

## *The Luke Daily Study Guide*

### **Week 6**

**Monday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Luke 20:1-26**

1 One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. 2 "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"

3 He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, 4 John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

5 They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?'" 6 But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

7 So they answered, "We don't know where it was from."

8 Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

9 He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

13 "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

14 "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid!"

17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

" 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?"

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

20 Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. 21 So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. 22 Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

23 He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 24 "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

25 He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

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#### Points of Interest:

- 'together with the elders'—the elders were members of the Jewish aristocracy who were neither priests nor teachers of the law (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 201).
- 'by what authority you are doing these things?'—'these things' to which they refer are the throwing out of the merchants in yesterday's passage. The Temple was the jurisdiction of the chief priests, and they certainly didn't give Jesus permission to get rid of the temple merchants—the temple merchants were their idea. So, to them it's clear that Jesus is acting without any authority.
- 'I will also ask you a question'—before answering where he gets his authority, he demonstrates that he does indeed have authority; he tells them that they have to answer his question before he'll answer theirs, and they do.
- 'John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?'—I think Jesus is essentially saying, 'You can figure out the answer to your own question.' His authority comes from the same place as John's: if John was sent by God, so is Jesus; if John was simply acting on his own, so is Jesus.
- 'We don't know where it was from'—this is both a bald-faced lie and entirely accurate. It's a lie, because it's not as if they don't have an opinion: if they were to be honest, they would say that John's authority was human. So, by saying they don't know, they're lying to avoid saying something that they know will be unpopular. But, by giving this answer, they're ironically saying something that's doubly true:
  1. First of all, they really don't know where John came from, because they don't even bother trying to figure out. They don't even think about the truth of the matter, instead thinking only about the political implications of their possible answers;
  2. Secondly, if they were to give their answer, they'd be wrong. They really don't know where John was from, because they think he came from humans but he really came from heaven.
- 'Neither will I tell you'—Jesus sees through their avoidance; it's not that they can't answer but that they won't. Since they refuse to answer him, he refuses to answer them as well. Their unwillingness to recognize John leads to an inability to see Jesus for who he is.
- 'He went on to tell the people this parable'—while he won't plainly answer their question, he does tell a story that gives his answer. Earlier (8:10), Jesus said that he was willing to explain himself to those who truly listen to him, 'but to others I speak in parables.'
- 'A man planted a vineyard'—Jesus is using a story from Isaiah (Isaiah 5:1-7) as the basis for his own story. Isaiah's story ends like this:

The vineyard of the LORD Almighty  
is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are the vines he delighted in.  
And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;  
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress (Isaiah 5:7).

This vineyard to whom Jesus is referring is Israel, or Judah, and God is the builder and owner of that vineyard. Jesus adds a new set of characters—the tenants—to Isaiah's story. The chief priests, teachers, and elders are the tenants.
- 'he sent a servant'—another new set of characters: John and the other prophets.

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- ‘so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard’—they’re sent to collect the rent, but the tenants have forgotten that they are renters and have begun to think of the vineyard as their own. They send the owner’s representatives away (or in some cases kill them) as if they are beggars or thieves.
- ‘I will send my son, whom I love’—this is an echo of God the Father’s words about Jesus at Jesus’ baptism (3:22). It’s the answer to the priests’ question regarding Jesus’ authority. Jesus is God’s Son, sent by him, with his authority. It’s the priests, teachers, and elders who are usurping their authority: they are pretending that what belongs to God—the temple, and even more importantly the people who worship at the temple—belongs to them.
- ‘The stone the builders rejected’—this is Psalm 118:22. It’s the same psalm from which the people were singing, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD,’ in yesterday’s passage. It’s a song of thanks for God’s rescue. However, it seems that this rescuer is not immediately recognized. The cornerstone of a building is the first stone laid in the foundation, the stone upon which all of the other stones is built. In the metaphor Jesus quotes, one set of builders rejects a stone as altogether unsuitable, but another builder uses that same stone as the cornerstone. God will build something completely new—a Savior, a rescuer—out of what the chief priests, teachers, and elders throw out.

Ever since chapter 9, Jesus has insisted that he must go to Jerusalem to be rejected and killed, but he hasn’t given very much explanation as to why. Here is at least part of the answer. Jesus is going to prove definitively that God sees things differently from the people of this world. In the next few days, all of the worldly leaders—secular and religious, Jewish and non-Jewish—will agree to get rid of Jesus. But what they throw out as garbage is what God most values: God will pick Jesus out of the garbage, clean him up, and display him as his greatest treasure.

- ‘Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’—the chief priests and teachers think that they’ve come up with a trap for Jesus similar to the one he set for them about John. If Jesus says they should pay taxes, he would not only be pro-tax—and every politician knows how deadly that is to a political career—but pro-Roman (the Romans were unpopular foreign rulers—it might be something like being pro-American in much of present-day Iraq). But if he speaks against taxes, he’d be considered a dangerous revolutionary by the Romans.
- ‘Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’—Jesus looks at a coin and says, ‘Well, it seems to have Caesar’s name and picture on it; so, I guess it must belong to him. We should give it back.’ Even though it’s pro-tax, it’s logic that’s hard to argue with. Jesus answers their question forthrightly, but in a way that completely avoids making any political statements, either for or against Rome. I think he’s able to do so because money doesn’t have a hold on him (‘life does not consist in an abundance of possessions’ (12:15). It doesn’t really matter to him how much money Caesar gets, and it doesn’t need to matter to anyone else, either: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . . For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them’ (12:22,30). They could give Caesar every single coin that has his name on it without worrying, because God is faithful to provide for them.

