

Title: Journey to Jerusalem: Perspective

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Text: [Luke 22:21-33](#)

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We are a day early for this meal. We've been a day early for nearly 2000 years but that doesn't mean that we change the date. We just reinforce the error, making the Passover meal take place on Thursday instead of on Friday where it belongs. Being a day early is a matter of perspective.

Luke says that Jesus tells Peter and John to "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." (Luke 22: 8b) This is innocent enough in its expression. There is no mention of the day. It doesn't say it was Thursday but if you count back from Easter, it has to be Thursday. Peter and John don't say, "Jesus, you've got your days confused. It's Thursday and the Passover starts tomorrow on Friday." Instead, they say "Where?" There is no protest. They just go about putting the Last Supper together on Thursday night. Why the wrong night? Why one day early? Again, it depends on your perspective and there are at least three.

One perspective isn't terribly satisfactory but it's simple. The meal was actually on Friday but the gospel writers, twenty to fifty years after the fact, moved the Last Supper from Friday to Thursday in order to make Jesus' prophecy work. Jesus said a number of times that, "'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" (Luke 24:17) Call me a sentimentalist if you like but when it comes to my red letter edition, there is nothing Jeffersonian about me. I don't feel the need to snip out a verse here or there and suggest that Jesus got it wrong. If you don't mind, let's put that perspective aside and agree, the Last Supper was on Thursday, not on Friday. But, the question is still there. Why Thursday instead of Friday? Why the wrong night?

The second perspective holds more promise. For lack of a better title, let's call it, the "Easter brunch theory." The "Easter brunch theory" says if you don't have your Easter brunch reservation yet, you are out of luck. The only Easter brunch reservations left aren't for brunch. You might be able to get four in the afternoon. You'll have better luck getting a reservation for Saturday night and then, you'd be early like Maundy Thursday is early. Calling the explanation, the "Easter brunch theory" is a little odd because when the Last Supper took place before Easter. A better title for this perspective would be the "upper room shortage" theory.

During the Passover, Jerusalem swelled from 50,000 residents to well over half a million people, with those half million pilgrims plus all of the local Jewish residents eagerly wanting to have this meal. Throughout the city, temporary ovens baked lamb all day long, all week long so much so that historians say there was a dark haze of smoke hanging over the holy city. The priests worked long shifts butchering unblemished lambs. The "upper room shortage theory" says that you got a room when you could get a room. If this is the case, Thursday was the day that the room was available. It makes a lot of sense but I would hate to think that Jesus didn't get his first choice of reservations for his Last Supper. If Jesus can get a donkey with "The Lord needs it", you'd think that he could get a room with the same line.

There is a third perspective could be called "calendar confusion." You know this perspective. You write the time or day down wrong on your smartphone. It is easy to do. It actually has a name. It is the "Diaspora Passover theory." In 721 B.C. the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria. Ten tribes of Israel were sent into exile. It was extremely traumatic, so much so that as many were leaving, they made little bags of soil and carried the dirt with them so that they had a "piece" of the Promised Land to worship on. These ten tribes become the lost tribes of Israel.

It was hard to keep their religious traditions when first exiled and there was confusion around a different calendar. When they finally settled in and began remembering the ritual celebrations, an interesting tradition developed. They held the festival "one day early" just in case they'd lost a day in the translation of calendars and a day longer, again, just in case that started too soon. They continued the tradition when they returned. Jesus was from Nazareth and recruited his disciples in Galilee, in the northern kingdom area and some were likely descendants of those exiled. Given this perspective, they didn't think it was one day early. It was just the way Jews of the Diaspora celebrated the Passover. There are some who still do it this way, a nine-day Passover instead of seven.

It is, of course, all a matter of perspective and impossible to really know why Jesus has his Last Supper a day before the Passover begins. But that shouldn't surprise us because it is a night of full of things that are impossible to perceive.

Whatever the reason, the task given to Peter and John of securing the upper room and preparing the meal was no small task. They would have first purchased a year-old lamb. They would take it to the Temple first to be certified as pure and unblemished. Then, a different set of priests would slaughter the lamb, catching a bowl of blood to pour on the altar and giving Peter a hyssop soaked in blood to wipe on the mantle of the house.

John and Peter would find one of the temporary ovens, preferably close to the location, to roast the lamb. While the lamb was roasting, they would shop for the rest of the meal, including bread and wine which would be transformed later that evening. Because of the crowds, the assignment given John and Peter was a long, grueling day. By the time of the meal, Peter and John were likely exhausted.

