

## The Way To Greatness

Series: Encountering Jesus (through the Gospel of Luke)  
March 1, 2020 – Brad Bailey

### Luke 22:1-6

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Intro

I want to begin by asking...

**What kind of greatness do you believe in...and seek?**

I know that is a big and broad question... but it's worth a moment to think about. For many of us... **it's not as clear as we might want to think.**

If you're like me... you might find that your mind can try to respond in two different ways... we try to consider and give the **right answer**... but if we consider the **real answer**... **it may not be so simple.**

If you are like me...there is a response that comes out of my self-centered desire to have power of my own...and another that TRIES to see a greatness that is centered in God.

As we **continue** in our **series Encountering Jesus through the Gospel of Luke**... one of the living testimonies of Christ... we are **brought to the issue** of our pursuit of power and greatness.

And **how fitting** that we should come to this at the **launch of the Lenten season.**

**The 40 days of Lent is reminiscent of the 40 days in the wilderness at the start of Christ's ministry.** Just as the Father in heaven declares his blessing on Jesus as his beloved son... we are told that he is lead into the wilderness for 40 days...where he fasted... and there the Enemy of God... came with temptations. What were the temptations that the enemy brought to him? The Enemy of our very lives... seeks to take hold of Jesus in the same way he took over the nature of human life... with the lure: **"I will give you power if you serve me."** **When it failed... one was now loosed who would begin to declare that a new power was at hand... not rooted in self-consumption of this world's prestige...but in giving oneself to the rule of God.**

Even before it's climatic juncture as Jesus would give himself... soon declaring "not my will but Yours be done"... and then as he died upon that cross... and he would surrender his spirit...this conflict of power comes to the forefront.

### **Luke 22:1-6 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, <sup>2</sup> and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. <sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. <sup>4</sup> And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. <sup>5</sup> They were delighted and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup> He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

**As Passover approaches... a force is rising up against Jesus.**

The religious leaders gather to get rid of him.

**Why?** Because as we read... **"they were afraid of the people."**

Thousands of excited pilgrims crowded in and around Jerusalem during that week **Passover celebrated freedom**... a rather loaded celebration that caused the Romans to always be nervous about possible uprisings.

And even more directly... the people were drawn to Jesus. **If he tried to seize him publicly... the people might turn against them. [1]**

**The conflict was ultimately one of power:** They had been taken by a form of this world's power... that of **prestige**...of social recognition and respect... of **material blessing**....**and it controlled them.**

They **may have thought** that they **held such forms of power**... but in truth... **such forms of power held them.**

And Jesus was reflecting the corruption as the one who stood outside of it. Jesus was not given to serving the vanity of self-serving power...and greatness.

It is the culmination of the confrontation that Jesus brought to bear with the religious leaders.

In essence...they were **faced with losing power.**

Was such a desire for social power and greatness **vain?**

Yes....but not in any way we can just project onto them.

**As noted before...this is depicted in the JR Tolkien Lord of the Rings...**

The ring was dangerous but hard to get rid of –an embodiment of power and the corrupting effects of power. often summed up by the Lord Acton quote: “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”.

It enabled the source of such self absorption...the evil Sauron to bend the will of others to his own. In seeking to exalt themselves, they became his slaves.

**It echoes what the Scriptures describe as the state of our own lives...as described in the events of that first Garden of Eden.**

**Evil power meets human pride...** result is that of life **becoming enslaved and self-consumed.** (Our now independent selves are actually lost... enslaved.)

Perhaps that is why it is not surprising to be **told next how Satan takes Judas.**

There are hints in the Gospel accounts of Judas, one of the 12 disciples... bearing frustration that Jesus was not seizing power like he should. That became the door by which the enemy could consume him.

Perhaps he **felt slighted... under appreciated.** I imagine most of us can sense how much such feelings can be played upon.

And that became **the opportunity the religious leaders.** They would not be able to simply call upon the Roman temple guards to arrest Jesus publicly... but if one would help the temple guards find Jesus in the night hours... and formerly identify him... the plot could begin.