What is very important to Jesus is that God gets what belongs to him. Going back to Jesus’ story, the owner deserves his fruit. Jesus knows that the coins belong to Caesar because his picture is on them. Thus, whatever bears God’s picture belongs to him. By this argument, it’s people who belong to God: in the story of creation, God says, ‘Let

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us make human beings in our image, in our likeness . . . '(Genesis 1:26). Just like the tenants in the story are holding back what belongs to the vineyard owner, the chief priests are holding back what belongs to God: by crowding the other nations out of the temple and cheating Jews who need animals for sacrifice, the chief priests are robbing the people of the chance to worship and robbing God of their worship. Even worse, they're robbing God of these people's worship in order to gain money for themselves.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* The tenants in the vineyard start off just wanting to hold back a little fruit from the owner, but they end up killing his son. I think greed often starts small, but grows quickly out of control. Pray that God would protect you from greed. Ask God to point out any small entrance points for greed in your life, and ask him to give you the strength to refuse to give in to it. Ask God to forgive you for any ways you've already given in.
- *For your six:* Pray that God would remove any barriers to your six seeing or believing truth—whether it be truth about themselves, about God, or about something else. Also pray that the truth, when they do see it and embrace it, would be of great benefit in their lives. Particularly ask God to give them the boldness to accept truths that it might be difficult for them to admit.
- *For our city:* The chief priests and the teachers had influential positions, which they could use to do a lot of good for people. Many of them probably started out in their public careers with the best intentions. However, over time, their priorities had shifted away from the good of the people and toward maintaining their own power. It seems to be all too common a temptation for people in powerful public service positions. Pray for our politicians, that they would be strengthened against this temptation and that they would be blessed with public-spiritedness in their decision-making.

#### **Tuesday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>**

##### **Luke 20:27-21:4**

27 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.

28 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. 30 The second 31 and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. 32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

34 Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. 37 But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

39 Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" 40 And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

41 Then Jesus said to them, "Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? 42 David himself declares in the Book of Psalms:

" 'The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

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43 until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet."

44 David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

45 While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, 46 "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 47 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

21:1 As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

#### Points of Interest:

- 'Some of the Sadducees'—the Pharisees have become familiar to us. The Sadducees were the other major religious/political party among the Jews in Roman Palestine. The Sadducees were more conservative than the Pharisees in some ways, but less traditional in others. For instance, they recognized the authority only of the Law—the five books of Moses, which were the oldest parts of the Jewish scriptures—not of the Prophets; but they were also significantly influenced by Greek culture and philosophy. Whereas the Pharisees were of the prosperous middle class and dominated among the teachers in the synagogue, the Sadducees were upper class and dominated among the priests at the Temple. The Pharisees were more numerous, but the Sadducees held the more powerful positions.
- 'who say there is no resurrection'—the Pharisees believed in life after death, but the Sadducees did not. It's the perfect intersection of their scriptural conservatism (the books of Moses are a bit sketchy on what happens after death) and their urbanity (contemporary Greek philosophy focused on the material world).
- 'man must marry the widow and raise up offspring'—this law (found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10) was meant to insure that widows could be adequately taken care of—largely through having children who would look after them in their old age—without land, which was the major wealth of each family, passing out of the hands of the family.
- 'since the seven were married to her'—three different husbands would have made the point. But the Sadducees exaggerate to make the situation as ridiculous as possible. This problem may have been one of the Sadducees' best 'stumpers' in their frequent arguments with the Pharisees.
- 'those who are considered worthy'—Jesus begins by saying that not everyone gets to enjoy life after death. It's a great privilege. It should neither be assumed as a right nor dismissed as unimportant.
- 'will neither marry nor be given in marriage'—the Sadducees seemingly airtight proof against life after death relies on the fundamentally flawed assumption that the next life is just like this one. According to Jesus, the next life operates by different rules. To me, Jesus' viewpoint makes a lot more sense: what would be the point of an eternal life that's exactly like this one?
- 'they are like the angels'—a little dig at the Sadducees, who—despite plentiful evidence in the books of Moses—also did not believe in angels (*New Bible Commentary* 1012. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- 'But in the account of the burning bush'—this is one of the most famous stories from the books of Moses. It's when God called Moses to rescue the Israelites from their

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captivity in Egypt (Exodus 3). Jesus is proving life after death from the scriptures accepted by the Sadducees. Moreover, by using such a well-known passage, he's saying that proof of the resurrection has been right under their noses the whole time. It's almost humiliatingly obvious.

