

TASTE & SEE

Exploring the heart of the Christian message of hope over four meals.



Meal Number 3

Week Three

The Great Rescue



Meal Number 3: The Great Rescue



Leader's introductory notes

Week 3. Overview

This week as we meet around a middle-eastern feast, we share the significance of the Passover meal that Jews have been sharing for thousands of years to celebrate God's rescue. We'll see how Jesus used this meal, the night before his crucifixion, to point to his sacrifice for us as God's rescue from our deepest problem, sin and its consequences.

On The Menu: A Middle Eastern Feast

Lebanese flat bread, some version of lamb (slow cooked, roasted, kebabs, koftas / meatballs (cheaper)), falafels, tabouli (made on quinoa if GF is required), houmous, olives, stuffed vine leaves, apple and blackcurrant juice / red wine, baklava. Most of this can be easily bought from local supermarkets.

Decor

Go for middle-eastern style fabric table cloths, patterned bowls, serve food from shared platters, raid the garden for olive branches or rosemary sprigs.

Presenter Script

We cover a lot of ground this week - a fast forward connecting the dots between the Exodus and the Last Supper. Remember that Taste & See is the gospel in broad brush strokes. We are laying the foundations of the big story so we are not trying to say everything.

We pick up the thread of "rescue" and let Jesus reinterpret the Passover as a symbol pointing ahead to his own death on our behalf as the climax of God's great rescue plan for humanity.

We touch on the question of God's justice and judgement.

And there are some extra notes about the historical reliability of the Gospels.

Either or both of these may come up in Q&A and require further resources.

Importantly this week, we give people the invitation to take home **a copy of Luke's Gospel** to read for themselves (particularly ch 22-24) in preparation for our final session. Any version of Luke is fine, but we particularly like ["The Search"](#) version which has some helpful intro videos.

Blue is where we have provided various options in the footnotes.

Orange represents interactive elements, discussion and visual aids.

This week we finish with another **personal faith story** by one of your team.



Suggested formatting of the night

- 7pm Arrival, welcome, mingle, seating
- 7:15 Presenter welcome everyone back.
- 7:20 Mains served - Ice breaker discussion over dinner.
Session 3 Presentation (first half) - over / after dinner
- 7:45ish Dessert break - discussion over dessert
- 7:55 Continue Session 3 (second half)
- 8:10 Personal Faith Story #3
- 8:20 Q&A
- 9pm Wrap up



Meal Number 3: The Great Rescue

Presenter Script



Welcome to Week 3!

As we enjoy a middle eastern feast tonight, we will be picking up the thread that goes through the Bible—the thread of God’s Great Rescue plan for humanity. Indeed, if you were trying to give the Bible a genre, it’s really a rescue-story—God’s plan to rescue humanity and his whole creation on a grand scale.

Here’s a rescue story we probably all still remember. The whole world watched in 2018...

Boys Rescued by Divers from Thai Caves. June 23, 2018. Coach and 12 boys, rescued 10 days later. One navy seal rescue diver died.

Ice-breakers

Have you ever needed rescuing? What was that like? As we pass the food around, let’s see who has the best rescue story?

----- share food, begin eating -----

Introduction: Jesus and Meals

Meals featured heavily in the life of Jesus. He was a guest at many dinner parties. Occasionally he was the cook. At several events he was the main supplier. Bread, fish, and wine were apparently the go-to foods. He was a notorious over-caterer. One on occasion, it was so extreme there were twelve basketfuls of left-over bread.

And he must have been a great conversationalist. He spoke with an extraordinarily wide range of people, with a particular reputation for friendliness toward ‘The Wrong Sort of People’– (as we noted last week) he was known as a ‘friend of tax-collectors and sinners’. His presence at some dinner parties lead to awkwardness. Once (Luke 7), when he was the guest of a conservative religious leader, a prostitute broke in mid-party to weep, pour oil on his feet and thank him for some previous encounter, the nature of which was unclear to the other guests. Awkward.



Jesus and the Last Meal

And so, it seems fitting that Jesus' final act before his death was to host a special meal. It was a meal for his disciples, not unlike the meal we are eating tonight. A special meal. A Passover meal.

(Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" slide)

It was a meal with a long history and a big story. And at that meal, his life and mission would take on a new clarity. Tonight, we want to listen to what Jesus said about himself through what he said about this ancient and symbolic meal on the night before he was executed.