**Tolkien shows us** that the only people who can be trusted with great power are those who don't really want it – or who do, but have the moral strength to reject it. Even then, it's touch-and-go, the burden of responsibility taking a terrible toll on the reluctant bearer.

And it is towards this.... that the meal that symbolizes such a choice unfolds.

**In the next few verses** that we won't read, Luke tells us that Jesus sends two of his disciples to prepare the meal (Luke 22:7-13)

**Nobody knew where** the Passover feast would be except **Peter and John**. They were given very mysterious directions for finding the room. Jesus kept the **location a secret, probably because of Judas**. He was determined that his arrest would take place at the time He had chosen, and not before.

### **Luke 22:14-20 (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

What Jesus presents may sound familiar to many of us... but to those in that room who first heard these words... it could not have been more startling.

It begins like any other Passover celebration....but becomes something so much bigger.

The Passover meal was really a remembering that which defined their story.

The original Passover was a meal that was eaten the night before the Israelites were liberated by God from slavery from Egypt. The night before they were liberated from Pharaoh, they ate a meal. God said to them, "I want you to eat this meal repeatedly, every year, as a perpetual memorial. I never want you to forget this night. I never want you to forget how I saved you by my grace and my power," and therefore, this would have been happening now for centuries, that they ate the Passover meal together once a year.

You see, in verse 17, **Jesus gets up and he takes a cup and he blesses, or he gives thanks**, and he begins to speak. That **fits in exactly with what had been happening for centuries**. The **presider, the head of the family, would get up and take a cup**, the first cup of wine, and he would give thanks

He'd say, "**Our forefathers, our ancestors, they were slaves**, but God looked upon their affliction, their suffering." Then, Deuteronomy 16, he would say, "Do you see this bread? This bread is the bread of our affliction, the bread of our ancestors' affliction, that they ate in the wilderness," and so he explains the meaning of the liberation and the suffering, and so on.

So Jesus Christ picks up the cup and he opens his mouth, the way it has been done for centuries, but as soon as he begins to speak, Jesus begins to say things that must have absolutely astonished the disciples.

The bread is now my body.

The blood is now my own.

The power that enslaved you... that was once Pharaoh...is now the whole of the powers of this world.

Jesus is now fulfilling what had only been a shadow.

He had become the **Living Word**... the **ultimate Temple**...and now the **Passover sacrifice**.

**He is the sum and substance of that shadow, and the fulfilling end of that type**

As Tim Keller describes, Jesus is saying, "Years ago, they ate a meal before God redeemed them from political and economic slavery from Egypt, but tonight we eat a meal the night before God will redeem us from sin and death and evil itself. All other sacrifices, all other deliverances, by all the other leaders, are pointing to here, to me. I'm the ultimate Moses. This is the ultimate exodus. *This* is the night that's *the* night, that's different from all other nights."

He is saying, "**My death, tonight, is the climax to which all of history has been moving.**"

It's the center of history."

**Jesus even refers** to this as **the "new covenant"** (v 20).

That phrase may sound like some sort of contractual language...but it is relational... the bonds rooted in what the OTHER party brings.

It is not a contract based on some impersonal transaction. It is one party giving themselves to the other.

**He says, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you"** (vs 15)

That is how he feels... and eager desire ...to have them partake of this meal with him. The creator of the universe... is now embodied. This is as profoundly personal as can be.

He says: "This is my body **given for you**...and the new covenant in **my blood, which is poured out for you.**" **Some of us need to hear that.**

**And we need to recognize, that he is not speaking to those who are righteous...but the imperfect who will follow him.**

He's already noted that this group includes one who will betray him... later he speaks to Peter who is known to deny him...and in fact most will abandon him by the time he is crucified. And yet to them...he says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you"

Jesus knows your heart. He knows that sin about which you would bear the most shame and humiliation possible were it ever known and which you have worked so hard so that no one else will know. He knows that sin. He knows corners of your heart that you don't know. And yet He says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you."

**v 19 – "Do this in remembrance of me"**

Becomes the meal of life... that which we remember

This use of "remember" **is not referring to what is cognitive but rather formative. It is not simply some cognitive recall to our memory... but rather about taking this to bear on how you live.**

> It implies that what God did changed things... is the changed reality that we are living out of.