Each gospel gives a different perspective of what happened in that upper room as if they were all in the same room recording from four different angles. The early church, like us, quickly blend each perspective into one picture of the events of that night. John alone records the foot washing, something that is easier to understand when you see the disciples reclining face forward around a three-sided table, with feet behind them. Jesus takes off his robes, wraps himself with a towel and begins to wash the feet of the disciples, Peter alone protests. "...you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then...not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (John 13: 8-9) It is the first of many things tonight where Peter's perspective is off.

Luke alone has the perspective of a dispute about who was the greatest. It's really impossible to perceive. It goes from bad to worse. Jesus predicts his betrayal. Someone around the table, one of the twelve will betray them. They begin to ask one another who could do this.

Again, it was impossible for them to perceive this happening. Matthew gives us the perspective that Judas asks, "Is it I, Master?" and Jesus affirms this by saying, "You have said so." John alone offers the perspective that Judas then leaves the dinner.

As the dinner comes to a close, Peter promises to follow Jesus "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" (Luke 22:32) That's his perspective. Jesus has another. "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me." (Luke 22:32) I'm sure that Peter just shook his head, thinking, "That's impossible."

Upon their arrival in Gethsemane, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John deeper into the Garden. He asks them to keep watch while he prays. Jesus goes away, prays for strength during his trial and returns to find the disciples asleep. It's understandable given the long day. But Jesus asks Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake for one hour?" The answer is, no. He is too weary and Jesus finds him asleep not once, but three times.

Judas arrives, kisses Jesus and betrays him. Peter pulls a sword, "struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. Now, this is the Peter we have

come to expect – brash and impulsive. The slave's name was Malchus. (John 18: 10).

Hey, Peter, what about “blessed are the peacemakers?” Have you not learned anything following Jesus? You’re impossible. Jesus tells him to put the sword away and performs his last miracle before his death. Jesus heals the servant and the pace of the evening picks up.

Peter follows the arresting party all the way through the gates of Jerusalem to the high priest’s residence. He enters the courtyard determined to be with Jesus in the crisis. Warming himself by the fire, he hopes he can avoid recognition but twice he is asked if he is a follower of Jesus and twice he denies the accusation. Finally, he is confronted by a woman who is related to the servant whose ear he had severed. Seized by panic, he does what earlier he perceived was impossible. He begins to curse and insist, “I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he is still speaking, the cock crows. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22: 60-62) Everything was wrong about it, even the night because it was one day early. Or was it? Let me give you one more perspective.

Fast forward a few hours to the midday of the right day, the day of Passover. At the stroke of noon, there are two events taking place simultaneously. In the Temple, a line of pilgrims presents their pure and unblemished lambs to the priest to be sacrificed for the Passover even while another, pure and unblemished, is presented to be sacrificed on a cross. While the Passover Lambs bleed, so does the Lamb of God. Years later, the one who did not believe that he would deny Jesus, who perceived himself to be so loyal that he would not desert him, Peter wrote these words about why the Last Supper happened on Thursday. He said, “We are ransomed `...not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.” (1 Peter 1: 18-19) Jesus was the new Passover lamb, sacrificed on Friday and whatever sin, whatever failure, whatever shame you or I experience, is passed over because of his death on the cross.

The great Swedish theologian Soren Kierkegaard once offered this perspective. “Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward.” For the rest of his life---indeed until the present day---Peter’s name is connected with his personal failure. Peter learned on this night what each of us needs to embrace. It is impossible not to betray Jesus. We will betray Jesus. We all fail, over and over again. We all engage in actions which say, “I do not know the man!” Betrayal is part of the Christian pilgrimage. It

happens to everyone one of us and we need to be honest enough in our self-perception to admit it.

It is why this night is always the right night to remember. It is a night for everyone to confront our betrayal of Jesus, a night when we remember and confess our failure, and to anticipate the redemption that comes to us tomorrow, the day of the Passover. Tomorrow, the Lamb of God will bleed and as he does, he takes on the sins of the world. We need that perspective as we remember.

Hold on to it then as you come to this table. See Jesus taking the bread and offering it as his body, presenting wine and offering it as his blood. He does so in anticipation of his day on the cross. They are gifts of salvation. We are saved not because of who we are – betraying, sinful ones who act as if we do not know him. We cannot work out own salvation; it's impossible. It's the wrong perspective. We are saved because of who He is, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Acknowledge that, see that; it changes your perspective about everything.