The Story so Far

Let's see where we've got so far.

In our first meal, we saw the beauty and goodness of God's creation and that humans were uniquely tasked with being God's image bearers, God's own argument for his existence. We were made by God to bear his image to each other and the world.

We also saw last week that, according to the Bible, the brokenness in the world today stems from humanity's rebellion against God. As a race and individually, and in all sorts of ways, we have cut ourselves off from God - going our own way, ignoring him, declaring our autonomy and independence.

The result is alienation (from each other, the creation, and God himself) and ultimately death as we cut ourselves off from the life-giver and Creator. We still bear God's image, but we do so in broken and distorted ways. Our world has become distorted and disintegrated and we need saving.

Israel's Story

But God did not abandon his creation or his creatures. The story of the Bible is a rescue story—the story of God's plan to rescue his creation and his image-bearers. Tonight, we reach the heart of the Christian message which finds its climax in Jesus. (We are going to cover a lot of ground quickly this week!)

Optional: (You may have already covered this in Week 1)

You may not realise that The Bible is actually a library of 66 books, 40 different authors, written across the span of over 1000 years, yet one storyline. OT (in Hebrew) and NT (Greek). Many genres / styles of writing - historical narrative, law, poetry, letters.

Abraham

That story begins with a man called Abraham. God chooses this one man and through him promises to 'bless all the nations of the earth.' Abraham has children, and his descendants form what will be called the nation of Israel. God promised that they would be a great nation, with their own land, their own 'Garden of Eden', from where they could be blessed and be a blessing. But, through a series of unfortunate events, they end up enslaved and oppressed in Egypt for four hundred years.

Moses

Under the leadership of Moses, they escape Egypt. In the dramatic story of their escape, God's judgement comes down on Egypt in the form of plagues and disasters. After ignoring many warnings, God's final judgement is that the first-born sons of the Egyptian households are killed by the angel of death. (Pharaoh had previously wiped out all the Israelite baby boys). But before this, the Israelites are told to kill a lamb and to prepare a last meal. They are to paint the lamb's blood onto the doors of their houses as a symbol so that God's judgement will pass over that house.

The Passover

This was the event that inaugurated the Passover, so-called because they remember when God passed over their first-born sons and rescued them from slavery in Egypt. That is the background for the Passover meal celebrated annually by Jewish communities for the last 3000 years! Our meal tonight is based on this. The claim of Jesus is that this meal points ahead to a bigger rescue.

A few of features of the meal are worth pointing out:

Flat Bread:

The meal features flat bread. If you've cooked bread before you'll know that bread ties you to the house (remember when we all started cooking sourdough during the lockdowns?!). You need to be around

for the process of kneading, allowing the bread to rise, kneading again, and then baking. But Israel needed to get out of Egypt in a hurry. There was no time to wait around for it to rise. Hence the flat bread.

Bitter Herbs

The meal also came to feature bitter herbs. These recall the bitterness of slavery, the trauma and distress of having no control over your own life and choices. Slavery is the opposite of freedom—the sort of freedom the humans had in the Garden of Eden. (Tabouli tonight represents the herbs)

The Lamb

And, of course, there was the lamb. The lamb reminded them that something died in their place. Instead of their first-born sons, it was a lamb. Through the blood of that lamb, their lives were spared.

Sidebar: The comfort and challenge of God's Judgement.

Before we go on, it's worth saying something about God's judgement as we meet it in this story. Not a popular or comfortable idea. We'd much prefer to focus on God's love and forgiveness! The idea of God as judge is challenging.

Here's a few things that might help:

1. It's all through the Bible

The Bible is not shy about the reality of God's judgement. Jesus actually speaks a lot about it. It is something to come to grips with.

2. It occurs in the context of oppression

Second, it's worth noticing that the judgement of God comes up in the context of oppression. Israel has been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years! That's 400 years of slavery, cruelty, injustice, and evil. For those of us who have lived in more comfortable circumstances the judgement of God seems to come out of nowhere. But the story of God's judgement in the Passover have been precious to the Jewish people, and to people who have experienced similar periods of oppression (this story was, for example, a favourite of African-American slaves).