When the God of all creation...all power...all goodness... comes to us the rebels...and gives his body... pours out his blood... **NOTHING IS THE SAME. [2]**

In the cross there is the crossroads between the power that this world rules with...and the power of God.

In this meal...and in the cross...is the ultimate crux of all life:

Serve the powers that offer self-greatness... or serve the one who is the source of all good and greatness.

It remains what we gather around ...and follow.

...and I think this is what **gets clearer in what follows**

Words are spoken of one who would betray him (Luke 22:21-13)... but then before that could be identified they all show their own vulnerability.

### **Luke 22:24-30 (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup> Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. <sup>28</sup> You are those who have stood by me in my trials. <sup>29</sup> And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, <sup>30</sup> so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

You may find this a bit comical. Given what Jesus had just said ... it hard to imagine how his disciples starting to argue about who should be considered the greatest. It may have been that when Jesus spoke of one who would betray him... they became a bit accusational towards one another...or began to argue for why it couldn't be them because of how great they were.

Nevertheless, Jesus uses this to bring home the very nature crossroads that we each face.

**Jesus says that you must make a choice. Will you accept the world's method of honoring greatness? Or will you follow the Lord's example of being a servant?**

**"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But you are not to be like that.**

**He is saying that the common way...the way of the Gentiles in contrast to the way of God's chosen...is that they Lord power over others. They want to use and control others. And the "benefactors" refers to those who seemed to give to others but only in a way in which they were then owed and held control over others. In essence...they gave to get.**

**This... Jesus said...is not the way of God. True power does not give to take.**

That is why Jesus spoke so much about **money, sex, and anger. Many feel awkward about these parts of life. Uneasy. Many feel there is something inherently bad about these parts of life. But what Jesus helps us to see...is that there is nothing bad about these parts of life. If we listen to Jesus, we realize that** what he really spoke to was **greed, lust, and the desire to destroy others...** because they are all related to this deceitful pursuit of the false power that tries to consume from others.

Jesus now tells us in verse twenty-seven,

**Vs 27 - I am among you as the One who serves."**

**Christ has set the example,** as he himself displayed when he washed the disciples' feet. [3]

Jesus said: **"For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"** (Mark 10:45).

**And in becoming God's servants...we receive God power. As Jesus says...**

**29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me,**

He is telling us something profound. He calls them to serve like him... it frees us to trust God as source of authority. He says as we serve, he will give them the kingdom as the Father had done for him. [4]

**> Authority is not something you claim...but rather that which can only be given to you.**

**Greatness lies not in the power of claiming our greatness...but in serving God's greatness. Greatness is not in serving ourselves...but in serving what is greater than ourselves.**

**Closing:**

And so this meal.. we refer to as Communion...or The Lord's Supper...or the Eucharist... is the symbol of our story. It defines our story...and in remembering ...we are embracing that there is One who came and defied the powers that rule this world...that defeated the powers of this world...and that he declared a greater power now at hand.

In a moment we will have the opportunity to come join in taking this meal. It is very communal in nature. In this meal we declare that this is our shared story.

**But this is a meal we must take personally.**

You don't really take a meal just because you sit at the table and see it.... and believe in it....and watch others eat. We take it by taking it. Each of us must receive the sacrifice of Jesus personally.

**And this is a meal we must take continually.**

It isn't good enough to have taken in a great meal long ago. We need to take this continually.

**Resources:** Tim Keller (The Upper Room); Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III ("This Do in Remembrance of Me");

**Notes:**

1. The plan to kill Jesus was of long standing, as is clear from such passages as Mark 3:6; 11:18; 12:7, 12; John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 8:37, 40; 11:53. In Luke see especially 19:47; 20:19. In fact the present passage (22:2) is virtually a repetition of 19:47, 48 and 20:19, for in all three passages it is either stated or implied that the plotters "were afraid of the people." -

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, pp. 954–955). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were the three most important feasts on the Jewish calendar (Lev. 23); and all the Jewish men were expected to go to Jerusalem each year to celebrate (Deut. 16:16). The Feast of Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and it was a time for both remembering and rejoicing (Ex. 11–12). Thousands of excited pilgrims crowded in and around Jerusalem during that week, causing the Romans to always be nervous about possible uprisings. Passover had strong political overtones, and it was the ideal time for some would-be messiah to attempt to overthrow Rome. This explains why King Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, were in Jerusalem instead of being at Tiberius and Caesarea respectively. They wanted to help keep the peace.

