

WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY: LEADER
WEEK 1: WEEK OF MARCH 3
A PLACE AT THE TABLE FOR YOU
Luke 22:1–23

OPENING

Jesus, I will ponder now
 On your holy passion;
With your Spirit me endow
 For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
 May the image cherish
Of your suff'ring, pain, and death
 That I may not perish.

—“Jesus, I Will Ponder Now” (*LSB* 440, v. 1)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

“Places of the Passion” is a Lenten series that meditates on the Passion Narrative of St. Luke. Each portion of the series focuses on a different place in the Passion of our Lord and discovers in that place the gracious work of God.

What is important in these places is not the physical surroundings but the spiritual dispositions of the people who gather there. Again and again, we will see God’s people, from the religious and political leaders to the disciples, revealing the sinful ways of the human heart. Yet, again and again, Jesus will reveal how He enters these physical places to bring about salvation and spiritual change. The most troubling places of our lives become the most amazing places of God’s grace when Jesus visits them.

As you read through these studies, you will be invited to see a stark contrast between the ways of sin, manifested in all the variety of human life, and the way of salvation, made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By listening closely to these texts, by meditating on the work of God revealed in and through them, we will learn to bring our sins to Jesus that He might save us with his powerful and passionate love.

INTRODUCTION

In Exodus 12:1–14, God offers Israel directions for keeping the Passover. The first portion of the text (vv. 1–11a) describes Israel’s actions: from selecting the lamb, slaughtering it, and placing its blood on the doorposts, to preparing the lamb and eating the meal. The second portion of the text (vv. 11b–14) describes God’s actions. God will pass through Egypt, striking down the firstborn, but He will pass over His people because of the blood on their doorposts.

Thus, in Exodus, when the Passover is introduced, we are asked to contemplate two actions: the action of the people and the action of God.

Luke uses a similar technique when he retells the story of our Lord's celebration of Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:1–13). The first section of the text (vv. 1–6) focuses on the actions of the people, and the second section of the text (vv. 7–13) focuses on the actions of Jesus. In this way, Luke presents us with two vastly different Passover preparations.

By contrasting these two different Passover preparations, Luke invites us to see that Jesus graciously works through His Word even in the face of evil.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Note: Participant guide includes only the questions for this section.)

1. When we think of the Lord's Supper, we remember Jesus and "the night when He was betrayed." Our thoughts turn to how Jesus graciously gives us His body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of our sins. For the disciples, however, Passover meant something different. What was the meaning of Passover? How did God's people celebrate it? (See Exodus 12:1–14.)

Passover celebrated God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. It was celebrated at the beginning of each year, when God's people remembered God's deliverance. The way in which they were to celebrate the event highlighted the haste with which they ate the Passover, awaiting their departure from Egypt by the power of God. At the heart of Passover was an event of judgment and salvation. God revealed His judgment upon all of Egypt, including its gods, by passing through Egypt and striking all of the firstborn. God revealed His salvation of His people, delivering them from their enemies, and doing so vicariously, as the blood of the lamb placed upon the doorposts was a sign for the people that God would pass over their homes.

2. Scripture offers explicit directions on how to prepare for Passover physically. Knowing what Passover celebrated, how do you think God's people would prepare for it spiritually?

The celebration of Passover was a grateful response to God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt and, thus, would involve giving God thanks. Israel might confess her powerlessness to deliver herself, remembering her call upon God from the depths of her suffering and the fact that God graciously heard her cry and intervened to save (Exodus 3:7–9). As the Israelites slaughtered the Passover lamb for sacrifice, they would remember how the firstborn of Egypt were killed but they, the firstborn of God (Exodus 4:22), were saved by the blood of the lamb. In addition, since Passover was part of a larger narrative of God leading his people to the Promised Land, Israel would look forward to the work of God, fulfilling His promises to restore His people.

3. In the beginning of the text (22:1–7), Luke records how people were preparing for Passover. What are people doing? What do these details tell you about the spiritual state of God’s people?

Luke focuses our attention upon the interaction between Judas and the religious leaders. Instead of giving thanks for the work of God and looking to the future in hope, we see God’s people engaging in sinful rebellion. Murder and the deceit of betrayal are prominent. Murder and deceit are the works of Satan, a murderer and liar from the beginning (John 8:44), so it not surprising that Luke turns our attention to Satan.

At the first Passover, Israel was delivered from the power of Egypt; with the appearance of Satan in Luke’s Passion Narrative, the question arises whether God’s people can be delivered from his power.

*In discussing the threat of Satan in the text, the leader may want to help the participants remember how Jesus fought against Satan through the proclamation of God’s Word, both in the temptations in the wilderness and then throughout His ministry. This will prepare the participants for the next section of Luke’s Passion Narrative, where Luke focuses our attention upon the power of Jesus’ Word.

4. How does Luke’s description of Jesus preparing for Passover (22:7–13) contrast with the description of the preparations of others?

In this section, Luke focuses upon the words of Jesus in contrast to action. Whereas the previous section records no dialogue, this section is almost all dialogue. Jesus converses with the disciples, giving them directions on what to do, and then Luke ends the section by stating, “they went and found it just as He had told them” (v. 13). In the midst of human acts of evil, Jesus speaks a word that comes true and prepares a place for His disciples to celebrate the Passover with Him.

5. Luke reveals that Jesus works through His Word in the midst of evil to graciously provide a place to celebrate the Passover. Why is this of great comfort to us today?

It is a great comfort to know that God does not abandon His people in the midst of evil but comes and graciously works through His Word to bring about their salvation. In the midst of the evil that surrounds us in the world and the evil that arises from within us, we have a gracious God who promises to come and work through His Word. He comes now and forgives us our sins according to His promise. He prepares a table for us to celebrate with Him the great Passover of God, where the Father offered His only Son that we might be forgiven and claimed as the people of God.

CONCLUSION

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, a time when God's people engage in repentant preparation for the celebration of Easter. There are many different activities, spiritual disciplines that God's people do in repentant preparation. In the midst of all of those activities, Luke turns our eyes to Jesus, to His Word and His work for us. In Him, we see how God has worked in the midst of evil, to prepare a place for us to gather at His table and be fed with the bread of life.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, when Your people suffered from slavery, You brought them a great deliverance and, when Your disciples were caught in deadly conflicts, You prepared for them the Passover.

Be with us now, as we begin the season of Lent. Teach us to repent of our acts of evil and open our eyes to see Your Son's acts of love, our ears to hear His words of grace, and our hearts to trust that, in all places, He has prepared a table for us.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.