3. **It is God's answer to a cry for justice**

Third, if we care, we all cry out for justice. Only the most hard-hearted of us can look at the Holocaust, or the trafficking of children for profit, or the killing fields of Cambodia and not cry out for justice. Miroslav Volf, a theologian (Yale) who himself lived through the dark days of war in the former Yugoslavia, writes the following:

"My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalised beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love."¹

We expect accountability and justice on earth. How much more from God? Human justice is limited. God's justice is pure, righteous and wise. The Bible's teaching on the judgement of God is both a comfort and a challenge: A comfort to the oppressed, and a challenge to the oppressor.

You might still have questions or feel tension about this important topic. That's okay! Most Christians do too! There's plenty of time to discuss it later.

But it does leave us with a challenge. Maybe we can see how right it is that God judges others. But what would a just God say to us?

¹ <https://brendansaltvick.wordpress.com/2017/06/23/why-the-wrath-of-god-proves-that-he-is-a-god-of-love/>

Somehow when it comes to us, we expect God's forgiveness. Can God be both just and merciful?

Brief Dessert Break - Pass the Baklava around.

(Pause to make space for any comments or questions here around judgement, justice and mercy)

In light of that, what kind of rescue do you think we need?

The answer to that question is found at the cross of Jesus...

The Last Supper

On the night before he died, it was the time of the Passover when Jews gathered to commemorate the story of God's rescue from slavery in Egypt and Jesus shared with his twelve disciples the Passover meal.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Luke 22:19-20

The Cup and the Bread

In the middle of that meal, he did something unusual. He took the flat bread in the middle of the table and said, "Take and eat, this is my body, which is for you." (demonstrate with flat bread)

And a little later on, he took his cup of wine (demonstrate with wine / juice) and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28), Jesus is giving this ancient meal a new significance. But what does he mean?

Shortly after that meal, it is well documented, Jesus was arrested and then crucified outside the city at site called Golgotha. And he died and was buried.

Part 3: The meaning of Jesus' death

Through this meal, Jesus is pointing us to the meaning of his death. What does it mean? At least three things:

Jesus' death addresses the sin problem

First, Jesus' death addresses the problem of sin and its penalty.

According to the Bible, we are all guilty of sin. In all sorts of ways, we've all turned our backs on our Creator, ignore him and choosing to live our way without him.

Sin is personal. It cuts us off from relationship with God. In the story of the Prodigal son, the older son and the younger son are very different. The older son insults his father to his face. He says, in effect, 'you are dead to me'. He takes the father's money, spurns the father's care, and lives a life in opposition to everything the father taught him. The older son, on the other hand, stays on the farm and lives a life of outward compliance with the father's expectations. Both very different. But both share one thing in common: They are both out of relationship with the father. The younger son breaks relationship with the father extravagantly; the older son does it quietly. But they both do it. They both end up cut off from their father.

It is like that with us and God. According to the Bible, we have all sinned. Some of us have sinned in obvious ways; others in quiet ways. But the result is the same. We end up out of relationship with God our father. And we need reconciliation. We might not think sin is such a big deal. Jesus does.

When Jesus takes the wine and says "*this is my blood for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:28), that's what he means. In his death God's judgement for our sin, fell on him. He stepped in our place to rescue us. The penalty of death we owed, he took. Out of love for us, Jesus came to address the problem of our sin. And in doing so he makes relationship with God possible again.

Sacrifice: Illustrate using *Story of rescue from Skydiving plane crash Missouri - Kimberley Dear 2008. [Skydiver's bravery saves Aussie's life \(smh.com.au\)](https://www.smh.com.au)*

Jesus took the full weight of our sin on himself. He died in our place so that we could live.

Here in the bitter-sweet climax of Jesus' life, we see, just how far God is willing to go to rescue us from the judgement we deserve. It is an extraordinary act of love for us! Remember our earlier question "How

can God be both just and merciful?" Through Jesus' death on the cross for us, God is able to be perfectly just and perfectly loving.

Jesus' death addresses the slavery problem

The Passover was about rescue from slavery. The people of Israel needed to be freed from the dominion of Pharaoh.

According to Jesus, Sin is the ultimate Pharaoh. When we sin, we become Sin's slave. We become captured by a force bigger than ourselves, and one that will do us harm. Jesus died, like the lambs at the original Passover, to rescue us from the dominion of Sin. Jesus addresses the problem of our slavery to Sin.

Jesus' death addresses the belonging problem

Jesus' death addresses the belonging problem. "It is not good for man to be alone", observed God of Adam in the Garden. We cannot flourish without a community, a people. Through his death, Jesus brings us into the world-wide, multicultural family of God.

