

THE SAVING SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS AND HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL—FOCUSSING ON LUKE 22:19b-20

I J DU PLESSIS

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the problem as to why the death of Jesus is afforded such a low key in Luke's writings. The question is raised whether Jesus' death was a prerequisite for salvation according to Luke. Special attention is given to Luke 22:19b-20 which forms part of the institution of the Eucharist. If these verses are considered to be authentic, the question is posed as to whether they refer to sacrifice or martyrdom. Arguments are raised to support the notion that Luke thought of Jesus' death as a martyrdom rather than a sacrifice. This links up with his presenting Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who acted on God's behalf in forgiving sins and offering salvation to those who accepted his preaching from the very beginning of his life. From Luke's perspective Jesus' death is the culmination of his life's work, a proof that He cares and a guarantee of a new life.

1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

At issue is the question as to whether Luke considered Jesus' death to be an atoning¹ sacrifice? Most Lucan scholars would agree that the Lucan corpus hardly connects the idea of redemption² with salvation. In trying to understand Luke's viewpoint, we take as our point of departure Jesus' words at the institution of the Eucharist, shortly before his death. This is probably the only occasion in Luke's Gospel which could be taken as an indication of the saving significance of Jesus' death. Luke's version of this important occasion appears in 22:14ff. Within this passage vv19b-20 for various reasons form an exegetical crux. Text-critically and exegetically they have led to many imaginative attempts to try to understand what Luke had in mind. Numerous questions have been raised in this connection. For instance: Did Jesus on this occasion lay a direct connection between his death and salvation for mankind? What effect has the choice of the shorter or longer text on the outcome of the debate? How important is it to take the remainder of Luke's writings into consideration when judging Luke's viewpoint on Jesus as reconciler of man with God? How does this debate affect our view of Jesus' role

¹ To 'atoning' we attach the usual meaning: to make amends for sin; to appease God.

² By 'redemption' we understand: payment for guilt; payment for an obligation; setting free as compensation or reparation.

in the plot of this Gospel? What is the significance of Jesus' forgiving of sins during his ministry for his death on the cross, and what is the relationship between the two? Because of limited space I shall concentrate on just a few of the most important issues raised above.

2 JESUS' DEATH A PREREQUISITE FOR SALVATION?

It is well known that the Old Testament is full of cultic examples where the sacrifice of an animal acted as expiation for the sin of man. It is therefore understandable that theologians throughout the ages have tried to prove the logical necessity of Jesus' death as prerequisite for salvation. In the letter to the Hb 9:22 (linking up with Lv 17:11) this necessity seems to be confirmed: 'Indeed, according to the Law, it might almost be said, everything is cleansed by blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'.³ Paul clearly regarded Jesus' death as a *sacrifice* (e.g. Eph 5:2: 'as Christ loved you, and gave himself up on your behalf as an offering and sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God'), or as an *expiation* for sin (Rm 3:24: 'For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death...'). There can be little doubt that the death of Jesus has salvific significance in Paul's preaching. Enshrined in the eucharistic formula (1 Cor 11:24-25), Jesus' death as a sacrifice is part of the earliest tradition Paul received regarding Jesus' death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3). Early Christians probably made thankful use of existing Jewish traditions to integrate the death of Jesus into the heart of their religion (cf Nickelsburg 1993:371). Thereby they could celebrate the crucifixion as a positive rather than a negative event. From this viewpoint the death of Jesus was a death on behalf of others. It served as sacrifice or ransom or expiation on behalf of others. The range of terms is largely cultic in its origins.

In the Gospels the picture is slightly different. In *Mark* we do find references to the significance of Jesus' death in a vicarious capacity (10:45; 14:24), but although he knows the soteriological interpretation of Jesus' death, it receives relatively little attention (cf Vos 1993:215). *Matthew* also refers to Jesus saying at the institution of the Eucharist that his death is 'for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:28). Except for the wording of the institution of the Eucharist Jesus' death is not linked with forgiveness in *Matthew* (6:12,14-15; 9:1-8). Conzelmann has claimed that in *Luke* 'there is no trace of any Passion mysticism, nor is any direct soteriological significance drawn from Jesus' suffering or death. There is no suggestion of a connection with the forgiveness of sins' (1961:201). Such a viewpoint, however, depends very much on how much one is influenced by Paul's way of looking at the significance of Jesus' death. Has not Paul's views on the significance of Jesus' death affected our interpretation of the Gospel representa-

