



Session Fifteen

The Gospel of

Luke, Pt.12

Luke 22-23

These chapters of Luke cover the last days of Jesus' life from the eating of the Last Supper to the resurrection.

Questions to consider as you read Luke 22-23

1) Events in Luke 22:1-13 move methodically and quickly. On the surface, they can be read simply as things that had to occur in order for Jesus to be betrayed by Judas Iscariot and for the so-called upper room to be prepared for the eating of what we know as the Last Supper. But at a deeper level, they can be read as evidence of how carefully God's plan for the redemption and salvation of humankind unfolded—down to the detail of following a man carrying a jar of water. What does this suggest to you about the nature of faith and hope?

2) In reading 22:14-20, Luke's telling of what we know as the Last Supper, consider the symbolism of the elements of bread and wine and Jesus' actions of breaking and sharing. I think it's safe to assume that Jesus could've chosen any act or event as a final one with his disciples—why, do you suppose, he chose a meal with *these* elements and *these* actions?

3) When we participate in celebrating the Lord's Supper, we typically experience it as a positive experience which reminds us of Jesus' love, sacrifice, and ongoing nurture, and the promise of his return and life everlasting. Luke 22:21-23, however, reminds us of a darker reality: sin and betrayal. They, too, are part of the Lord's Supper. Given the chance, we'd likely resist such a reality, thinking that the betrayal was limited to Judas and has nothing to do with us. But just as we must embrace Good Friday to fully understand Easter, we need to embrace the reality of betrayal in our own relationships with Jesus to fully understand the Lord's Supper. Thus, this question: where in your life are you guilty of betraying Jesus?

4) Luke tells us (22:24-30) that immediately after the Lord's Supper—and remember that even though Luke doesn't include it in his narrative, this would mean immediately after Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and given them the new commandment that they love one another as he, Jesus, has loved them—the disciples begin arguing about who among them is the greatest. Jesus admonishes them and reminds them of the importance of service and that he is giving them the Kingdom. This is a reminder that in times of crisis and stress, the temptation is strong to turn from the way of the Kingdom to embrace worldly power. What does this suggest about how you deal with crisis and stress? What does this suggest about church leadership?

5) In Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial (22:31-34), we're returned to the issue of betrayal we considered relative to the Lord's Supper. This time, however, betrayal is addressed in terms of discipleship as a whole. If ever there was a person who should have been the Super Disciple it was Peter, and yet Peter will deny knowing Jesus three times (22:54-62, which explains why Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail). This is a reminder to us all that despite our best efforts at discipleship not only will there be times we fail, there will be times that we, too, deny Jesus, if not in word then in deed. This underscores yet again the importance of *knowing* Jesus, as opposed to merely knowing *about* Jesus. The more intimate our relationship with Jesus and the more we've internalized what Jesus would do, making his life our life, the less likely we are to deny him. Yet, all the while, Peter will remind us: we will still deny Jesus.

6) Luke 22:35-38 is difficult. In part, it is a reminder that in seeking the Kingdom, our every need will be met (verse 35). Verse 36 is probably best understood as a reference to the fact that because Jesus is leaving them, not only will they need to carry a purse or a bag (contrary to his instructions in sending out the 12 [9:1-6] and the 72 [10:1-16]) but also a sword. If this sounds strange in view of Jesus' insistence on non-violent resistance, it must be read relative to verse 37: "And he was counted among the lawless" is a reference to Isaiah 53:12, one of the so-called "suffering servant" texts. This particular Scripture will be fulfilled when Jesus is crucified between two criminals. Thus, Jesus' message here is likely that because disciples can expect to suffer the same persecution as their teacher, they should be prepared. In other words, Jesus' admonition to carry a bag and procure a sword should be understood symbolically, as evidence that disciples of Jesus are emotionally and spiritually prepared for persecution.

7) Luke 22:39-46 presents us with at least two issues. First, it raises once again the issue of betrayal: Jesus asks his disciples to pray for deliverance; instead, they fall asleep. It's not active betrayal (they don't fall asleep on purpose), but betrayal of their roles as disciples nonetheless. Secondly, it raises the issue of why, if Jesus knew his fate (as, clearly, he did), he prayed so fervently that it be taken from him if it was his Father's will. How would you answer this question of why?

8) Read 22:47-53, Luke's narration of Jesus' arrest, paying particular attention to verses 51-52. Jesus responds to one of his disciples cutting off the ear of the slave of the high priest by saying, "No more of this!" What the Greek literally says, however, is "Allow until this!" which suggests a much greater significance for what the disciple has done. What do you think that significance might be?

9) For me, 22:61-62 may be the most poignant moment in all of Scripture. Have there been times in your life that you felt Jesus turning and looking at you? What did that feel like? How did you respond?

10) Read 22:63-23:56, then read the following quote from biblical scholar Alan Culpepper:

Jesus died a redemptive death. His solution to the problem of violence was not to attempt to overcome it with more violence but to absorb it in suffering love. Perhaps only one who is divine can redeem the violent in this way, but from time to time spiritual leaders have succeeded in following Jesus' example in the exercise of redemptive non-violence. Jesus not only suffered for us but he also suffered to teach us how to overcome the violent and corruptive impulses within us and within our society. This, too, was a part of Jesus' proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom.

Clearly there are many things to be asked or said about Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and resurrection, but I urge you to focus particular attention not on what *did* happen, but on what *didn't* happen: Jesus could've answered the violence against him and those who followed him with violence of his own. But he chose instead to absorb the violence with suffering love. While it may not be absolutely clear that Jesus expects such suffering love from us, it is absolutely clear that he expects us to deal with violence through non-violent resistance and loving our enemies. The Gospels do not indicate that Jesus allowed any exceptions to this. His teaching is unequivocal: no violence in terms of self-advancement or self-defense; no violence in the name of protecting liberty or country, community or family.

In short, we cannot choose violence as a response to anything without ignoring—or severely twisting—Jesus' teaching to us as his followers. And if we ignore this teaching, it calls into question what authority any of Jesus' teachings have in our lives unless we're willing to admit that we pick and choose what we're willing to follow.

Thus, the question: if Jesus materialized in your living room, sat next to you on the couch, looked you straight in the eye, and asked you how you reconcile his teaching on violence with your own thoughts and behaviors, how would you respond?