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Luke 22

Luke 22.¹⁴⁻²⁰

¹⁴And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. ¹⁵And he said unto them, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: ¹⁶For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves: ¹⁸for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”

¹⁹And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

²⁰Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

I hope that it is not too obvious to say that the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian bondage is the most celebrated event of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament. The writers of the Book’s histories and the prophets who preached among the descendants of the rescued slaves returned to it over and over again. The constant returning to the event not only served to remind descendants of the event itself, but, more importantly, to remind them about the character of Yahweh and one of his most deeply held values: justice for and rescue of oppressed peoples.

One of the very first things Israel learned about God was that he is an emancipator. This was certainly their first actual experience with Him. While the Passover dominates the landscape of the Hebrew Bible, followed closely with the exile of first Israel and then Judah, with the addition of the Christian Bible, or New Testament another event replaces and surpasses Yahweh’s rescue of Israel from slavery. That event, of course, is Jesus’ emancipation of all humankind through his suffering and death.

But both events, the old and the new are really the same. Both testify to God’s enduring commitment to justice for and rescue of oppressed people—whether that oppression be physical, emotional, spiritual, etc. So committed is Deity to justice and rescue that he will achieve them at any cost to himself. For Jesus, this meant entering “the grasp of [that] awful monster; yea that monster, death and hell.”¹ Thus, it is appropriate to see the Jewish Passover and the Christian sacramental meal of bread and wine as serving the same end. Both serve as occasions to commemorate the same Divine reality and celebrate the same Divine character: God searches for, watches over, and delivers oppressed people.

This truth adds to the significance of bread and wine as emblems of the sacrament. Like Egypt’s Israelite slaves, oppressed people often lack the economic resources necessary to a healthy and happy life. Thus, a provision of bread and wine signifies the Lord’s watchful care over oppressed people and his supply of resources necessary to life. Individuals oppressed by sin and guilt lack the spiritual resources necessary for a healthy and happy spiritual life. Thus, the sacramental bread and wine signify the Lord’s supply of the spiritual nourishment necessary to life and salvation.

Even during the journey from spiritual bondage to complete spiritual freedom, the individual requires divine sustenance. Thus, Yahweh’s supply of Manna during Israel’s journey in the wilderness. All of this adds meaning to Jesus’ declaration,

¹ 2 Nephi 9.¹⁰

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.... I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”²

But, the oppressed are given more than bread and water enough for basic sustenance. As the 5,000 who were fed by Jesus’ miraculous multiplication of bread and fish, the oppressed are filled to full. With extra to spare, all oppressed are invited to come and partake without money and without price in a feast of fat things.”³

Lent is a time to reexamine our attitudes toward the sacrament, our understanding of it, and the uses to which we put it. It is a good time to appreciate the “desire” with which Jesus desires to join us in commemoration of his desire to emancipate. It is a good time to partake of the true manna that came from heaven. It is a good time to join him in his search for people oppressed by all manner of afflictions, and strive to provide them with the bread and water, literal or symbolic, they require to live happy and healthy lives.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)

² John 6.^{32-33, 35}

³ See DC 58.⁸

³⁹And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. ⁴⁰And when he was at the place, he said unto them, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

⁴¹And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁴²saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

⁴³And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶and said unto them, “Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

After a brief introduction in which he shares his strategy of record-keeping—a strategy suggested by his brother, Nephi—Jacob begins the Book that bears his name with a series of admonitions. We find this admonition among them:

“Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death...”¹

This is good advice for any time of year—advice that can greatly enhance one’s sacramental experience, for example—but is especially good advice during the Season of Lent and Easter. It is hard to imagine that one could make better use of one’s time than to review, imagine, envision, and see with an eye of faith the greatest and most chilling events in human history—the suffering and death of God.

It is my testimony that as one diligently and faithfully strives to “view Jesus’ death,” there are few limits to the revelation that might come. As I have followed Jacob’s admonition, I have seen things beyond compare and things beyond my ability to describe. I have had a peek into that cup that Jesus held in his trembling hand. There is good reason, I think, why I have been given only a peek. Anything more than a peek might undo me. What small part I have seen was truly awful to behold. As I witnessed the small part that I was privileged to witness, I was both saddened and depressed, as Enoch was when he saw the Son of Man’s suffering—Enoch “bad bitterness of soul... wept” and said, “I will refuse to be comforted” (Moses 7.⁴⁴)—and thrilled—again, as Enoch when “his soul rejoiced, saying: ‘The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world.’”²

