

Living As New Covenant People

Luke 22:24-38

Key Verse: 22:26

“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.”

The scene of today’s passage is still the Last Supper, right after Jesus established a new covenant in his blood. It was an intensely dramatic moment, for Jesus revealed that he was about to be betrayed by one close to him. After Jesus said this, a dispute broke out among his disciples. They began to argue, right after taking the cup of the new covenant! It seemed that the Last Supper had turned into a disaster. However, Jesus was not upset. Jesus was patient with his disciples. Jesus taught them the most important principle to practice as new covenant people. Jesus encouraged them. Jesus planted hope and faith in their hearts. Let’s listen to Jesus’ words so that we may be strengthened to live as new covenant people.

First, Jesus teaches the way of true greatness (24-27). As the Last Supper concluded, Jesus had to announce his betrayal even though it was painful for his disciples to hear. He wanted them to know that he was fully aware of Satan’s schemes. Jesus was not outsmarted; he went to the cross willingly to fulfill God’s purpose. Jesus also warned his betrayer of grave consequences. Jesus’ words came as a shock to his disciples. They could not imagine that one of them would betray Jesus. But they knew Jesus was speaking the truth, and they took him seriously. So they looked around trying to figure out who would betray Jesus. This shows that they did not know each other very well. Still, they had strong opinions about each other. They began to speak frankly and passionately about each another, and the discussion became heated. Their topic shifted to who was considered to be the greatest, and then a dispute broke out. It was not the first time this had happened. When Jesus first foretold his betrayal in chapter 9, his disciples had also responded by arguing with one another about who was the greatest. It seems that this argument was ongoing, and always ready to surface.

Jesus did not rebuke his disciples. Instead, he taught them the way to true greatness. Man’s desire to be great is not bad. One of the blessings God promised Abraham and David was that their names would be great (Gen 12:2; 2 Sam 7:9). God wants man to be great. But since the Fall, man’s desire has been corrupted by the power of sin. Jesus wanted to purify his disciples’ hearts. Jesus planted in them God’s concept of greatness and how to be so. Jesus began by contrasting Gentile rulers and himself.

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Look at verse 25. **“Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.’”** “Kings of the Gentiles” can be understood as any rulers who do not fear God. Though the Bible teaches plainly that their authority comes from God, they do not recognize God as God. They recognize themselves only and think they are the supreme power. They rely on coercion to subdue people and exert their will. They dominate others in order to extract goods and services and simply to enjoy the feeling of power. Though they rob people of freedom and dignity, they call themselves “Benefactors;” they claim to do good to conquered peoples. It is ironic.

King Herod was such a ruler. In order to Hellenize Jewish culture, he murdered many people. Once, some devout Jews demonstrated against Herod’s policy by removing a Roman eagle from the temple entrance. Herod had them dragged to death by horses. With such brutal displays of power he terrified people so they would obey him. At the same time, he wanted to be recognized as a philanthropist for his great building projects, including the Jerusalem Temple. He called himself a benefactor, but history regards him as a cruel madman. This is not just Herod’s story. This tendency is in the sinful nature of all fallen men. Husbands can abuse power over their wives, parents can do the same over their children. Employers mistreat their employees and popular people despise the needy and outcast. When Satan works through these relationships people can be badly damaged and even destroyed. We must realize that any fallen human being can become harmful when he exercises power through his sinful nature. President Lincoln found that people whom he empowered to serve the nation changed after gaining power. He said, “If you want to know a man, entrust him with power.” Lord Acton said, “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Look at verse 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.”** In that society, the youngest had no right to exercise authority over others. This teaches that true greatness does not come from a position of authority; it comes from within. The best example is our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he is in very nature God, he came down to this world and became a little baby who was placed in a manger. He took the lowest position on earth in order to dwell among us as our Savior and Friend. Jesus removed barriers of power distance, be they political, economic or social in nature. Fallen men hide their corrupted inner lives behind positions and titles, avoiding any real relationship with others. But Jesus removed every barrier through his humble renunciation so that we might come to know him as he truly is. In this way Jesus shared the life of God with us. He

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allowed us to experience the greatness of God within him. Let's remember that true greatness comes from who a person is, not from what position they obtain.

