

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.”

In the last passage we learned about the new covenant in Jesus' blood. The blood of Jesus has the power to cleanse us from sin and to change us from the inside out. The blood of Jesus can change America into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We receive the new covenant in Jesus' blood by faith. Then we must live as new covenant people. Today, Jesus teaches us how to live as new covenant people.

First, new covenant people serve others for the glory of God (24-27).

What a beautiful and meaningful Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples! But after sharing the cup, Jesus foretold his betrayal by one of them. They were shocked. They began to question among themselves who it might be. One by one they asked Jesus, “Surely not I?” (Mt 26:22; Mk 14:19) Each one felt sure about his own loyalty to Jesus. But at the same time, a question mark arose in each one's heart. In light of their weaknesses and past failures, it was possible for each one to betray Jesus. When they felt bad about themselves, it was comforting to consider others' weak points. “Well, at least I am not as bad as that one. Surely I am a little better than him.” Inevitably, their conversation turned to the issue that was really in their hearts: “Who is the greatest?”

Look at verse 24. “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.” Here “the greatest” meant, to the disciples, the one who would be in charge after Jesus. This was not a light matter among them. It was so important to them that they began to dispute about it, even at the Last Supper. To all men, the issue of who is the greatest is really important. To women as well, the issue is important. Everyone wants to be number one. No one wants to be number two. In high schools and universities, there is always an intense struggle to establish a valedictorian. Because of this, seemingly nice people suddenly become quite upset about grading differences that amount to several hundredths of a percentage point. Why is it so?

When God made man, he made him in the image of God. God is great. Therefore, man must be great. When God called Abraham, he told him, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). God wants his people to be great, not petty. Those who have no desire to be great must really repent before the God of Abraham. However, greatness in God is different than greatness in the world. Jesus wanted his disciples to be great and to be the greatest, but not in the way of the world. So he taught them how to be truly great in the sight of God.

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.’” In this verse, Jesus exposes two things that make worldly rulers evil in the sight of God. In the first place, they “lord it over” others. This means that they abuse their power to gratify their egos and sinful desires. They do not lead by example. Nor do they really care about the people they rule. Their rule is based on coercion and they enjoy power for its own sake. Stalin may be a good example. Through political intrigue he presented himself as the only logical successor to Lenin. Through brute force he established his rule and destroyed all challengers. As a result, he had more unchecked power than the tsars of old. He used this power abusively, mistreating his subordinates. If they did not debase themselves at his command, they could be executed. Khrushchev survived by doing everything Stalin demanded, swallowing humiliation again and again. Perhaps he was the happiest man when Stalin died, but secretly. A more relevant example to us is the recent hazing incident in Northbrook. High school seniors abused their juniors badly, simply because they were junior. Fifteen of them were charged with misdemeanors. Those who abuse power plant resentment and bitterness. There has been an endless cycle in history of the oppressed rising up to overthrow the oppressor, and then becoming just like them. The vicious cycle led Lord Acton to say, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Those who are corrupted by the abuse of power are not great in the sight of God.

In the second place, they call themselves “benefactors.” Although worldly rulers rely on coercion, they try to appear benevolent. They want to be regarded as benefactors and heroes to ordinary people. In fact, they are hypocrites. What is worse, they are slaves of self-glory. They give themselves awards and medals and boast about how beneficial they

are to those under their reign. They expect gratitude and honor from those whom they abuse and crush. Jesus' disciples must be different.