- 'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living'—God mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as character references for himself: 'Just ask Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They'll vouch for me.' He wouldn't be a very good God if his best references were decaying corpses. To say that God is the god of the dead would be to say that he is powerless. Greek mythology might provide us with another viewpoint on Jesus' argument here. In Greek mythology, three brother gods—Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades—drew lots to decide who would rule heaven, who would rule the seas, and who would rule the dead; the loser, Hades, ended up with the dead and was not very happy about it. Since God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Sadducees either must admit that God is a bitter loser like Hades, or that Abraham and the others are alive.
- 'Well said, teacher!'—the teachers of the law, who would mostly be Pharisees, can't help but be impressed by and grateful for his refutation of the Sadducees, even though they're supposed to be allied with the Sadducees against Jesus (19:47).
- 'Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David?'—During the birth stories early in his story, Luke makes much of Jesus' association with David's lineage. Even Gabriel, the angelic messenger to Mary, calls Jesus David's son: 'The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David' (1:32). Just a few passages ago (18:38), the blind man who calls Jesus 'Son of David' is given as a positive example of faith. So, why does Jesus all of a sudden take issue with the Messiah being called David's son? I think it has to do with the perception of the source of the Messiah's greatness. It's not that the Messiah benefits from David's reflected greatness: 'this Messiah is almost as good as his dad David.' Rather, it's the other way around: David was great because he resembled and to a certain extent foreshadowed the King who was to come.
- 'David himself declares in the Book of Psalms'—besides being a king and a warrior, David was a great worshipper and writer of songs. This is Psalm 110:1.
- 'Beware of the teachers of the law'—the people need to be on their guard against the teachers for a couple of reasons: they're bad examples, and they'll rob you if they can.
- 'the places of honor at banquets'—here's how they're bad examples. They think they're great, but they're actually setting themselves up for a fall: 'For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' (14:11)
- 'They devour widows' houses'—here's how they rob you. Widows were relatively powerless in Jesus' society. We don't know exactly how the teachers were taking advantage of the widows' powerlessness, but the point is that the teachers are on the lookout for how to use people's weakness to their gain—specifically to their financial gain. Ultimately, of course, Jesus promises that the teachers won't get away with it: 'It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble' (17:2)
- 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others'—speaking of widows, Jesus exalts this humble widow for her act of faith. These coins the widow puts in would be of worth very little, but they mean a lot more than they're monetary value. It's significant that the widow has two coins, because she could have just given one of them and it still would have been half of her income—far more, percentage-wise, than everyone else's ten percent. But she gives everything. She is able to do what the rich ruler

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(18:22) could not: she gives everything she has, and she trusts God to provide for her. She gives to God what is God's (yesterday's passage) by putting her life into God's hands. It's the only real act of worship we've seen since Jesus arrived in the Temple. She is also shrewd with her money: she's turned her small amount of money into much treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33). And, she has no need to worry even in this life, because she has a good father who will take care of her needs (12:30).

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Do you feel like you have very little to offer to God? Maybe you wonder if it's even worth giving what you have to give. This passage shows us that God sees and honors the smallest offerings.
- *For your six:* Their preconceived notion of what it meant for the Messiah to be David's son was getting in the way of Jesus' listeners ability to see Jesus clearly and accept what he had to offer them. Ask God to remove any unhelpful filters through which your six see Jesus. One common filter is seeing Jesus as only a good moral teacher; but there are many other possibilities as well.
- *For our city:* I think that we as a city can sometimes, like the Sadducees, be a little too sophisticated to give credence to such things as miracles, or angels, or eternal life. In this passage, Jesus tells us that we miss out on the best parts of life if we dismiss the supernatural. Pray that God would give our entire city a greater ability to accept the supernatural.

#### **Wednesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Luke 21:5-38**

5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6 "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

7 "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

8 He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. 9 When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

10 Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

12 "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13 And so you will bear testimony to me. 14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17 Everyone will hate you because of me. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 Stand firm, and you will win life.

20 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 23 How dreadful it will be in those days for

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pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

25 "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29 He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32 "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

37 Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, 38 and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

1 Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, 2 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. 3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. 5 They were delighted and agreed to give him money. 6 He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

9 "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

10 He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11 and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 12 He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones'—Herod the Great (the father of the Herod from our story) tried to buy popularity with the Jews by spending tremendous amounts of money on a very lavish renovation of the Temple. Rich Jews from around the world contributed to the project as well. So, it's not a big surprise that the disciples would do a little gawking—the Temple is a world-renowned architectural wonder, like St. Peter's Basilica or the Taj Mahal. They seem to miss Jesus' point from yesterday's passage, though: the important thing is not the amount of money given, but the amount of faith shown.

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- ‘not one stone will be left on another’—even the Temple, the house of God, is just worldly wealth to Jesus: it will fail; it will wear out; it can be stolen or destroyed. In fact, the destruction of the Temple is not just a theoretical possibility. Jesus specifically foresees it in the not too distant future.  
This prediction also reminds me of Psalm 118: ‘The stone the builders rejected/has become the cornerstone’ (quoted in Monday’s passage). There’s only one way to have a new cornerstone: by building a new building. You can’t just add a new cornerstone to an old building. God will dismantle his old home—the Temple—and build a new one, with Jesus as the foundation.
- ‘when will these things happen?’—in what follows, we’ll read a lot of things that sound quite cataclysmic, but the cataclysm that’s being talked about is local. ‘These things’ is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. For Jesus’ listeners, the destruction of the Temple would be simultaneously geographically limited and almost incomprehensibly significant, like Washington, D.C., or Manhattan all of a sudden ceasing to exist.
- ‘what will be the sign’—a sign is something that comes just before the thing it’s pointing to. For example, a freeway exit sign comes just before the exit itself, so that you know that it’s coming and are able to make the exit. The disciples want to know what comes just before the destruction of the temple, so that they have a chance to escape just before it happens.
- ‘the end will not come right away’—it will take longer than they might think. In particular, the disciples will be tempted to listen to rumors that Jesus has returned. As Jesus said before, they’ll know it when he’s returned (17:24)
- ‘fearful events and great signs’—many of the things that are typically thought of as signs of terrible events—wars, earthquakes, natural disasters, epidemics, strange things happening in the stars—will happen, but they aren’t the signs they need to be concerned about.
- ‘they will lay hands on you’—up until this point, they won’t need to worry about the Temple. For a while, the Temple will be fine: they themselves, however, will face a considerable amount of trouble. These stories of being thrown in prison and of testifying in front of governors are much of what Luke’s sequel, the book of Acts, is all about. Almost from the beginning, Jesus’ followers would be in and out of prison at the hands of the chief priests; and they would face their first major persecution from the Romans during the reign of Nero, just a few years before the war between the Romans and the Jews and the eventual destruction of the Temple.
- ‘Stand firm, and you will win life’—as long as they trust Jesus to guide them and give them the words to say, they’ll be in absolutely no real danger. The danger is not that they will be harmed, but that they will fall prey to fear or worry. If they succumb to worry, they may try to save their life, and lose it; but if they lose their life for Jesus’ sake, they’ll win it (9:24). It will be difficult to wait. It will look like they are on their way to death. But, if they stay the course, it will turn out very well.
- ‘When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies’—back to Jerusalem’s destruction. The sign of the Temple’s doom is obvious enough: Jerusalem being surrounded by an enemy army. Once that happens, people should leave immediately; there’s enough time to escape, but just enough. Jesus recommends that everyone run away from the city and into the hills, which goes against Jesus’ advice goes against instinct; in times of trouble, people would usually run toward the city to get behind the safety of the walls. In this particular case, whoever ignored Jesus’ advice would end up trapped by the Roman siege, from which absolutely no one would escape (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 248).

