

Those Last Few Days
Luke 22:14-23

As I ponder those last few days in the life of the Lord Jesus, I know that they must have been difficult beyond any measure that we, that you and I, can possibly imagine. The suffering, physically, emotionally, and especially Spiritually were taking place within a realm of understanding that the ordinary mind cannot fathom.

But that is why it is so very important that we clearly understand what was actually taking place, to understand exactly who this man Jesus really was. And also who it was that was making the decisions and the choices that were bringing all of these events to this one focal point of this "Passover Supper" there in that Upper Room. And also where it would all lead to next.

And unfortunately, left only to your and my meager human abilities, our intellect and our rationale cannot help us to grasp the real importance and meaning of these events.

But thanks be to God, these things that were about to happen were not dependent on the intellect, the understanding, or even the desires and the plans of men. All that was taking place truly was the "Master Plan" of God. The "Master Plan" that He, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit, and yes, God the Son, this very One who was the focal point of this meeting there in that upper room, was a "Plan" that all of them, in One accord, had put into place way back there in time, before there was time, before the foundations of the earth were laid.

A carefully devised "Plan" that would return our broken and corrupt world back in the direction that God had planned for us from the beginning. Through the suffering that the Lord Jesus would endure over the next few days, His death, His burial and His resurrection, He would provide the "Path" that we could follow back into the eternal relationship with Him that He had planned from the beginning.

And praise be to God, none of these events or decisions or choices were ones that would be left solely to the efforts and desires of man. It would all be at the desire and the plan of our God, the "First Cause" of all that takes place on the earth.

Folks, with all of the constant clamor within the souls of men to insist on having our own "Free Will", we must accept that our "Free Will" really does have its limits. Our Lord tells us that so very clearly in Romans 11:36. There He says plainly that it is,

³⁶ . . . from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)

And so then, while so many, many people choose to insist that they themselves decide the matters of their soul, these precious scriptures tell the real truth. And that is that our God is the "Cause", the "First Cause" of all that takes place, and thanks be to God that He is.

Oh dear Christian, think about this for a moment! And ask the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom and the insight to see the Hand of God within it all. Because as the words of this bible tell us, our Loving God really is the "First Cause" of all that is and all that takes place on the earth!

And while yes, it is true that you and I do intervene and stick our hands into most all of those occasions, our involvement is only "secondary" to the First Cause, our God, who initiates it all.

And so it was also with all of those events of this day that we read about here in this scripture passage. God was there "causing" the greatest event that would ever take place in the lives of mankind to have its beginning. And that greatest event was the sweet gift of "Grace", "Grace", a "Gift" that had not before then been part of biblical discussions of the church leaders of the time, but would now become the most important "Gift" that mankind could ever hope for. A "Gift" by which sinners like you and me could receive eternal salvation for their souls.

And the "First Cause" of that eternal salvation would come through the blessed events that would take place over these next few days, through the death, the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Pause for a moment and read with me these words given to us here in Luke chapter 22, beginning in verse 14,

¹⁴ When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this

Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁰ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. ²¹ But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. ²² And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" ²³ Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing. (Luke 22:14-23)

You'll recall from our last study that earlier in the day, that being Thursday, the Lord Jesus had sent Peter and John on ahead into the city of Jerusalem to make preparations for the Passover celebration.

And now here in these words, we find all of them gathered together and "reclining" at that table to eat, sharing bread and wine.

Many bible scholars over the centuries have offered their thoughts concerning this supper being held on Thursday rather than on Friday. And these scriptures are mostly silent about God's reasons for doing it this way. But we can note that we do not find mention of a sacrificed lamb during this meal, so we might assume that this meal was preparatory to the final "Passover" meal.

The specified time for the Jewish Seder, the actual killing and eating of the Passover lamb, was to be on the next day, on Friday.

And looking back on the events of that day and the days that would follow, we can clearly see that Jesus Himself was intended to be that Passover Lamb that would be slain.