³ All references are from the NEB.

tion of the life of Jesus too much? The question can therefore be posed: If Jesus proclaimed forgiveness to the sinner before his death, what is the significance of his death in this regard, and how could it have effected the Evangelists, especially Luke? The central theme and plot of Luke's Gospel narrative is to be found in God's plan of salvation as it is realised in Jesus Christ. This plan of salvation embraces the *total ministry* of Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection was the culmination of Jesus' work. For Luke, however, God's plan of salvation started with the birth of Jesus. That is why he found it necessary to include the birth narratives in his Gospel story. They are an integral part of the Gospel story and of Luke's theological viewpoint. In the birth narrative many of the important theological themes of the Gospel are already broached, so as to prepare the reader for God's plan of salvation. The birth narrative is very much a part of the plot of the Gospel. From the very beginning of his story, the narrator gives hints to his readers about the outcome of this story. According to Luke, Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah from his birth. Jesus revealed God's will and acted on his behalf from the very beginning of his life. Although Luke wrote at a stage in the history of early Christianity when Jesus' death and resurrection was already considered as the symbolic focal point of salvation, his story represents the *historical* Jesus whose lifestory he was interpreting. Could this have been the reason why Luke paid less attention to the significance of Jesus' death for salvation? How does this affect our reading of Luke today?

3 RECONCILIATION WITHOUT BLOOD

Are there any examples of Luke's point of view that Jesus forgave sins without blood being shed? In the Old Testament there are numerous occasions where God forgives sins and reconciles without any blood being shed. Flour and frankincense could be offered for expiation of sins (Lv 5:11-13). In the Psalms, wisdom literature and the Prophets, repentance, obedience to the law, and an ethical life are the media through which reconciliation are achieved (Ps 51:16-19; Pr 16:6; Is 1:10-20). God may even forgive sins through the intermediation of a prophet, without any physical expiatory means (Dt 9:15-20; Am 7:1-3). In the New Testament, beyond the Gospels, we find that in the speeches of Peter and even Paul (Ac 2:14-39; 3:12-16; 13:16-41) forgiveness is based more on the *resurrection* than on the death of Jesus. Durand (1993:3) has pinpointed the problem of the significance of Jesus' death in relation to his resurrection, when he tried to provide a perspective on the relative importance of the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection: 'Throughout the history of the western theology the main emphasis has fallen on the salvific significance of Christ's death on the cross, often to such a degree that the resurrection was pushed to the background, and at the most seen as the divine affirmation and legitimation of the cross.' There can be little doubt as to the centrality of the resurrection in the early church. The resur-

rection of Jesus Christ was considered to be the salvific event through which God reconciled the human race with Himself. Durand (1993:14) sees the resurrection as the theological focal point through which God retrospectively affirms the incarnation and the cross and in anticipation guarantees the future consummation. In spite of the importance of both Jesus' death and resurrection in the early church, we wish to argue that Luke looked at Jesus' death differently because of a different perspective on Jesus' life. We want to argue that Jesus' reference to a *new covenant* at the institution of the Eucharist (Lk 22:19b-20) gives expression to the fact that the commemoration of Jesus' death is a reminder of the new covenant He made with his followers. For Luke the accent falls on Jesus' death as the *culmination* of Jesus' love for his followers, and his blood as the symbol and seal of the new covenant He made with them. His blood is therefore the *guarantee* of this loyalty and care.