Passover for Israel was their national feast. More than any other of their festivals, Passover was who they were. Like Thanksgiving for North Americans, ANZAC Day for Australians, or Independence Day for Indians, Passover said, "We belong here."

Jesus said to his disciples "do *this* in memory of me." What's "this"? "This" is the Passover, the meal that told Israel who they were. And now, through his death, Jesus is creating a new people from every tongue and tribe and nation who are together as one people. A people who can say: "The reason we are together is because of the death of Jesus for us" Through his death, Jesus reconciles us to God as our Father, and so also reconciles us to each other as brothers and sisters. We are made a people, a family, through the death of Jesus. We share at table together, which is what families do.

Conclusion

At the centre of Israel's story is God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt. And at the centre of Jesus' story is the rescue of his people from slavery to sin! In Israel's story this happened through the death of a lamb in their place; in the Jesus story he offers himself in our place. Through his death, an extraordinary act of love for us, he stands in our place, rescues us from slavery to sin, and makes us his people.

Next week we're going to finish by exploring how we become part of Jesus' story. We'll look at his resurrection, the hope of a new creation, and what it means now to follow Jesus.

We've covered a lot of ground fast this week!
I wonder what stood out for you. Take a moment to share with the person next to you (OR to write down), one thing that struck you or any questions that you would like to raise.

As we wrap up this week, let me invite you to take home a copy of **Luke's Gospel** for yourself and in your own time read chapters 22-24 - Luke's account of Jesus' death and resurrection, in preparation for our final session next week.

Consider this week - if this is true, what does it mean for my relationship with God?

Personal Faith Story #3

Q&A

Next Week - our final session.

OPTION is to bring your favourite international dish to share.

OR cater with a variety of international dishes banquet style.

Extra Information: Jesus and History

We might need to clear up a potential road-block. We're talking about Jesus: who he was and what he did, and the thought might occur to you, "Did he exist at all?" If he didn't, we can safely put to one side any claim he might have on our lives.

"I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very centre of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history."
H. G. Wells (1866 - 1946 Novelist, Journalist, Sociologist and Historian)

Most influential figure in history. "Who is Bigger?" research.²

Who was this man? You might be wondering, what can we know about him historically? How reliable are the ancient accounts?

Let's take as our guide the late Professor Ed Sanders from Duke University, an expert in this field. Sanders says that the following statements are beyond dispute for almost all ancient historians. Jesus was:

- Born in 4 BC near the time of death of Herod the Great
- Spent his childhood adult and early years in Nazareth
- Baptised by John the Baptist
- Called disciples
- Preached "the Kingdom of God"
- Around 30 or 33 AD went to Jerusalem for Passover
- Created a disturbance in the temple
- Executed on order of Pontius Pilate
- He died and was crucified.
- And after that - a community forms that believes they saw him again and live to await his return.

These are well within what ancient historians accept. Australian historian, Dr John Dickson, has publicly stated that if anyone can find someone who specialises in Ancient History at any university in the

² <https://www.whoisbigger.com/> Computer scientists Steven Skiena and Charles B Ward have studied the Wiki pages of more than 800,000 people to come up with a list of the world's most important figures. Jesus came out at number one, followed by Napoleon number 2, Shakespeare number 3.

world and argues that Jesus never existed, he will eat a page of his Bible. So far, no one has managed to come up with the goods.

None of this means you need to believe that Jesus was the Son of God who died for your sins. Many ancient historians (including, as it happens, Ed Sanders) are not personally people of faith.. But they do share a basic conviction that Jesus existed, and that an impressive range of historical facts can be known about him with the sort of confidence history provides. The Gospels of the New Testament, together with some important non-Christian sources, provide a solid historical basis for knowing who Jesus was and what he was like.

(There's lots more we could say here. If you'd like to know more about the historical reliability, we've got some good resources you can dive into later.) But for starters you might like to take home a copy of Luke's Gospel to take a first-hand look at his life for yourself. (Point out copies of Luke's Gospel).

EXTRA RESOURCES

"Is Jesus History?" - John Dickson.

"A Doubters Guide to the Bible" - John Dickson.

Questioning Christianity - Can I trust the Bible? James Allen

<https://www.questioningchristianity.com/resources/blog-post-title-two-l28tj>

Podcast: *Undeceptions* <https://undeceptions.com/podcast/> - Library

Centre for Public Christianity - Library

<https://www.publicchristianity.org>