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- 'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles'—many of Jesus' contemporaries thought that because Jerusalem was the home of the Temple, God would never let it be destroyed. This confidence was somewhat foolish, seeing as God had already shown in the past that he was indeed willing to allow his own house to be destroyed if that's what it took to get the attention of his people; about 600 years before Jesus, Jerusalem was conquered and the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians. In AD 70, the Temple would be destroyed again by the Romans. The Jewish overconfidence in the inviolability of Jerusalem proceeded partly from an overvaluation of the importance of the Temple. The Temple was never as important to God as it was to the people of Jerusalem. It wasn't even his idea; it was David's (I Chronicles 17). God accepted the Temple and chose to bless the place with his presence, because the temple was a generous expression of gratitude from his people—parents always show pride in the gifts their children give them. But his plans never depended on the Temple as much as his people came to think they did.
- 'they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory'—Jesus refers to one of the most famous prophecies of the Messiah, found in Daniel 7:13-14:

There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

I think, in context of the story Jesus is telling, this prophecy is about 'the stone that the builders rejected' becoming the cornerstone. This is describing the destruction of the Temple, but from a heavenly rather than earthly perspective. In Jerusalem on earth, the Gentiles entering Jerusalem will be followed by the destruction of the Temple. In heaven, Jesus will come into his full authority. The Temple will be replaced by Jesus and his followers as the sign of God's presence on earth. The shaking of the heavenly bodies probably refers to a shake-up in the heavenly hierarchy: the sun, moon, and stars were often used in prophecy to describe the spiritual power behind earthly rulers (Ezekiel 32:7-8, in which the downfall of Pharaoh is accompanied by stars falling and the sun being darkened, is a good example).
- 'this generation will certainly not pass away'—all of the things Jesus has said up until this point will happen within the average lifespan of his listeners.
- 'Heaven and earth will pass away'—not just the Temple, but all of heaven and earth, will eventually fade away; but Jesus' words will last beyond it all. They're like a lifeline to eternity.
- 'and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap'—I think 'that day' is the day when heaven and earth pass away. What Jesus was talking about until now was something that will happen in Jerusalem, which can be avoided by running to the mountains, for which there will be plenty of warning. What Jesus is talking about now happens suddenly, across the face of the whole earth. However, even it—the end of the world—can be escaped by the person who faithfully watches in the expectation of Jesus' rescue.
- 'each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives'—the Mount of Olives was just outside of the city limits.
- 'the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover'—this festival commemorates the Israelites' escape from Egypt. The unleavened bread (bread without yeast) symbolizes the suddenness and haste with which the Israelites left Egypt: they didn't

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even have time to let the dough rise. The first Passover, and instructions for future feasts, is found in Exodus 12.

- 'they were afraid of the people'—the priests and teachers are looking for a way to arrest Jesus without causing a stir in front of the crowds.
- 'Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve'—after tempting Jesus (chapter 4), the devil withdrew, but he was still on the lookout for a good opportunity (4:13). Now, he sees that opportunity, not directly with Jesus, but with one of the Twelve.
- 'delighted and agreed to give him money'—Judas agrees to sell Jesus for money. This is the ultimate choice of treasure on earth over treasure in heaven: 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed' (12:15).
- 'on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed'—the Passover lamb is sacrificed on the first night of the feast. At the first Passover, in Egypt, the people spread some of the lamb's blood on their doorframes. God sent a plague on the firstborn of the Egyptians, to punish them for keeping the Israelites in slavery. But whenever the destroying angel came across the blood on the doorframe, it passed over that house, saving the life of the firstborn of that house (Exodus 12:23).
- 'a man carrying a jar of water will meet you'—it's unclear whether this is some sort of supernatural arrangement, or it's a little bit of cloak-and-dagger so that the priests and teachers don't know where Jesus is having his Passover dinner.
- 'found things just as Jesus had told them'—they are preparing for Jesus' feast, but Jesus has already prepared for them to prepare. He gives them what they need to serve him.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would protect you from worry or distraction or unbelief that would get in the way of you being ready and on the lookout for the things he would like to do in your life.
- *For your six:* This life is full of the possibility of unexpected dangers. Pray that God would mercifully protect your six from being harmed by any disaster.
- *For our city:* When the disciples look at the Temple, they see something impressive and enduring. But Jesus tells them that they're mistaken: many of them will outlive the Temple. Our government, our banks, the large businesses in our area, our sports teams, and the universities all look solid and impressive enough; but who knows what changes may come in the future? Pray that God would save our city from placing undue trust in institutions that won't last.