4 OLD TESTAMENT ORIGINS OF SACRIFICIAL DEATH

The precise origin of the conception of a *sacrificial death* is disputed. It is traditionally traced to Is 53:10. Morna Hooker (1959, cf also the discussion in Nickelsburg 1993:371) plays down the role of the Servant Songs in the New Testament. Williams (1975) traces it back to Greek thought (cf also Seeley 1990:78-88). Nickelsburg (1993:371), however, states that one cannot eliminate Jewish influence or an origin in connection with Is 53. From the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature we have proof of the death of a person having salvific consequences. We have, for instance, in 2 Mac 7 an example where the innocent deaths of the seven brothers function in the larger text as the event that causes God's wrath to turn to mercy (2 Mac 7:37-38; 8:5). This idea and the use of cultic language are more explicit in the rewritten version of this story in 4 Mac 17:20-22: here the deaths of the martyrs become a ransom for the sin of Israel (cf Charles 1913b:683). While the tradition from Is 53 can be used to develop a pattern of suffering and exaltation, with no reference to vicarious death, Nickelsburg (1993:371) believes that the evidence supports the conclusion that this Biblical text was *foundational* in Christian speculations about the death of Jesus. Quite possibly the text was read in the light of concurrent Greek notions. But in such a case Hellenistic Jewish Christians were explaining the death of Jesus in light of what they understood to be their Jewish heritage. They saw Jesus as the fulfilment of Scriptural prophecy, and his death as the event that sums up the functions of the Temple cult and renders them unnecessary. It therefore seems very likely that the idea of Jesus' death as being *sacrificial* goes back to reasonably early traditions within the church. But that renders it even more *enigmatic* as to why the Evangelists—and especially Luke in this case—provide so little evi-

dence of this central Christian dogma.⁴ Let us now turn to Luke for a closer look at the issue.

5 THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST ACCORDING TO LUKE

As was pointed out earlier on Lk 22:19b-20, being part of the institution of the Eucharist, is about the only text where there is a possibility of any reference to Jesus' sacrificial and atoning death. What can we make of this reference?

5.1 Table companionship and the Eucharist

It is customary for Luke to present many of the most important events and discussions in Jesus' ministry as having taken place during table companionship. No wonder that he used a meal for Jesus' last important discussion with his closest allies⁵. The narrative location of the speech has no parallel in the synoptic tradition, although we find an analogy in the much longer farewell speech in Jn 13-17. Luke and John show strong similarity in the main themes at stake, namely, Jesus' coming arrest and death and his teaching to his closest disciples regarding their task as future leaders of his cause. Luke, however, puts the occasion within the setting of the institution of the Eucharist, suggesting that what Jesus is saying to his closest followers is meant for the future church (cf Sellw 1987:75).

According to Luke, Jesus used this last meal to make a new covenant with those members of his discipleship on whom He depended to continue his work and message. To them He entrusted his spiritual inheritance. From them He expected to commemorate his life's work and thereby continue what He started. Minear (1970:325) aptly theologises: 'The table becomes a place where human need meets divine grace, where the presence of Jesus transforms the sad remembrance of things past into the glorious promise of things to come.' One might therefore rightly assert that salvation as Jesus preached it throughout his ministry is symbolically concentrated in the pact He makes with his followers at the table when he instituted the Eucharist. On the occasion of Jesus eating the last supper with his closest disciples, He delivered his farewell speech in which He recapitulated his most important teachings regarding sin, repentance and forgiveness. This is the only meal where Jesus acted as the *host*, and this is the occasion He

⁴ Vos (1993:217) concludes in this regard: 'What has become clear in Matthew and Mark, is worked out to extremes in the author of Luke's Gospel and Acts, namely, that it is possible to transmit the traditional words regarding Jesus' death of atonement without these words having an essential function in the soteriology of the author. Right from its beginning, Christian belief was pluriform on this point.'

⁵ Sellw (1987:74) points out that Luke, on various occasions, gathers together around dinner stories sayings of diverse origin, e.g. Lk 5:29-39; 7:36-50; 11:37-52; 14:1-24. The purpose was to use the occasion of a communal meal as gathering point for teaching traditions on a particular theme.

chose to offer them a covenant in bread and wine. The words of institution function as the beginning of his farewell speech in which He would give a summary of his teachings. Right through his Gospel, Luke has told his story of Jesus as God's agent who represented God and presented Him to mankind, forgiving people their sins on God's behalf, preaching salvation for those who were prepared to accept Him as God's representative exactly for this reason. Because the farewell speech during his last supper is the occasion which Jesus used for his final teaching to his disciples, it is understandable that Luke does not here speak of Jesus' imminent death as a prerequisite for salvation.⁶ As Minear (1970:326) puts it: 'In this story the center of gravity lies not in the word of institution but...in the four key dialogues between Jesus and the disciples.' This is the culmination of Jesus' teaching before his death.