The religious leaders prepared for a crime (vv. 1–6). It is incredible that these men perpetrated history's greatest crime during Israel's holiest festival. During Passover, the Jews were expected to remove all leaven (yeast) from their houses (Ex. 12:15) as a reminder that their ancestors left Egypt in haste and had to eat unleavened bread. Jesus had warned His disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1; also see Matt. 16:6; 1 Cor. 5:1–8), and now we see this hypocrisy at work.

The religious leaders had cleansed their homes but not their hearts (see Matt. 23:25–28). - Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 264). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. One of the great questions of history is, "Why is the cross the symbol that defines the role of Christ?"

All the other religious founders of all the great religions died old and successful.

Moses dies old ... full of years ... over 100 years old.

Buddha lives to 80 years old and achieves enlightenment.

Muhammad lives into his 60s, but he doesn't die until after he unites all of Arabia in one kingdom, under one faith.

In absolute contrast, you have Jesus...at the young age of 33... like a lamb led to slaughter... raised up in public shame...and physical pain.

Yet Jesus says... "remember this."

In the cross there is the crossroads between the power that this world rules with...and the power of God.



In this meal...and in the cross...is the ultimate crux of all life:  
Serve the powers that offer self-greatness... or serve the one who is the source of all good and greatness.

And notably, in Revelation 5:9–10 John says ....

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

He had us in mind... the sacrifice that would reach through the wider and longer ...

It is a revelation of being FOREVER the one who gave himself to gain us...across time and cultures. It is the greatness that is bound in God.

Tim Keller notes, "John Stott, a Christian writer, puts it like this. He's doing a little historical deduction. He essentially says, "The fact that a cross became the Christian symbol and that Christians refused, in spite of ridicule, to discard it in place of something less offensive, can only have one explanation. It means the centrality of the cross originated in the mind of Jesus himself."

See, he's doing some historical deduction. He's saying no human mind would look at the cross and say, "That's the central paradigm I want to live according to." No one would do that, and therefore, the only reason why the cross became a transforming presence in the lives of so many people that it changed the world is that, as John Stott says, Jesus explained it himself.

On the night before he died, Jesus gave his disciples the interpretation, the explanation of the meaning of his death, and afterwards, when it was all over, they remembered it and they accepted it and it changed them.

3. John 13:12-17, "So when he had washed their feet, taken His garments and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'" (13) You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. (14) If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. (16) Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who sent greater than he who sent him. (17) If you know these things blessed are you if you do them."

4. The predicted betrayal caused the disciples to question who might be responsible (v. 23). But the conversation quickly turned to which disciple was the greatest (22:24–30), for if one could be in the lowest position of a traitor, then presumably there must be some kind of rank. Jesus confronts the competitive spirit of his disciples, contrasting the secular meaning of greatness with his own perspective. Gentiles use power to dominate others and to acquire a reputation for themselves. The new community, however, should not be characterized by a quest for power or greatness, for true greatness consists in serving. Jesus uses his position not to demand service but to give service and aid to others. Nevertheless, the disciples will be rewarded for their service and endurance with Jesus in his trials (v. 28). They will share with Jesus in the messianic banquet and the kingdom, having a responsibility to judge Israel. -

Schreiner, T. R. (1995). Luke. In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, p. 836). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Note: Following this at the end of chapter 22, there is a challenging statement in which Jesus seems to encourage bringing swords. The following may be helpful: What follows supplies a probable explanation. The Master knew that two of the disciples (Peter and another) had brought swords with them, and with that acceptance of the thoughts of others which we have so often traced, He sadly, and yet, as it were, with the gentle sympathy with which a man speaks to those who are children in age or character, conveyed His warnings in the form which met their fears and hopes. If they meant to trust in swords, a time was coming when they would sorely need them. - [Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers](#)