Again, may we continue to remind ourselves as we observe these events that are taking place here, that none of them were left to man's design or were by coincidence or happenstance! Each of the occurrences of this day, and every other day leading up to this Passover was carefully planned and set into motion by God Himself. And nothing, not even the smallest of details would be left to chance.

Why would that be so? And is not every activity of man's existence also planned and carried forward at God's command? Yes it is. And may I recall again for us those words from Isaiah 45 that tell us,

⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these (things). (Isaiah 45:5-7)

So then, yes God does set into motion and carry forward all of the matters of this life. But yes, He does also give a very special allowance for the intervention of man's free will into each event. And as these particular events unfold, we will see man's freewill at its very worst. And it will seem as if free will is fully at the forefront and in control, men deceiving and conspiring with one another and with satan.

But may I say again that while it may seem that man's free will was fully at the forefront and in control, it was really always God's hand that actually guided each and every step. Remember those words from Proverbs 16, "Man makes his plans, but God guides his steps". And as one of my favorite writers, John Piper, tells us, "God never turns loose of the leash He has around satan's neck".

Dear Christians, may I say to us again that these and the other events that would soon follow would actually be the most important events that would ever take place in all of the history of mankind. And for that reason, God the "Grand Director" of all of the activities of man and of the earth would personally and carefully guide and direct each and every detail, not leaving much at all within the hands of men and demons.

And no, none of the people involved, not the disciples, not the chief priests, not Judas, not the Roman soldiers, none of them were able to recognize, at the time, that it was God's hand at work in their activities. It would only be later on, after all the events of the Passover had taken place, Jesus' death on the cross, His burial, His resurrection, and then finally His ascension into heaven that the Holy Spirit would make all these things to become clear. But even then, only to those to whom God would reveal Himself.

But that too, their lack of the ability to understand at the moment, was also by God's design. And I count such things as mercy and grace from God, because if you and I were to be able to know what each next moment would hold, I believe that we would not be able to bear up to the strain of it.

Of all the people involved there in those events, only Jesus fully knew what each next moment held in store! We must always take into account the truth that yes, Jesus was fully a man, but yes also, He was fully God. And He fully knew what would take place at each step along the way. That is why He said to His disciples in verse 15 . . . "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Oh dear Christian, yes, Jesus knew that through His death, His burial and His resurrection, He Himself would actually fulfill and complete the full meaning and the intent of the "Passover".

He knew everything that these next few days held in store. And though it would be the very worst suffering that man or God would ever endure, He knew it would all be worth it. The salvation of mankind was at stake and Jesus fully knew all that it would take to bring that salvation to our souls.

But again, the human heart, mind and body are frail and are not built to withstand such knowledge and such extreme suffering.

And that would be made so evident in the next few hours as Jesus was praying there in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, His heart, His mind, His body would be put into such overwhelming stress, knowing all that the next following hours would hold, that He began to sweat great drops of blood.

So yes, it is mercy and grace from God that keeps us from knowing what the next moment will hold for us. We surely would not be able to bear up to such knowledge.

But here in these moments, Jesus did know all that was about to take place, that all of the plans that He and God the Father and God the Holy Spirit had made in eons past were finally here and now.

And perhaps, and we don't know, but perhaps in those moments when His human side would gain some ground, He would have to remind Himself that this . . . this awful suffering that lay just ahead for Him was the real reason that He had come to earth.

Yes, He had come to preach, and to teach, and to be an excellent example of purity and holiness for all to see and to follow.

And I have to believe that from a human perspective, He must have truly enjoyed Himself, preaching and teaching and especially as He would bring healing to a broken body or clarity and freedom to a demonically possessed mind.

But as good and as important as all those things were, they would not compare to what He must do next. And these words bespoke that deep and difficult emotion. He said,

¹⁵ "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16)

These words, though they are not expressed in the same way our modern English would say it, say to us, "I have desired with great passion to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, but I will not. That's because I myself will actually be the Passover Lamb that will be sacrificed. And I know that my sacrifice is necessary, that my blood must be spread over the lintel of each person's heart and soul, else as God passes over this earth in His final accounting for our sinful souls, every person would surely die, eternally.