#### **Thursday, April 5<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Luke 22:1-46**

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again 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 given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

20 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. 21 But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. 22 The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" 23 They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

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24 A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 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. 27 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. 28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." 35 Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered. 36 He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. 37 It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." 38 The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That is enough," he replied. 39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God'—this is a goodbye meal. Like the nobleman from the story in chapter 19, Jesus is going away for a while to take possession of his kingdom. They will someday all celebrate this feast together again. It will be a double celebration: the celebration of the Passover, and the celebration of their new kingdom.
- 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'—For the centerpiece of this Passover meal, Jesus replaces the usual lamb with the bread and wine, the symbols of his own body and blood. He is establishing a new tradition, with a new sacrificial lamb: himself. The Passover lamb was a symbol of God's protection of his people from death, his rescue of them from captivity, and his guidance of them to a new land. The bread and wine commemorate a new but similar relationship between Jesus and his followers; the bread and wine symbolize salvation from death, rescue from sin, and the coming of a new kingdom.

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- ‘as it has been decreed’—numerous Psalms speak of the Messiah being betrayed by a friend. Psalm 41:9 is a good example:  
Even my close friend,  
someone I trusted,  
one who shared my bread  
has lifted up his heel against me.
- ‘those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors’—*benefactor* means, ‘helper,’ or, ‘sponsor.’ It comes from the Latin, ‘to do well.’ Basically, these worldly leaders call themselves servants, but really they’re all about telling other people what to do.
- ‘But I am among you as one who serves’—Jesus suggests that there are better ways to be great than arguing about it; sensibly enough, he suggests that they watch the one who is greatest—him—and imitate what they see.
- ‘so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones’—this sounds like two different stories Jesus has recently told: the man throwing the big party, and the nobleman who goes away to get royal authority. Jesus’ kingdom will be the best party ever, and it will also be real work. Jesus wants to share both his fun and his authority with his followers; they will be guests at his party, but also deputies ruling in his kingdom.
- ‘Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat’—having had success with Judas, Satan turns his attention on the rest of the disciples as well. Satan offers, ‘Let me help you test your follower’s faith,’ but Jesus knows that Satan’s goal is not to refine them, but to destroy them.
- ‘when you have turned back’—there will be a time when Peter’s faith will fail under Satan’s temptations and accusations. But that won’t be the end. He can repent: that is, recalibrate himself toward Jesus again. When he does, he’ll find that he not only has enough strength to follow Jesus himself but to lead others toward him as well.
- ‘did you lack anything?’—it’s important that they remember that Jesus was able to provide for them even when it looked like they had nothing.
- ‘But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag’—I think Jesus is saying here that there’s a moment—the few days when he is in the grave—when they will be in danger but he will be unable to help. It later becomes clear that he is not recommending that they literally defend themselves with swords: two swords wouldn’t do much good anyway, and when they do try to use them (in tomorrow’s passage) he tells them to put them away. I think Jesus is speaking hyperbolically here to get across the message that they will soon be considered the fugitive followers of a criminal.
- ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation’—the chances that they will cave to temptation are very high. Jesus is praying that their faith will not fail under Satan’s attack, and he encourages them to pray the same.
- ‘take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done’—having advised his followers to pray against temptation, he follows his own advice. Jesus is fighting in this prayer against the temptation to try to save his life. If he were to fall to this temptation, it would be devastating, not just for everyone else whom he would save by his sacrifice, but for him: ‘whoever wants to save their life will lose it’ (9:24). Even Jesus is in danger of losing his life. Even he is tempted to desperately grab at life in these final moments; if he does, he’ll—temporarily—save his earthly life, but he’ll lose heavenly life. Jesus doesn’t rely on his own strength to face this last and strongest of the devil’s temptations. He asks the Father to supply him with the strength he needs.

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#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Consider attending a Holy Thursday service today, to remember Jesus with the bread and the wine. Or, celebrate the last supper with your family or household by reading this passage together and sharing bread and wine.
- *For your six:* Pray that Jesus would protect your six from the devil's plans for their destruction. Ask God to unmask the work of Satan's lies, accusations, and temptations in their lives.
- *For our city:* Pray for a proliferation of true greatness in our city. Pray that we would have many great servants in our city, and that God would equip and reward those servants for their service.

#### **Friday, April 6<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Luke 22:47-23:25**

47 While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

49 When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

51 But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? 53 Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns."

54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

63 The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. 64 They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" 65 And they said many other insulting things to him.

66 At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. 67 "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68 and if I asked you, you would not answer. 69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

70 They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You say that I am."

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71 Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

23: 1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

5 But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16-17 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

18 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" 19

(Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. 21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

22 For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'—that's a level of hypocrisy and betrayal that Jesus can't allow Judas to stoop to.
- 'touched the man's ear and healed him'—Jesus shows that he really is a child of God. He shows mercy even to the people who are trying to kill him.  
But love your enemies, do good to them . . . Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your father is merciful (6:35-36).
- 'But this is your hour—when darkness reigns'—it's usually the criminals that work at night or in secret. Jesus is being arrested for things he's been doing in the middle of

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the day, in front of huge crowds. It's the so-called authorities who are hiding their actions under cover of darkness.