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." Here, "youngest" does not mean the most immature. A spoiled youngest mentality does not make one great. Rather, "youngest" refers to the one who has no privilege intrinsic to position. The disciples of Jesus should not seek positions in a hierarchy thinking that it will make them great. The disciples' greatness must come from their imitation of Christ. Their authority and influence should be purely spiritual, not political. Their greatness starts with the transformation of their own inner persons through the indwelling of Christ. The more Christ is formed in them, the greater they become. St. Paul became a truly great servant of Christ. It was because Christ lived in him. He said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Another characteristic of the youngest is that they think they must grow the most. Great servants of Christ are those who are always growing. St. Paul knew Jesus better than anyone through his lifetime effort to follow Christ. But at the end of his life, he did not say, "I have mastered the imitation of Christ." Instead, he said, "I want to know Christ." He felt he had just begun to know Christ and there was much more to learn. We can have this attitude when we look at Jesus. When we see Jesus, we have so many things to learn and so much growing to do. Dr. Samuel Lee served Jesus more than forty years with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. He grew to be one of the greatest shepherds of the 20th century, together with Dr. Billy Graham and Pope John Paul II. Still, he continued to learn of Jesus, especially the humbleness of Jesus, the shepherd heart of Jesus, and the absolute faith of Jesus. His last key verse was 1 Corinthians 13:11. It says, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me." He wanted to humbly grow in Christ to the end. Jesus said, "the greatest should be like the youngest."

Look at verse 26 again. "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." Jesus said that the one who rules must be like the one who serves. This means that spiritual power is exercised through humble service, not by coercion. Jesus himself showed us the 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." When Jesus said this, the disciples must have been seated at the table, while Jesus—with a towel wrapped around his waist—was going from one disciple to the other, washing their feet, drying them with the towel. Jesus is the holy Son of God. But he came down from heaven and became a man. As a man, he became the servant of all, beginning with his disciples. Jesus served them, not because they were great, but because they could not help themselves. This service comes from the heart of God. When God looked at sinners, he knew we were helpless against the power of sin. In his great mercy, God sent Jesus to save us. Romans 5:6 says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Again, Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This Jesus served his disciples one by one. He embraced them with love and hope and planted the word of truth in their hearts. He bore their weaknesses and failings until they could change from powerless sinners into powerful men of God. Simon Peter was passionate and humanly loyal. But in his deep heart he was fearful, selfish and proud. His effort to be a shepherd consisted of speaking big words, while his desire and motive was not much different than worldly rulers. The other disciples did not like his presumptuous speech and behavior. But Jesus always saw him with hope and love. Jesus bore with his failings and weaknesses to the end. At last, Peter recognized the love and saving grace of Jesus through his death on the cross. He confessed in 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Then he was changed into a sacrificial shepherd who served others like Jesus did. In 1 Peter 5:2,3, he said, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." New covenant people must grow in the character of Christ and serve others for the glory of God.

Second, new covenant people stand by Jesus to the end (28-30).

Jesus did not look down on his disciples even when they were displaying the most immature behavior at the most inappropriate time. Rather, Jesus respected them and encouraged them. Look at verse 28. “You are those who have stood by me in my trials.” To Jesus, their main problem was that they did not recognize themselves. Their boasting was shallow and hollow. However, Jesus recognized them and deeply respected them. He said, “You are those who have stood by me in my trials.” Of course, they could stand in Jesus by his grace. Still, Jesus respected them greatly. Here we learn that being faithful to Jesus in the time of trial is really precious to him.

When we think of our senior missionaries, we cannot but thank God. They have stood by Jesus throughout all kinds of trials for the last 25 years. Missionary Isaac Choi was once a young and dynamic fellowship leader with growing sheep under his care and many hairs on his head. But to establish American leadership, he gave up his fellowship leader’s position. When deprogrammers attacked and took away many sheep, our senior missionaries followed the way of Jesus’ cross to win the spiritual battle by losing the human battle. They suffered much. Then deprogrammers self-destructed and God’s ministry flourished. Now, our senior missionaries experience the effects of time. There are many reasons for them to complain. There are many reasons for them to draw back. But they do not. They continue to stand by Jesus to establish a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for God’s glory.