Both the things that are said and the things left unsaid within these words speak a powerful message. The very Son of God, in His role as Son of Man, was at that moment looking forward to the awfulness of His suffering, knowing that the pain and the humiliation it would inflict upon His body, soul and spirit would be suffering beyond comprehension. But also knowing that it would bring about the greatest of all blessings to all people, to you and me who would receive it.

This was truly a bitter-sweet moment. Within the next few hours, He, the last, the final, the ultimate "Paschal lamb" would be slain.

And again, if the people of Jesus' day had only had "ears to hear" they would have known about this day from the beginning.

And yes, some, perhaps many did. The twelve disciples and others like them speak a strong witness that many of them at least understood a little bit. And they were looking forward to the Advent of the Messiah.

And although the disciples would be greatly surprised as the actual events of Jesus' suffering would unfold, they were very close in their understanding about Him. Recall that on one occasion when Jesus was saying some very "hard" and difficult sayings to a group of listeners, and many of those who were present walked away from Jesus, Peter and the twelve were able to hang on by a thread of understanding. Listen to these words given to us in John chapter 6.

⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God. (John 6:67-69)

So then yes, there was some limited understanding taking place within the minds of the disciples, but not in full! And again, perhaps such limited understanding was simply mercy and grace being shown to them for the moment. And as we have often said, the Providence of God seems always best seen from a distance and after it takes place.

Folks, as we observe these events that are unfolding in the life of the Lord Jesus and in the life of His disciples, from our ordinary human perspective, it's obviously a very confusing time for these devoted followers of our Lord. And I myself, have often wondered what I would have done in those moments.

With that in mind, may we pause and take these last few moments of our study time today and ponder what we might have done, what our response might have been during these last few confusing and uncertain hours that we would be experiencing with the Lord Jesus!

In reality, unaware of what was shortly to come to pass, we might probably have responded much as did the disciples, simply busying ourselves with the hopes and the with the goals that we had been looking forward to, thinking about and planning the next steps to take after these immediate days of the Passover had passed.

And as we will study in the weeks ahead, some of them were even arguing about the positions they might hold in God's kingdom, who would be the greatest.

But may I bring to our remembrance a response that I believe would have been the response that I would wish to have had. It took place just a few days earlier, during a special dinner that Jesus ate with His friends and disciples at the home of Simon the Leper.

In attendance there was Lazarus, the one Jesus had raised from the dead. And with him were his sisters, Mary and Martha.

And on that occasion, as was Martha's custom, she busied herself preparing and serving the meal. But Mary was not like her sister. Mary had a different "calling". Hers was to sit at Jesus' feet, to learn of Him and to worship Him. And on this occasion Mary was being about a very special mission within her "calling".

Listen to these words given in Matthew 26 and also in John 12!

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it upon His head (and over His feet and wiped His feet with her hair) as He reclined at the table. But the disciples (Judas in particular) were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price (worth over three hundred denarii, about eleven month's wages) and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you have with you always; but you do not always have Me. For when she poured this perfume upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her."

Did Mary know the real reason she was doing these things. Most likely not! In God's loving grace and mercy, He probably kept it from her, else her heart would surely have broken within her.

Mary truly loved and adored the Lord Jesus and she was willing to humble herself to any extent as she worshiped and adored Him.

Hers, fellow Christian, is the response that I would love to think that I would have had to these very difficult events that were soon to take place in Jesus' life. This was humility at its uttermost. And while I might not have poured perfume over Him and did exactly as Mary did, I really do hope that I would have found some humble way to simply worship and adore Him.

And I am convinced that this is exactly what God desires of you and me, that we would not be caught up in what would happen next or who would be greatest later on in God's kingdom, but to simply humble ourselves to any and every extent to the uttermost, adoring and glorifying the Lord Jesus.

And folks, we will. We surely will! And yes, someday, everyone will.

And the question is . . . why not now, today!

Listen as we close . . . these words from Philippians chapter 2,

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:9-11)

Pray with me.