There is a whole world, a whole universe found in the cup that Jesus’ begged the Father to remove. We investigate that cup in detail in other meditations. For now, we note that Jesus himself, once before a large Nephite multitude and then in private discourse with Joseph Smith, called the cup “bitter.”³ This is surely one of the great understatements of all time. It seems clear that Jesus did not pick this imagery of a “cup” frivolously. The imagery had a long history. It seems beyond dispute that this cup came to be symbolic of the pain and torment of sin which brings to the sinner a deep sense of Divine disapproval and wrath.⁴ It is, then, an apt symbol of hell. Joseph Smith was once given a peek into the abyss of hell. But, again, it was but a peek.

¹ Jacob 1.⁸

² Moses 7.⁴⁷

³ 3 Nephi 11.¹¹ & DC 19.¹⁸

⁴ Mos. 3.²⁵⁻²⁷; Ps. 11.⁶; Ps. 75.⁸; Is. 51.^{17& 22}; Jer. 25.^{15-17, 27}; Jer. 51.⁷⁻⁹; Ez. 23.³²⁻³⁴; Rev. 14.¹⁰⁻¹¹; Rev. 16.¹⁹; Rev. 17.⁴⁻⁶; Alma 40.²⁶; D&C 29.¹⁷; DC 43.²⁶; DC 101.¹¹

“I, the Lord, show it by vision unto many, but straightway shut it up again; wherefore, the end, the width, the height, the depth, and the misery thereof, they understand not, neither any man except those who are ordained unto this condemnation.”⁵

Fortunately for Joseph, he had not been “ordained unto this condemnation.” But, I suggest, Jesus had been “ordained unto this condemnation,” not for any guilt of his own, but for our guilt of which he took ownership. He did descend into hell. He “descended below all things.”⁶ If this realization is not shocking enough—the *Holy One* suffering the pains of hell—the miracle of his survival is infinitely more startling and miraculous. Anyone and everyone else would be undone by a descent into the deepest, darkest crevice of hell’s the bottomless pit.

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.”⁷

Jesus not only survived these unfathomably dark and lifeless depths. He triumphed. He conquered. There is much else to learn from today’s reading. But to have a view, if only a short peek, of the power that Jesus exercised in our behalf in order to conquer first the cup and then the cross... well, that’s an admonition to be prized, heeded, and experienced above all else. And it is a witness to Jesus’ unimaginable supremacy to any and every other person who has or every will inhabit this globe.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: may 21, 2024*)

⁵ DC 76.⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸

⁶ See DC 88.⁶ and 122.⁷⁻⁸

⁷ Mosiah 3.⁷

⁴⁷And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. ⁴⁸But Jesus said unto him, “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

⁴⁹When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, “Lord, shall we smite with the sword?”

⁵⁰And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹And Jesus answered and said, “Suffer ye thus far.” And he touched his ear, and healed him.

⁵²Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, “Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? ⁵³When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

“No, God, the Father, did not kill Jesus. He is not responsible for his death. Neither his “offended honor,” nor his commitment to “justice” demanded that Jesus die. Wounded human pride, human injustice, human will to power, and human violence killed Jesus. Humans alone are responsible for the death of a God. I don’t know how many times I’ve said it. I’ve said it in one-on-one discussions. I’ve said it in groups of dozens and hundreds. I’ve said it in posts found on this site. I’ll say it again here. God the Father is in no way responsible for the death of His dear Son. Resisting such strong assertions, some have pointed to the fact that Jesus foretold his death. Others have quoted Jesus’ words to Peter when the latter attempted to protect Jesus from arrest.

“Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”¹

Jesus’ foreknowledge of his death is, they claim, evidence of its divine necessity. Jesus resisted Peter’s violence, they assert, not because he was resistant to violence, but because he understood himself to have been sent by God to be arrested and killed. However, it could just as likely mean that in sending Jesus, the Father expected him to resist violence at all costs—not because he was to die, but because he was to reveal the unalterable non-violent character of God. Jesus was sent to earth as much to live as to die. Both served as examples to the rest of us. In addition, his living was intended as a daily revelation of the character of God and whatever other immortal Beings inhabit the cosmos. Humankind might have learned everything it ever needed to know about God had it given Jesus a regular life-span to reveal his Father through daily living and teaching.