- 'Peter followed at a distance'—Peter has just sworn that he will follow Jesus to prison and death. In the book of Acts, Peter does indeed follow Jesus to prison (Acts 4:3, for example); and church tradition tells us that he eventually follows Jesus to execution, perhaps even on a cross (quite possibly during the persecutions under Nero, mentioned in Wednesday's passage). Right now, though, the best he can muster is following at a distance—and he doesn't even sustain that for very long.
- 'The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter'—Jesus knew this would happen. But there's room for encouragement in this sobering story. Jesus predicted that Peter would betray him; but he also predicted that Peter would repent, that he would strengthen his companions, that he would eat with Jesus in his kingdom, and that he would share in ruling that kingdom.
- 'Prophecy! Who hit you?'—they think they're being clever, but they're actually in the middle of fulfilling prophecies he has already given: 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law' (9:22); and, 'They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him' (18:32-33).
- 'At daybreak'—now that day has come, they can hold a formal trial. Of course, the outcome of the trial is a foregone conclusion.
- 'the council of the elders of the people'—the council was sort of like a combination of Congress and the Supreme Court; its members were the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. The Roman government gave them a wide degree of authority in all kinds of internal Jewish affairs.
- 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer'—Jesus doesn't like the idea of answering their question when they don't really want to know the answer.
- 'the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God'—Jesus is referring again to the Messianic prophecy from Daniel 7:13-14. It's a concise, poetic way of saying, 'Yes, I am the Messiah. Now that I've told you, you will kill me; but killing me will only end up leading to my exaltation and the establishment of my kingdom. You're going to end up bringing about the very thing you are resisting.' They might not catch all of it, but they understand enough to respond, 'So, you're saying you're the Son of God, then?'
- 'You say that I am'—basically, 'See, you figured it out for yourself.'
- 'led him off to Pilate'—Pilate is the Roman governor. The council needs his approval to apply the death sentence.
- 'opposes payment of taxes to Caesar'—their real reason for killing Jesus is jealousy. Their formal charge is blasphemy (according to them, he's claiming to be God when he is not). Neither of these reasons would be of any interest to the Romans; so the council beefs up the charges a bit—with an outright lie.
- 'claims to be Messiah, a king'—they also frame him as a rebel leader setting up an alternative to Roman rule. That's another charge that Pilate would have to take seriously.
- 'I find no basis for a charge'—upon further examination, Pilate determines that Jesus is not a significant political threat.  
Luke is stressing the lack of legitimate charges against Jesus to clearly establish that Jesus is not a common criminal. For Luke's readers, it would be quite scandalous that

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Jesus was crucified; it's a form of death reserved for the lowest of the low. Luke is therefore careful to demonstrate that the sentence is completely undeserved.

This doesn't absolve Pilate of responsibility. Rather the opposite, Pilate is all the more guilty because he knowingly sends an innocent man to death because he's afraid to let him go.

- 'he sent him to Herod'—Herod is probably in town for the feast. As a Galilean, Jesus is technically Herod's citizen. But since the charges have to do with actions in Judea, Pilate has the right to try Jesus (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 253); he's just trying to pass off a difficult case.
- 'Jesus gave him no answer'—Herod reminds me of something Jesus said earlier: 'This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah' (11:29). Herod is asking for a miracle, but for entertainment purposes only. If he were truly concerned about the kingdom of God, he would have listened to John's call to repent (the sign of Jonah); but instead of receiving John, he killed him. So, Jesus has nothing to say to him.
- 'I will punish him and then release him'—Pilate suggests that they just send Jesus away with a stiff warning, but the mob gathered by the chief priests and other leaders.
- 'for an insurrection in the city, and for murder'—they pretend to arrest Jesus out of concern that he will lead an insurrection, but they lobby for a real insurrectionist and murderer—basically, an anti-Roman terrorist—to be let go.
- 'their shouts prevailed'—they accuse Jesus of stirring up the crowds, but it's they who have started a riot.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Do you feel as if you've failed God in some significant way? Ask God for forgiveness. If Jesus' treatment of Peter is any indication, he's more than willing to give you another chance. God is rooting for you to succeed.
- *For your six:* Jesus healed the ear of one of the people who came to arrest him and kill him. Particularly if any of your six have been hostile to Jesus, pray that he would draw them to himself by showing them kindness in a way that they know is from him.
- *For our city:* Pray for the justice system in our city. Ask God that justice would be done. Pray that corruption would be unearthed, and that the innocent would not be punished but protected.

#### **Saturday, April 7<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Luke 23: 26-56**

26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then

" 'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"  
and to the hills, "Cover us!" "

31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"  
32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—

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one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

50 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. 54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'made him carry it behind Jesus'—Simon of Cyrene serves as a very vivid picture of Jesus' call to his followers: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me' (9:23). Unfortunately, it's a complete stranger who unwittingly and unwillingly provides this image. None of Jesus' actual followers are anywhere to be seen. Simon Peter, who just last night talked of dying with Jesus, has run away; so Simon of Cyrene has to temporarily fill in for him. Cyrene, by the way, is in North Africa, in modern Libya (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 254).
- 'including women who mourned and wailed for him'—it's not quite true that all of Jesus' followers have abandoned him. The men among the disciples are hiding, but the women continue to follow him to the very end.
- 'what will happen when it is dry?'—another reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Even on the day of his death, Jesus is more concerned for the citizens of Jerusalem than he is for himself. I think the point of Jesus' image is if, during relatively prosperous times, people can so quickly turn on him and kill him, imagine what they will do to one

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another when times get rough. Indeed, during the Roman siege of 70 AD, much of the damage was caused by fighting among Jewish factions (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 248).

