

# Three Tables

Luke 19:28-40 | Psalm 31:9-16 | Philippians 2:5-11 | Luke 22:14 – 23:56

## LUKE 22:14-30

<sup>14</sup>When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup>He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup>for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' <sup>17</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; <sup>18</sup>for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' <sup>19</sup>Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' <sup>20</sup>And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. <sup>21</sup>But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. <sup>22</sup>For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!' <sup>23</sup>Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this. <sup>24</sup>A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup>But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup>But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. <sup>27</sup>For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. <sup>28</sup>'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; <sup>29</sup>and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, <sup>30</sup>so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

## INTRODUCTION

I recently learned the definition of a *shaggy dog story*. It is an 'extremely long-winded anecdote characterized by narration of typically irrelevant incidents and terminated by an anti-climax.'<sup>1</sup> Some of you, of course, probably think I just defined *preaching*. I did not. But as I am starting in a place of sociology, not where I normally start, I want to warn you, this sermon is not a *shaggy dog story*. Stay with me.

One of the major shifts that has taken place in society in the last 50 years is that we, as a species, decided that our feelings, especially our feelings about ourselves, matter most. Fifty years ago, if I felt that my nose was too big and confided to my doctor and my friends that I feel my true nose is much smaller, my doctor would tell me to see a psychiatrist because my mind needs to better understand my body, and my friends would laugh at me. Today, if I confide to my doctor that I think my nose is too big and I feel my true nose is smaller, she might refer me to a plastic surgeon so that my body can catch up with my mind, and my friends would support my choice to live as a person with a smaller nose, lest I accuse them of nose-shaming me. Of course, this example is a little absurd, but this is now the way a significant part of our society works. We think that our feelings, particularly our feelings about ourselves, are all that matters. And anyone who cannot recognize and affirm my feelings is, somehow, a threat to me.<sup>2</sup>

Here's the thing, though, that is not what the Christian faith actually teaches. Christianity has always taught that there is truth that exists outside of the self. There is a divine being with power

<sup>1</sup> See the definition at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaggy\\_dog\\_story](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaggy_dog_story).

<sup>2</sup> For this shift, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, Crossway: 2020), 35-198.

and authority and comprehension and grace, far beyond our capacity to understand. And his name is God. If we recognize that he is God, and that we are not, then he has the prerogative to define reality, to tell us what is right or wrong, good or evil, love or sin. And if he does that, then we don't decide what is right or wrong, good or evil, love or sin, any more than I decide how big my nose is. And in that reality, well, I will be found wanting. I'm not as right, good, or loving as I want to be, let alone as right, good, or loving as God demands that I be.

Now, to be clear, I'm not saying that my feelings about myself don't matter. And there are any number of conditions where my self-assessment will matter. I'm simply saying that, from a Christian worldview, God's version of reality matters more than mine—mine should be submitted to his. And so, with that, we turn to the first 17 verses of the Passion Narrative we heard. In it, we are given glimpses of three tables. Let me take them slightly out of order.

### 1. GOD'S TABLE (LUKE 22:28-30)

The third table is God's banquet table in heaven: "*so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom...*"<sup>3</sup> For those who persist with Jesus, who share in his trials and live according to his word, there is a reward far greater than anything this earthly life has to offer, a place in his kingdom, a place at his eternal table. Later, in Revelation 19, this vision is referred to as "*the marriage supper of the lamb.*"<sup>4</sup> And a glorious supper it will be. But it is the supper of the lamb because it was a lamb—a lamb who was slain—that makes it possible.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. THE LORD'S TABLE (LUKE 22:14-23)

This brings us to the first table, the Passover table, the Lord's Table. You see, Jesus brings about salvation, hope that we might one day have a place in his kingdom, by being the lamb who was slain. That is, he gives his life as a ransom, as an atonement, as a propitiatory sacrifice that removes sin and spares us the wrath we deserve, just like Passover. And Jesus is clear that his body will be broken, his blood spilled, his life given. Why? For us. Our salvation, our invitation to the great table in heaven, depends on the sacrifice he was to make on a cross, acted out at this Passover.

### 3. OUR TABLE (LUKE 22:24-27)

And that brings us to the second table. You see it there in the middle. It's the disciples' table. It is our table. Are we sitting there, reclining, waiting to be served, and bickering about our greatness? That's what the disciples did. But Jesus rebukes them. "*For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.*"<sup>6</sup> The Lord's Table and all it anticipates makes a demand on us at our tables. We no longer have to strive for or grasp at power. He saved us so that we might serve others while following him (and it goes against all of our self-serving, self-absorbed, self-promoting tendencies).

## CONCLUSION

So why do these tables matter? They matter because they show us the greatest possible hope we could have for the future—God's banquet table in heaven—the cost of what it takes for us

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 22:30.

<sup>4</sup> See Rev 19:6-10.

<sup>5</sup> See Rev 5:1-14. Cf. John 1:29.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:27. This is an ironic twisting of the parable about the great dinner in Luke 14:15-24.

to enjoy it—the Lord’s Table of his sacrifice—and the implications of that for us—what exactly we’re doing at our own tables. Given what it cost Jesus, how can we be so self-absorbed? Or as I put it last week, how can we not *get over ourselves*? And you may think that’s just *my* message that I keep coming back to over and over again as I preach. I would suggest it is in the text. It’s right there. “*But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.*”<sup>7</sup> Maybe this idea is in the Bible so much because it is something we need to hear. There is something far greater than us, far greater than our self-realisation, far greater than our view of ourselves, far greater than our feelings out there—something... someone who makes demands of us and shows us just how our society and the philosophy of this age is flawed. As we approach this Communion Table in a few minutes, let us return to that God, that God who gave up everything for us. The least we can do is be honest with ourselves, look his reality in the face, bow in repentance, and then celebrate the feast of our redemption.

*Let me pray. Great God in heaven, we are grateful that you sent your Son to die on a cross to save us. May we be so compelled to look past ourselves, that we may dine with you in glory. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 22:26.