5.2 The last supper as part of a farewell speech

Luke presents the last passover meal⁷ as part of a *farewell speech* by Jesus—different from Mark and Matthew, but analogous with Jn 13-17. Kurz⁸ characterises the formal literary category of a farewell speech as a final statement by a patriarch, ruler or teacher to his sons, successors or students in view of his approaching death. We mention briefly some of the elements which he regards as occurring frequently, of which many appear in Luke's presentation of Jesus' farewell speech, namely

the summoning of successors; the speaker's example; his impending death; an exhortation; his warning and final injunctions; his promises; his appointment of a successor; the mourning of his family and friends; a sacrifice or the renewal of a covenant; the care of those left behind; consolations to an inner circle; future degeneration.

In this farewell speech Luke reveals the unfaithfulness of the apostles. It is therefore not without significance that Luke refers to the apostles that were with Jesus (22:14). Luke is not as negative about the role of the disciples as Mark, but his characterisation of the disciples is nevertheless one of people who failed in the following of Jesus (cf Tannehill 1986:262). It is, however, in this circle that Jesus celebrates the passover meal, and it is for their benefit that He reinterprets the meal in a particular way, giving to the bread and the wine a new meaning. Simul-

⁶ Although He would teach them again after his resurrection, none of these teachings are as extensive as at this occasion.

⁷ Fitzmyer (1985:1389-1390) devotes an elaborate discussion to the question as to whether the description of this meal could be one of a genuine Jewish passover meal. He points out various elements which could identify this meal as a Jewish passover (cf also Jeremias 1977:41-84). For the remainder of this article we shall regard the meal at the institution of the Eucharist as a genuine passover meal.

⁸ Kurz (1985:251-268) argues that Luke is especially influenced by the speech of Matthias in 1 Mac 2:49-70 and the speech of David in 1 Ki 2:1-10.

aneously He commands them to repeat this meal in the future to commemorate Him. From this it becomes clear that He says this with a view to his imminent death and the new situation in which the Apostles will find themselves. Although his words are spoken in private to his inner circle of disciples, the stress on the commemoration of his death, and the promise of a new covenant, shows that it is meant for the church of Luke's time and for future generations.

5.3 Luke 22:15-18

What Jesus said at table consists of two sets of parallels. The first concerns eating and drinking (22:15-18), and the second concerns Jesus' reinterpretation of the passover meal (22:19b-20). The first set of parallels refers to the future when the kingdom of God will have finally come. At the same time it witnesses to the fact that his coming death, to which He referred at various occasions (9:22,44; 12:50; 13:33), is at hand. Through this reference the story joins the eating of the passover meal, the imminent death of Jesus, and the coming of the kingdom of God together in one focal point. It gives the passover meal a specific eschatological significance, which is further accentuated by the institution of the Eucharist as a *commemorative meal*.

Verses 15-18 have the function to prepare for the farewell speech which follows in vv19-38. As explained above (5.2), certain elements regularly appear in the typical Christian and Jewish farewell speeches, e.g. the hero knows that he is going to die; he assembles his followers and delivers a farewell speech containing two standard components—first a forecast of what will happen when he is no longer with them, and secondly an encouragement regarding how they should behave after his death. The fact that Luke presents the last passover as part of a farewell speech, is an important reason why his presentation differs from that of the other synoptics. This notion of a farewell speech should, however, not dominate the interpretation of this episode in such a way that the real impact of the combination of *passover meal* and *Eucharist* is lost sight of (against Talbert 1982:206-211). The focus is not on the forecast, but rather on the reinterpretation of the passover meal! Passover meal becomes Eucharist; the commemoration of the release from Egypt becomes the commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ. Luke uses the prepositional expression ἀπὸ νῦν to indicate the expected arrival of Jesus' suffering and death. The culmination will be reached with the coming of the kingdom which refers here to its eschatological fulfilment (cf v16). The words 'which is given for you' (v19b) do not occur in Matthew or Mark, but it does occur in Paul in abbreviated form (1 Cor 11:24). Also the words 'Do this as a memorial of me' do not occur in Mark or Matthew, but it does occur in Paul (1 Cor 11:24). It is possible that Luke and Paul used an older tradition.