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.” Here, the word “confer” means basically to give due honor in recognition of quality performance. For example, universities “confer” diplomas on students at graduation. Jesus’ disciples had received spiritual training from Jesus in many ways. Though things became difficult from time to time, they did not run away. They remained with Jesus to the end. Now it was time for them to graduate as apostles. From now on, they had to be responsible shepherds and independent spiritual leaders. Jesus said to them, “I confer on you a kingdom.” The kingdom is not political and it is not of this world. It is spiritual; it is God’s reign in the hearts of those who believe the gospel. From now on, the apostles must do what Jesus had done. They must shepherd the lost ones by preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick. They must advance the gospel until the kingdom of God came on earth as it is in heaven. Finally, they would enjoy the glorious and final victory and would eat and drink at Jesus’ table in his kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, that is, the Christian church (Eph 2:20). New covenant people stand by Jesus to the end and enter the glorious heavenly kingdom.

Third, new covenant people depend on Jesus only (31-32).

Look at verse 31. “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.” Though the disciples disputed among themselves as to who was the greatest, Jesus did not deviate from his choice of Simon Peter as the top disciple. Now he addresses Simon on behalf of all the apostles. (Notice that “you” in verse 31 is plural in Greek.) Jesus began, “Simon, Simon.” Simon was his pre-Christian name. It represented his unchanged, natural man who was unpredictable and worldly. In his natural man, Simon was vulnerable to Satan. Jesus knew that he could not stand by his own strength. And, at the moment, he was too proud to really pray for God’s help. So Jesus prayed for him. Look at verse 32a. “But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.” Jesus’ prayer topic was that his faith would not fail. As we know, Peter would deny knowing Jesus three times later that night. It was a crushing failure that brought Peter to weep bitter tears. In a time of such dismal failure, there is a spiritual danger of despairing completely. Kierkegaard said that despair leads to death. However, as Jesus prayed, Peter’s faith did not fail. He remembered the word that Jesus had spoken to him. Though his self-confidence and ego were crushed completely, his faith alone became the source of strength for him to turn back to Christ. In the final analysis, the natural man in each of us will fail, and fail miserably. At that time, only faith in Jesus’ word can save us. The death of self-confidence should be the birth of true faith in Jesus alone. After this experience, Peter did not boast about himself any more.

When Peter was truly changed in his inner man, he became a blessing to the other disciples. Jesus charged him, “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (32b). After the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, Peter became the most bold witness of the gospel of Jesus. Through Peter’s fearless preaching, thousands in Jerusalem repented. New covenant people do not depend on their weak natural selves. New covenant people depend on Jesus only.

Fourth, new covenant people overcome the world by faith (33-38).

When Jesus foretold his denial, Peter talked back, saying, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” Peter was still self-righteous. He did not listen to Jesus’ words. Peter did not really know himself and he did not know the world. So he was totally unprepared for what was about to happen. To help him, Jesus clearly told him, “...before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” Then Jesus warned that trouble and hardship awaited the disciples. Jesus helped them prepare their minds to confront the world without his physical presence. In the past, they could go from place to place without purse, bag or sandals. Many ordinary people had a positive attitude toward Jesus and his disciples and were ready to cooperate with them. But after his death and resurrection, Jesus would be branded as a criminal by the Jewish religious leaders. In fact, the entire Roman Empire would consider Jesus a criminal and his disciples guilty by association. Anyone who helped his disciples would do so at great risk. In brief, the world would become hostile to Jesus’ people. Look at verse 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.’” Jesus didn’t really mean that they should fight with swords, for he stopped them from doing so later that night. Jesus meant that they should prepare their minds and hearts to confront a hostile world.

Look at verse 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.” Jesus quoted Isaiah’s prophecy, “...because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). To save us from our sins, Jesus would be treated like a criminal. That very night Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, imprisoned, tried, condemned, tortured and finally crucified. It was to fulfill God’s will. It was according to the Scriptures. Jesus was ready to obey God’s will with courageous faith. Likewise, new covenant people must overcome the world with courageous faith.

However, the disciples did not understand the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ teaching. They only thought about getting swords. Surely we human beings are slow to understand Jesus’ words.

Today we learned how to live as new covenant people. New covenant people do not boast about themselves. Rather, they grow in Jesus to serve others for the glory of God. They stand by Jesus to the end. They depend on Jesus only. They overcome the world with courageous faith. May God help us live as new covenant people.