- 'Father, forgive them'—Jesus continues to follow his own advice from the sermon on the plain: 'bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you' (6:28), and, 'Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned' (6:37). To the very end, Jesus is giving generously to others, particularly to those who won't or can't give anything in return. Jesus is aiming at greatness. He's living in such a way as to get the best possible rewards from God: 'For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (6:38).
- 'they divided up his clothes by casting lots'—it was common practice for the executioners to get the personal effects of the prisoner (*New Bible Commentary* 1017), but this is also a reference to Psalm 22. Psalm 22 (written by David, about 1000 years before Jesus) bears some striking resemblances to Jesus' crucifixion, including this division of clothes by lot, the sufferer's great thirst, piercing of hands and feet, and being the object of mockery:

All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.  
'He trusts in the LORD, they say,  
'Let the LORD rescue him' (Psalm 22:7-8).
- 'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS'—the charge against Jesus is ironically accurate. He's being killed because he is the true king of the Jews, not because he falsely claims to be the king of the Jews. He is the son of the owner of the vineyard, being killed so that the tenants can take the vineyard as their own (20:14-15).
- 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'—this criminal is pointing Jesus in the wrong direction: 'For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it' (9:24). Jesus is saving himself—and them—by submitting to death. When he first started on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus warned:

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill they body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (12:4-7).

This criminal is afraid for his body, but shows no concern at all for his soul. Jesus, on the other hand, is showing respect for—and trust in—the one who has the authority to throw him into hell but the desire to save his life; as he prayed in Thursday's passage, 'yet not my will, but yours be done' (22:42)
- 'since you are under the same sentence?'—the moment before you die is not a great time to rack up new complaints against you.
- 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'—this second criminal reminds me of Jesus' story of the tax collector who humbly asks for mercy and gets it (18:13-14). Criminal though he is—and as far as we know a complete stranger to Jesus—he is the only person we've encountered who believes that this is not the end for Jesus. Even as Jesus hangs on a cross next to him, this criminal believes that Jesus will survive and triumph.
- 'the curtain of the temple was torn in two'—the curtain is the divider between the Holy Place (the priestly area of the temple) and the Most Holy Place (where only the chief priests could go, and only once a year). Perhaps this is the symbolic beginning of the destruction of the temple.

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- ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’—this is the first line of Psalm 31:5, which continues, ‘redeem me, LORD, my faithful God.’ This is not some vague statement of trust. Jesus is truly handing his spirit over to God in a quite real and immediate way. Jesus, the very son of God, the Lord of God’s kingdom, the one who cast out demons, healed diseases, forgave sins, calmed seas, and even raised the dead, is now dead. He’s a completely helpless corpse. And his last words before dying are, ‘Father, I’m putting myself in your hands, and I’m trusting you to bring me back.’ Jesus is pushing to the utter limit the principle that it is always a good idea to be generous to others. He recommended to the rich ruler that he give all of his possessions to the poor to gain treasure in heaven (18:22). Jesus himself takes it a few steps further, giving his very life. This choice takes tremendous faith in God’s goodness and his power. Jesus is sacrificing himself to an incredible degree for the sake of others, but he’s not expecting that others will gain at his expense; even he can’t afford to do that when the price tag is his life. Jesus is trusting God to make this sacrifice worthwhile to him. Even in giving his life, Jesus depends on God to out give him: ‘no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life’ (18:29-30)
- ‘a member of the Council’—apparently, not all the council members are Jesus’ enemies. Maybe the leaders of the council left any dissenters out of their deliberations, or maybe Joseph and any other members sympathetic to Jesus were simply shouted down.
- ‘placed it in a tomb cut in the rock’—the fact that Jesus’ body is placed in a tomb bought by this influential councilman brings to mind an odd little detail in one of Isaiah’s prophecies of the suffering servant: ‘He was assigned a grave with the wicked,/and with the rich in his death’ (Isaiah 53:9). Like Isaiah’s suffering servant, Jesus dies the death of a criminal (and would have simply been buried in a public burial ground with them except for Joseph’s intervention [*New Bible Commentary* 1018]) but is buried in a rich man’s grave. Even more than Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 (written about 800 years before Jesus) is startling in how accurately and vividly it portrays Jesus’ suffering—it might be worth finding a Bible and reading the entire chapter. Isaiah’s prophecy also offers what to me is the clearest (yet still fairly mysterious) explanation of why Jesus had to suffer in all of the Old Testament, maybe in all of the Bible:

Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:4-5)

All the way back in chapter 5 (5:31), Jesus declared himself to be a sin-doctor. He had come to the world specifically to heal people of their sin-sickness. Now, we see his method of healing. He somehow takes on himself the pain, the suffering, and the punishment for our sins. In effect, he kills off sin by having it die with him on the cross. It’s as if he undergoes sin-chemotherapy, but for all of us, not for himself. And by God’s great and mysterious power, this crazy plan works.

#### **Taking it home:**

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- *For you and your family:* Jesus' death is undeniably a very powerful story, but it's also one that can be very difficult to grasp. Pray that God would give you a new understanding today of the meaning of Jesus' death.
- *For your six:* Pray that like Simon of Cyrene your six would be drawn into Jesus' story in surprising ways.
- *For our city:* While their companions are sneering, the second criminal and the centurion find in Jesus' death something compelling and faith-inspiring. Pray that many people in our city would also gain a new appreciation for Jesus during these few days when there is so much focus on him and his death. Pray that they would not be deterred by any cynicism about Jesus they see around them.