But those who watched the revelation unfold rejected the revelation. The God that Jesus was revealing was contrary to every worldly principle and tradition. Jesus’ revelation was particularly contrary to the spirit of violence that has pervaded and flooded the earth since humanity’s earliest history. So, Jesus’ revelation of God also ended up serving as a revelation of the character of humankind. Nowhere were these two revelations made plainer than in the violence that was perpetrated against Jesus—from his arrest to his crucifixion.

Jesus, it seems to me, is clear about this. Of his arrest, Jesus said to his assailants, “This is your hour.” It wasn’t the Father’s hour. No one is to blame for Jesus’ arrest and eventual death but those who did the arresting and the killing, along with those who supported or remained silent about them. Perhaps those who continue to put the blame on Father, or only slightly less disagreeably, upon his sense of “justice,”

¹ John 18.¹¹

also bear a little responsibility for Jesus' suffering and death. For it may be that it is just such attitudes that would allow it to all happen again.

In a sense, of course, it has all happened again. And again. And again. Innocent victims continue to die violent deaths in the name of God and the false "justice" the world assigns to Him. Given that "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,"² the world has over and over again arrested and killed Jesus anew as the "power of darkness" continues to prevail. Easter, along with its Season of Lent, is a good time for us to reexamine our understanding of God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, along with our treatment of the vulnerable who are always among us. It is long past time that we repent of any and all violence we perpetrate or allow to be perpetrated against both God and human. With wars all over the globe, including those in Ukraine and Gaza, this seems like a particularly poignant time for more discerning reflection about human violence and its incompatibility with God and an enduring life with Him.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)

² Matthew 25.⁴⁰

⁵⁴Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, "This man was also with him."

⁵⁷And he denied him, saying, "Woman, I know him not."

⁵⁸And after a little while another saw him, and said, "Thou art also of them."

And Peter said, "Man, I am not."

⁵⁹And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, "Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilæan."

⁶⁰And Peter said, "Man, I know not what thou sayest."

And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. ⁶¹And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." ⁶²And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

The three synoptic Gospels were written and structured in such a way as to allow us to divide Jesus' earthly ministry into two parts. During the first part of his ministry, Jesus offers displays of his power and greatness through a series of miraculous interventions in the life of sick, suffering, vulnerable, and threatened people. Everyone, including his closest disciples, were impressed. Some were impressed so as to honor him. Others were impressed so as to see him as a threat and so rejected him. In the second part of his ministry, Jesus' displays of power and greatness are less numerous. However, he provides instruction concerning the nature of his power and greatness, discussing both its potential and its limitations. It could not, for example, be used for self-aggrandizement or violently to threaten or harm others. He was particularly careful about instructing his closest disciples about the proper and improper use of greatness and power. They struggled to understand.

The second part of the synoptic Gospels can often feel like a "study" in blind, undiscerning discipleship. Jesus' closest disciples are often clueless about the real nature of Jesus' Messiahship. We can lump Peter's denial of Jesus into this study of blindness. We can't be too hard on Peter or the other disciples, as such blind and undiscerning discipleship is not unique to them. It is pretty much the status quo for everyone who has known or heard of Jesus to the present day. He is remarkably patient with us; for we do not simply misunderstand and misinterpret principles that might be acknowledged as hard and obscure. We misunderstand and misinterpret the most fundamental aspects of his revealed character. In a sense, this is a denial of him not unlike that committed by Peter.

For whatever reason, Luke's account of Peter's thrice repeated denial of Jesus is gentler than either Matthew's or Mark's. In reading Luke's account, one might get away with imagining Peter's denials as almost apologetic. Perhaps he was even sheepish in his denials. Maybe calculating. Heck, I've even heard people claim he was inspired as otherwise he too might have been arrested and killed. And where would the church had been without its rock!?!?

But Matthew and Mark would have none of such vain imagination. Peter was not cool, calm, and collected in his denials. He was not moved upon by the Holy Spirit, unless, of course, the Holy Spirit has a potty mouth. For over the course of two to three hours—plenty of time to reevaluate one's actions and strategies—Peter resorted, according to Matthew, to swearing false religious oaths. When that didn't

alleviate others' suspicions, Peter angrily and vociferously "began... to curse and to swear."¹ Yes, the rock let loose with a torrent of four-letter words, thus demonstrating the seriousness of his denials.

Now. One might wonder what all of this has to do with Lent, and why we would focus on a story full of such profound failure. Well, first of all, it is a story that the Gospel writers present as fact. It is part of Jesus' final hours on earth. It is an important element in the Easter story. It is, then, part of that great circumscribed whole known as "truth." Secondly, we all have a bit of Peter in us. We fail Jesus often. And, as we have said, we deny him and aspects of his character in many ways.

