GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

The Good News focuses on Jesus' death, *Luke 22:7-23*

Although Luke only wrote two of the New Testament's books (Luke and Acts), his pair occupies as much space as Paul's thirteen letters. A good reason motivates the volume of Luke's writing – he wrote to affirm Theophilus' conviction about the Good News concerning Jesus (*Luke 1:1-4*). That purpose means Luke's writings offer insight into the meaning and application of the gospel ("gospel" and "good news" translate the same Greek word *euangelion*).

We have been moving through the major sections of Luke's writings, considering what insights they offer into the Good News. So far, we have explored:

- Luke 1-2: Luke's account of Jesus' birth reveals that the Good News is about Jesus' kingdom and rule.
- Luke 3-9a: Jesus' public ministry, recorded in Luke 3-9a, focuses on the people with whom Jesus interacted. Those accounts narrate that the Good News about Jesus is for everyone.
- Luke 9b-19: This section of Luke's gospel traces Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, where he would be betrayed and killed. This long section focuses on Jesus' teachings as he traveled and emphasizes the people's rejection of the Good News of Jesus' kingdom and rule.

Today, we will consider Luke 19:41-23:56, the section of Luke's gospel that begins with Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem at the start of Passover week and concludes with his betrayal and violent death. This lesson considers another insight Luke offers into the Good News – **the Good News of Jesus' kingdom and rule focuses on his death.**

"The Passover lamb had to be sacrificed"[1]

Jesus' announcements about his upcoming death did not reduce the shock and horror his disciples experienced when he died (*Luke 9:21-22, 43-45; 18:31-33*). The years separating Luke from the events he recorded allowed him to meditate on their significance and to offer his insights into Jesus' death through his record of Jesus' activities and teachings. For example, in Luke 22, Luke composes his account of Jesus' celebration of the Passover in a way that explains the meaning of Jesus' death.

- Luke repeatedly emphasizes the Passover in Luke 22 (*Luke 22:1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15*).
- He emphasizes the connection because he followed Jesus' teaching – **Jesus intentionally chose the Passover as the occasion of his death and explicitly linked his death to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb** (*Luke 9:28-31; 22:19-20*).

[1] Luke 22:7. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted

- To appreciate that connection, we need to remind ourselves about a few features of the Passover:
    - God instituted the Passover to commemorate His rescue of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, when He "passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians" (*Exodus 12:26-27*).
    - God passed over the houses of the Israelites during the death plague, the final plague He sent against Egypt (*Exodus 11:1-9; 12:29-30*). He spared the Israelites because He permitted them to substitute the life of a sacrificed lamb "without blemish" for their lives (*Exodus 12:1-6*). He accepted the innocent lamb's life because "the life of the flesh is in its blood" (*Genesis 9:1-4; Leviticus 17:10-14*).
    - The death plague released the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt (*Exodus 12:33*), freeing them to travel to Mount Sinai, where they entered a covenant with God (*Exodus 19:1-24:8*).
- The requirement to celebrate Passover annually reminded Israel that their God was a rescuing, relationship-seeking God. The memorial's celebration of that past event established a precedent that shaped their hopes about God's future behavior (*cf. Isaiah 52:7-12*). Jesus connected that hope to himself in his celebration of the Passover meal with the disciples.
    - By connecting himself to the Passover lamb, Jesus announced that God accepted his innocent life in exchange for his disciples' – and our – lives (*Luke 22:19*).
    - By identifying himself as God's new Passover lamb, Jesus signaled that his death initiated a new exodus (*Luke 9:28-31; 22:19-20; cf. Isaiah 52:7-53:12*).
    - By tying his blood to a new covenant, Jesus declared that his death inaugurated God's long-awaited kingdom that secured God's relationship with His people (*Luke 22:20; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:14-20; 37:15-28*).

Applications

- The central place of the exodus narrative and its Passover memorial prepares readers of the Bible to understand the significance of Jesus' death, reminding us that Jesus' death cannot be appreciated apart from the story of the Hebrew Bible.
- The connection Luke narrates between Jesus' death and the Passover reveals that Jesus' death is a goal rather than a tragedy.
- Understanding Jesus' Passover-setting explanation about the meaning of his death does not remove its discomfort. While his explanation clarifies its meaning, the necessity of his death makes explicit sin's ugly, corrupting influence in our lives and in our world.
- We must not miss this point – Jesus loves us enough to offer his life to secure our exodus from sin's oppression; he believes we are worthy of his sacrifice even though we participate in sin's tyranny.

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Evening discussion

In 2006, British evolutionary biologist and ethologist Richard Dawkins published a book titled *The God Delusion*. Dawkins' book proposes that science 'proves' God does not exist and that believing in God, in the face of the evidence he presents, qualifies that belief as a delusion. One support for his argument involves pointing to the Old Testament's depiction of God. He writes, *"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."* But Dawkins does not limit his vitriol for God to the Old Testament; he also points to Jesus' death, which Christians believe embodies God's sacrificial love and mercy, and calls Jesus' suffering "vicious, sadomasochistic, and repellent."

While we might recoil at Dawkins' characterization of Jesus' death, we should note that, since its release, the book has sold more than 3 million copies and has been downloaded an estimated 15 million times. Obviously, not everyone who reads the book shares his convictions, but many people do think like him. The influence of Dawkins' ideas raises a question for us as we think about our efforts to share the Good News about Jesus: **since the Good News focuses on his death, how can we present it in ways that help people correctly understand God's identity and plan for their lives?**

Discussion questions

How would you explain the significance of Jesus' death to someone without giving the impression that God is an unjust, bloodthirsty being?

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Paul wrote that he is "not ashamed of the gospel (Good News)" because it reveals "the righteousness of God" (*Romans 1:16-17*). How does Jesus' death reveal God's righteousness, and what does it reveal about it?

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The death of an innocent *is* unfair. However, God's Jesus-centered plan does not concern itself with fairness (*cf. Romans 3:9-26*). How might concerns about 'fairness' represent a cultural interest that can cloud our appreciation of what God offers through Jesus? How can we use the Good News about Jesus' death to help people rethink 'fairness'?

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A tendency exists to ask what Jesus' death reveals about God rather than what his death reveals about sin. What do you think his death reveals about sin? What insights might his revelation offer into sin's presence in our lives?

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How can we use the narrative of Israel's exodus from Egypt to help someone understand the meaning of Jesus' death and its significance for their life?

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