### **Sunday, April 8th**

#### **Luke 24**

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " 8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

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28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'very early in the morning'—they go to visit the body as soon as is practical after the Sabbath ends. They're bringing embalming spices to slow the decay of the body and hide the smell; but Jesus isn't even dead long enough for them to do the embalming. It somehow seems fitting to me that, with one of the primary complaints against Jesus and his followers being Sabbath-breaking, these women miss their window to anoint Jesus' body because they are observing the Sabbath.
- 'suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them'—when Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah on the mountain, Jesus' clothes 'became as a bright as a flash of lightning' (9:29), just like the clothes of these two men do now. I assume the two men are angels, because they're fulfilling the usual angelic role of passing along an important message from God, like Gabriel did in chapter 1 (1:11,26). Then again, it might be Moses and Elijah again—or Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob or some other long-dead person. After all, what they're testifying to is life after death. The prayer meeting on the mountain and this heavenly encounter at the empty tomb serve

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as bookends for Jesus' experience in Jerusalem. In his prayer time on the mountain, Jesus talked with two resurrected people about his own impending departure from the world (9:31). Here, the women talk with two heavenly or resurrected men about the fact that Jesus has indeed risen.

- 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'—As Jesus told the Sadducees, 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living' (20:38). God is certainly Jesus' God; therefore, Jesus is alive.
- 'Then they remembered his words'—again and again, Jesus has told his followers these things, but they haven't been able to understand. Finally, this thing that's remained a mystery is unveiled: 'No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in may see the light' (8:16).
- 'the Eleven'—Judas, of course, is no longer counted with the apostles.
- 'Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James'—these are some of the same women who have been traveling with Jesus since chapter 8 (8:2-3). Luke mentions their names to show that he is relying on the eyewitness testimony of specific people, not on rumor, hearsay, or anonymous tips. The testimony of women was considered less reliable than that of men (*IVP Bible Background Commentary 256*); nonetheless, Jesus gives the first news of his resurrection to these faithful women who have been following him and who have come to do honor to his body.
- 'their words seemed to them like nonsense'—the women were able to hear the words and have them bear fruit, but the men are still somewhat poor soil (8:12).
- 'Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb'—Peter doesn't quite believe the women, but he takes what they say seriously. He moves from unbelief to curiosity, which is a good step. If he sticks with it, his perseverance will eventually pay off (8:15).
- 'it is the third day since all this took place'—they're practically repeating Jesus' own words, about being rejected by the chief priests, being crucified, and rising on the third day; but they don't put it all together.
- 'and then enter his glory?'—Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, which so vividly portray Jesus' suffering, don't stop there. They go on to describe the sufferer's glorious future even after death. Psalm 22 starts with, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' but it ends with,  
    Posterity will serve him;  
    future generations will be told about the Lord.  
    They will proclaim his righteousness,  
    declaring to a people yet unborn:  
    He has done it! (Psalm 22:30-31).  
And Isaiah 53 says,  
    he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
    and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.  
    After he has suffered,  
    he will see the light of life and be satisfied . . . (Isaiah 53:10-11).  
What his followers thought of as Jesus' tragic end is only his glorious beginning.
- 'Jesus continued on as if he were going farther'—Jesus waits to see if they are interested in hearing more. When they invite him to eat with them, he accepts, just like he commanded them to do when they went to the villages to share his good news (10:8).

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- ‘Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him’—the broken bread, the symbol of his broken body, finally cures them of their blindness to who he is.
- ‘Peace be with you’—I think this would be a standard greeting, but it’s particularly meaningful here. He knows that seeing someone they think is dead all of a sudden pop up in the middle of them might be a bit scary. The first thing he wants them to know is that they have no reason to be afraid; he has good intentions toward them.
- ‘they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement’—they go from overwhelmingly scared to overwhelmingly happy.
- ‘he took it and ate it in their presence’—I think eating the fish both proves that he’s not a ghost and brings some normality to the situation.
- ‘he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures’—Jesus walks his followers through some of the very passages we’ve been looking at the past few days, opening their eyes to the fact that what looked terribly wrong was actually going exactly according to the script.
- ‘forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations’—Jesus isn’t just sin doctor for a few people in a room, or even just for one nation. He has the power and the desire to cure the whole world of sin. Isaiah speaks of this as well:

And now the LORD says—

he who formed me in the womb to be his servant  
to bring Jacob back to him  
and gather Israel to himself,  
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD  
and my God has been my strength—

he says:

‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will make you a light for the Gentiles,

That my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth’ (Isaiah 49:6)

Jesus is indeed Israel’s Messiah, just as Mary and Zechariah foresaw at the beginning of our story (1:54-55, 68-69). But he is so much more than that: he’s a Savior for the whole world.

- ‘beginning at Jerusalem’—this rescue from sin is even available to Jerusalem, the city that killed him. In fact, Jerusalem will get the offer before anyone else.
- ‘I am going to send you what my Father has promised’—that would be the Holy Spirit: ‘how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him’ (6:13). Before Jesus began his work, the Father sent him the Holy Spirit. Jesus is now sending his followers out to continue his work: the work of healing the sick, of casting out demons, of bringing forgiveness, or freeing people who are bound up, and of spreading good news. To do these things, they will need the same source of power Jesus relied on.

For some reason, Jesus’ command here not to leave until they’ve been equipped with heavenly power reminds me of his cryptic saying at the Passover supper about taking their purses, bags, and swords (22:36). Perhaps Jesus didn’t those things literally, but as a sort of parable about the Holy Spirit: they don’t want to find themselves naked or unprepared in the task he now has for them.

- ‘he left them and was taken up into heaven’—just like in the story where the servants are given the money to invest (19:11-27), Jesus goes away to get role power for

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himself. His followers are left behind to put what he's given them to work, until he returns.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Just as you prayed for a greater understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death yesterday, ask God to give you a deeper appreciation of the significance of his resurrection today. Ask God to fill you today with wonder and praise.
- *For your six:* Ask Jesus to show himself to your six. Ask him to give them whatever explanation or demonstration they need to believe in his death and his resurrection.
- *For our city:* Pray for God's forgiveness and his salvation to be poured out on our city. That's what Jesus came for.