Jesus also said that the one who rules should be like the one who serves. Those who are trusted with spiritual authority in Jesus' church must learn the attitude of a servant. They think of others more highly than themselves. They have a genuine concern in building up others for their good. They exercise spiritual authority with great humility and deep love. As a result, those who are served are built up in faith. The weak can become strong; the sick and wounded are healed; the wayward are led back to the path of righteousness. When leaders have the attitude of servants, they do not argue about who is the greatest. They keep their eyes on Jesus our Lord and constantly humble themselves before him. Satan finds no avenue to work among such people and the body of Christ flourishes.

Jesus' words were revolutionary. Yet Jesus taught with more than words. Jesus taught by example. Look at verse 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.”** Jesus had just officiated the Passover as the authority figure among the disciples. Then, as John's gospel tells, he put a towel around his waist and began to wash his disciples' feet, taking the position of the lowest servant. Jesus was clearly their leader. Yet Jesus was always serving those in need. Jesus healed a pitiful man with leprosy. Jesus raised a helpless paralytic in both body and spirit. Jesus drove out demons from a tormented man, restored his humanity, and enabled him to serve God. Most of all, Jesus had mercy on helpless sinners like all of us. Jesus shed his blood on the cross for us (Ro 5:6). Jesus' blood redeems us from the tenacious grip of sin (1 Pe 1:18-19). Jesus' blood purchases our forgiveness and restores our relationship with God (Ro 3:25). Jesus' blood purifies us from all sin, freeing us from guilt and shame (1 Jn 1:7). Jesus' blood enables us to stand before the living God and to serve him in holiness and righteousness (Heb 9:14). Jesus' blood will finally transform each of us into the holy image of Christ as loving and gracious servants like him.

Through Jesus' blood, God calls us into covenant with him. God wants to transform our lives and make us like Jesus. God wants us to learn to serve one another in love. For this, we need Jesus' humbleness. This comes from Jesus alone. Paul says: **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!**

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Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Php 2:5-11). Lord, clothe each of us in the humbleness of Jesus Christ!

In comparing the three synoptic gospels, we find that Luke alone puts Jesus’ teaching about true greatness after the Last Supper. Matthew and Mark place Jesus’ teaching about true greatness earlier in the gospel, while Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem (Mt 20:20-28; Mk 10:35-45). During the Last Supper Matthew and Mark emphasize the blood, while Luke emphasizes the new covenant a little more. Luke teaches us to live as new covenant people. We do not remain the same after entering a new covenant with God. We no longer live according to our fallen natures, which can be as brutal as Herod in our own sphere of influence. We are changed by the blood of Jesus. Now we can grow to be like Jesus. This is the fruit of the new covenant. Let's accept the blood of Jesus and become truly great like our Lord Jesus.

Second, Jesus plants hope in his kingdom (28-30). Jesus went on to offer words of encouragement to his disciples. Look at verse 28. **“You are those who have stood by me in my trials.”** Jesus appreciated the disciples’ faithfulness to him even in times of trials. He was not unaware of their sacrifices and struggles to bear the hard times with him, and he commended them for it. This must have comforted them greatly, especially after hearing all the talk of betrayal and the arguments. Yet Jesus did something more for them. Look at verses 29-30. **“And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** “Confer” means to bestow upon as a gift or honor. Jesus gave his disciples eternal membership in his kingdom as a gift. Not only did he bestow membership, but great privileges as well. They would all eat and drink with him at the King’s table. In addition, each of them would have their own throne. This indicates a sphere of power and influence among the redeemed children of God. Jesus would bestow upon them true glory and honor, and they would all be equal. They would all be great. They would have overflowing joy and important leadership positions. In this way, Jesus would satisfy their desire for greatness on a scale beyond imagination. Jesus promises the same for us. Paul said, **“...we are co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”** (Ro 8:17). The world we live in is marked by tragedy and injustice. People are wounded, dreams are broken, and desires go unfulfilled. Hopes in this world always disappoint us. But Jesus promises a place in his

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kingdom of perfect peace, true joy, and eternal glory and honor. Let's hope in this kingdom; it will not disappoint us.

