, and so I often fall into the trap of thinking emotions are suspect in spiritual matters. Jesus was the perfect Man, and He clearly displayed the full range of emotions in His life and in His prayers, so I need to recognise that emotion is a vital part of the spiritual life. That doesn't mean I need to manufacture tears and drama, but it does mean I shouldn't be aiming to remain aloof, or believing I can be above trivial things like feelings.

The very last subsection is vv.45-46 and contains another exhortation for the disciples to pray.

“When [Jesus] rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. Then He said to them, ‘Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.’”

It isn't hard to discern that the disciples are once again totally out of step with their Lord. He is awake and praying earnestly; they are asleep and therefore definitely not praying. It isn't possible to either watch or pray while you are having forty winks!

I've often puzzled over the expression “sleeping from sorrow.” It didn't seem like a reasonable conclusion that the disciples' sadness would lead to them dozing off. Perhaps the reference is to the way that sadness leads to disinterestedness in what is happening around you, and even a

desire to block out the world by sleep. The disciples did not understand the things Jesus had been saying about His going away, and the many times that He had spoken to them about His death and resurrection in the preceding weeks had left them confused and upset.

Just like us, the further they got out of step with their Lord, the more unsettled and disheartened they became. How could they break out of this downward spiral? Jesus answer was the same as before, “Pray, lest you enter into temptation.” In fact, it was “Rise and pray”, this time since they had been lying down sleeping. We all need to hear that exhortation from the Lord on a regular basis, “Rise and pray.” “Wake up. Shake of your lethargy and lack of engagement. Start praying actively.” They were about to enter the most difficult period they would ever experience. The Lord was about to die, and they would feel utterly bereft and frightened for the next few days. They needed to be preparing for the experience through prayer. Who knows what experiences, bad or good, we might be about to go through? The one thing that we can be sure of, is that if we ‘rise and pray’ we will be much better prepared. Prayer can sometimes seem like a very passive response in a world that needs urgent action, but it doesn’t stand by itself. Prayer paves the way for action. Nobody can claim that Jesus led a passive, hermit like life, but He was regularly a Man of prayer, often for lengthy periods. For Him, prayer was not an alternative to action, but a prelude to it. Action needs to be the right action, preferably with the right motives, if it is to really accomplish anything. Prayer is the way to make sure we are doing the right things, for the right reasons. It is not about delay, or diversion; it is the preparation for battle.

Let me conclude by looking at a couple of verses at the end of Galatians chapter 5. Verse 25 reads, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Most of us are fairly familiar with this verse, which is the conclusion to the section about the fruit of the Spirit. Some of you may know the children’s song based on the fruit of the Spirit, which has the refrain, “If we live by the Spirit let us keep in step, keep in step with the Spirit.”

The NIV actually uses the phrase “keep in step” in this verse, and it is a good representation of what “walk in the Spirit” means. It struck me that this provides a clear contrast with how the disciples were walking in today’s verses and a good exhortation for how we could do better. I have to confess, I had never really noticed the next, and final, verse of the chapter which says, “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” This is an almost uncanny summary of how the disciples were acting at this point, as they argued about who was to be the greatest. So, this presents two paths that we can choose to follow for ourselves. We can be conceited, provoking and envying, or we can keep in step with the Spirit. They are mutually exclusive, but we can easily slip from one to the other, so let’s keep praying that we will be given the grace to ‘keep in step.’

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give thanks that if we have put our trust in You as Saviour, we now ‘Live in the Spirit.’ Now please give us the strength and determination to keep in step with the Spirit, and so walk in step with You. Teach us what it means to ‘rise and pray’, and so keep away from temptation. We make these requests, not because we are so spiritual, but because, left by ourselves we are so hopelessly weak. We ask in Your name, Amen.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on Luke’s Gospel – Chapter 22 verses 24 to 46, After the supper and Gethsemane, talk number T1197.

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