But we might also have a bit of Peter in us in that as we recognize the many ways in which we fail Jesus, we, like Peter, mourn. After his multiple denials, "Peter went out, and wept bitterly." If we take the purposes and objectives of Lent seriously, we might at times find ourselves weeping bitterly as we boldly and faithfully confess our sins and the many ways we fail Jesus. But the Season does not call for us to remain in the depths. We can be, *will be* comforted if we faithfully accept Jesus' generous and lavish offer of grace that is so beautifully represented in the Easter Season. Then, through the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ we might discover, like Peter, that there is a day of the Lord's acceptance found on the other side of the darkness. Through our glorious Redeemer, we can find ourselves receiving

"beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness
that [we] might be called trees of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD,
that he might be glorified."²

May the Easter Season bring us such blessedness!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)

¹ See Matthew 26.⁷²⁻⁷⁴

² Isaiah 61.²⁻³

⁶³And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. ⁶⁴And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, “Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?” ⁶⁵And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.

⁶⁶And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, ⁶⁷“Art thou the Christ? Tell us.”

And he said unto them, “If I tell you, ye will not believe: ⁶⁸and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. ⁶⁹Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.”

⁷⁰Then said they all, “Art thou then the Son of God?”

And he said unto them, “Ye say that I am.”

⁷¹And they said, “What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.”

During Jesus’ first Kafkaesque “trial,” he was asked three questions. Not one of them was sincere. Not one of them sought the truth. All were intended to mock Jesus and to confirm what the questioners already believed or wished to believe. This mode of investigation is known today as “confirmation bias.” It is a serious problem. As Jesus’ trial shows, such dishonesty does more than reveal personal corruption and cause debilitating self-delusion. It gets people killed. By refusing to answer those who conducted their dishonest inquisition, Jesus refused to play the game. He allowed the questions themselves to stand as witness against his questioners’ guilt.

Jesus was asked his first question while blindfolded: “who is it that smote thee?” It was intended to belittle. The query drew no response from Jesus. I can’t help but think that Jesus could have answered the question and named the assailant. Jesus could likely understand his assailant’s thoughts and sense his assailant’s feelings even better than his assailant himself. The one with the blindfold could see better than anyone else in the room. The question meant to belittle Jesus only succeeded in revealing the smallness of the gathered mob and the greatness of Jesus.

The second question posed to Jesus is a study in dishonesty: “Art thou the Christ? Tell us.” Knowing that they had rejected his self-revelation from the beginning, Jesus did not waste time now trying to convince. But that does not mean that he was finished revealing. So, he revealed the truth about those who questioned him. “Your question is dishonest. You are not interested in learning the truth. You only seek to justify yourselves. It doesn’t matter how I answer, you will not believe me and only seek to use what I say against me.”

The third question was no more honest and sincere than the first two: “Art thou then the Son of God?” In response, Jesus’ answer was no more informative than the former, “You said it, not me.” At this point, Jesus seems to be resigned to his fate, and dismissive of his interrogators. He has judged them as beyond the pale and unworthy of respect.

But, in the midst of this Kafkaesque circus of dishonesty and contempt, Jesus dropped a hint about his future. This hint would be picked up again in Luke’s next letter—that of Acts. It would be picked up by other writers in the New Testament. It would be seen in vision and witnessed in Jesus’ future personal appearances—in both the “Old World” and in the “New.” It is central to our prayer life even today. Without it, our access to God would be severely limited. That “hint”?

“Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.”

He had maintained all along that he was *from* God. That he had been sent *by* God. Now, he would *return* to God; return to the intimacy of God's bosom. He would sit on God's right hand and advocate for those who approached God in the spirit of true and sincere investigation and query.

There is much to say about Jesus' privileged position at the right hand of God and the benefits that flow to us through it. But for now, during lent, we can use Jesus' intimate place with God as we attempt to "enquire after God." This inquiry must, above all, be conducted in the spirit of complete openness. There can be no attempts at "confirmation bias" in this inquiry. Only by avoiding this currently proliferating dishonesty of confirmation bias can we find the truth for ourselves. Only by avoiding this currently proliferating dishonesty can we follow Jesus' example of revelation. Only by avoiding this currently proliferating dishonesty can we act as an example to a "post-truth" world, act as a witness that not only does truth exist but that the truth will set one free—especially from the self-deception and self-justifying excuses of the fragile human ego.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 21, 2024)