Third, Jesus prays for his people (31-34). Jesus went on to warn and assure his disciples. Look at verses 31-32. **“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”** By calling him “Simon, Simon” Jesus reminded Peter that he was weak in his natural self. Satan would expose his sins and flaws, and those of the other disciples without missing one. Jesus compared it to sifting like wheat. That reminds us of threshers who beat out every last kernel from the chaff, not missing one. Satan would miss nothing. He would expose every wicked word, every vile thought, every irreverent act, and every base desire before the law of God to produce a verdict of “guilty” on every count. The disciples had no way to defeat Satan’s sifting. But they had one thing in their favor: Jesus had prayed for them. Jesus did not pray for them to avoid Satan’s schemes, but that their faith may not fail. Jesus wanted them to have faith in him. When their own sins and failures were fully exposed, Jesus wanted them to look at him for salvation. Jesus wanted them to look at the cross. Jesus prayed from the cross, **“Father, forgive them...”** God accepted this prayer. Furthermore, Jesus still prays to God the Father for his people. Paul said, **“Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”** (Ro 8:34). Hebrews 7:24-25 says, **“...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”** Jesus is praying right now before the throne of God. Jesus grants forgiveness of sins to all who believe in him. God saves us to the uttermost, not through anything we have done, but through Christ. When we trust fully in Jesus, God gives us victory over Satan, justifies us to be children of God, and accepts us as members of his kingdom.

However, Peter had difficulty accepting Jesus’ words. Peter did not understand the magnitude of the spiritual battle he would go through. He trusted his own faithfulness as the means by which he would follow Jesus. So he said, **“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death”** (33). It was true that Peter loved Jesus with passion. But Peter did not know himself very well. In truth, he loved his own life a little more than he loved Jesus. He would deny Jesus to save himself. Jesus foretold this. Still, Jesus believed that God would answer his prayer for Peter. Jesus believed that Peter would trust only in Jesus, win the victory, and turn back to Jesus. Jesus wanted Peter to help his brothers turn back and live only by faith in Jesus.

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Fourth, Jesus teaches to overcome the world by faith (35-38). Until this time, Jesus had been with his disciples as their good shepherd. He had protected them, blessed them and provided for them. Moreover, Jesus and his people had enjoyed a time of public favor as crowds of people received Jesus' grace with a thankful attitude. People were willing to support Jesus and his company out of their goodwill. But the situation was about to change drastically. Jesus would be taken from the disciples in a manner that Isaiah describes: **“And he was numbered with the transgressors.”** Holy and beautiful Jesus would be put to death like a common criminal. The religious leaders would try to slander his memory and destroy his followers. Now the disciples would have to face the real world as men, without human Jesus with them. Jesus wanted them to overcome the world by faith. So he reminded them how God had given them victory in the past. They obeyed Jesus' instructions not to take purse, bag or sandals. Then God used them to drive out evil spirits and heal diseases. God also provided for all of their needs. Jesus wanted them to continue to obey his words by faith. In their new situation, no one was going to show them hospitality. They would have to confront a hostile world and take responsibility for their own daily needs. Jesus taught them to overcome the world by faith.

In preparing his disciples to confront the world by faith, Jesus clarified how they should regard their training. While he was with them, he gave them specific instructions about not taking a purse, bag or sandals. But now he is rescinding these instructions. In doing so, Jesus emphasized that they should learn to practice the principles and faith that he taught, but not necessarily adhere to the forms of instruction. From that time on, they would need to pray and follow the Holy Spirit and learn to apply Jesus' teachings in different situations and later in different cultures.

There is a curious mention of a sword in verse 36. Jesus said, **“...if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.”** I believe Jesus said this to help them be spiritually alert. They would be fighting a spiritual battle that was just as real and intense as a physical war. And it was about to start. The disciples took Jesus' words very literally. They said, **“See, Lord, here are two swords.”** **“That is enough,”** Jesus replied. Jesus did not want them to try to arm themselves for a physical battle. Jesus would not fight by the sword, nor did he want his disciples to do so. But he wanted them to be spiritually alert.

In this passage Jesus has taught us how to live as new covenant people with faith in his blood. Our guiding principle is to be like Jesus, especially in his

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humility and loving service. We are weak and sinful. But Jesus' blood is mighty to cleanse and transform us day by day. Let's trust Jesus and grow to be like him as humble and loving servants for his glory.