5.4 Luke 22:19b-20

The second set of parallel clauses occurs in 22:19b-20, which follows on the set of parallels in 22:15-18. The parallelism is particularly clear in the Greek:

Τούτο ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου ...
 Τούτο τὸ ποτήριον...ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου

These verses represent a well-known textual crux, and we first look briefly at the technical situation:

Without here entering into a detailed discussion of this text-critical crux I wish to state that I accept the longer reading because of the scholarly arguments of experts in this field.⁹ In accepting the longer reading as conclusive, Petzer (1991:113-129) reasoned as follows: The presence of non-Lucan expressions suggests a non-Lucan origin of 22:19b-20, and similar features occur in 22:17-19a. Similarly, there are non-Matthean, non-Marcian and non-Pauline features in the other institution narratives. Thus we can argue that Luke, as well as the other authors kept more closely to the language and style of their sources than seems customary elsewhere in their work. It looks as if Luke followed the pattern occurring in the composition of the other institution narratives (cf also the supporting argument based on the double *parallel structure* in Lk 22:15-20¹⁰). This could mean that all the institution narratives were taken from (a) common (liturgical?) source(s) which differed from one another in detail but resembled each other fairly closely.¹¹ Non-Lucan stylistic features in the longer reading thus do not necessarily make it less authentic.

Where the first parallel refers to the future, the second one refers to the past. The first set of pronouncements deals with the passover meal and refers forward to the coming death of Jesus, while the second set is a reminder of the death of Jesus as if it has already taken place. *Temporal indications* are used in an exceptional way to indicate *continuity*, but also *contrasts*. By reaching forward from the present to the coming death of Jesus, and also by reaching backward from a future situation to the death of Jesus which has already taken place, the events surrounding the passover meal receive a much greater magnitude than would have been possible otherwise. Bread and wine expresses symbolically the full significance of Jesus.

In the first part of the institution of the Eucharist (vv15-18), Luke's version is more clearly a reference to the passover than those of the other synoptics. The description of the meal looks like a genuine Jewish passover (cf Fitzmyer

⁹ Cf Metzger, B M 1971. *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 176. London: United Bible Societies. See the discussion regarding the proponents of the longer and the shorter text in Fitzmyer (1985:1387-1388).

¹⁰ As demonstrated in the article by Petzer (1984:249-252).

¹¹ Cf Petzer (1991:127). The longer text is also supported by Sellev (1987:73) on the basis of a literary and theological analysis and a comparison with the Marcan parallels.

1985:1389-1390 and Jeremias 1977:41-84). Through this description the Lucan narrator gives Jesus the opportunity to declare his impending death and to prepare his disciples for the farewell speech which follows.

The second part of the institution of the Eucharist (vv19b-20) is not explicitly connected with the passover. Jesus requests his disciples to commemorate this meal regularly as a personal commemoration of Him (v19), and He states that his death is the seal of the new covenant (v20). The bread becomes the substitute for the passover lamb, thus used symbolically for the commemoration meal of which He is speaking. The point He wishes to make is that the breaking of the bread, its distribution, and the collective eating of it, will serve to commemorate Him. The bread represents everything which Jesus was: *God's gift*, and *proclaimer of his word*. The point is not the substance of the elements, but their use as a proclamation of a past event and of a Lord present in his church and sharing his mission and destiny with them (cf Ellis 1966:255; Dillon 1978:107).

5.5 Sacrifice or martyrdom?

We have stated earlier that we accept the longer reading of the text, thus including vv19b-20 as part of what Jesus said. The words 'which is given for you' (v19) are important for the problem we are dealing with. 'Given' (διδόμενον) may indicate a *sacrifice* (Ex 30:14), but may also refer to *martyrdom* (Is 53:10), and the same is true of 'for (ὐπὲρ) you' (Lv 5:7). A close look at Luke's Gospel shows that the dominant thrust of Luke's understanding of Jesus' death is that of a martyrdom.¹² Throughout Luke-Acts we find a particular kind of *theologia crucis* which is used as a guideline for those who followed Jesus' example in daily taking up their cross (cf Barrett 1979:73-84).¹³

A study of the trials of Jesus in Luke's Gospel gives the impression that the narrator wants to accentuate that Jesus was condemned and died as an innocent man—as a martyr. This line of thinking is revealed in various facets of Jesus' passion. He is, for instance, presented as one who obediently goes the way God has commanded, as already prophesied by the Old Testament prophets, and as a part of God's plan (Ac 13:27-29; 2:23). In Lk 13:33 his death is presented as parallel to the suffering of the Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, it has been pointed out (e.g. by Lohse 1955) that there existed in Judaism a doctrine of the martyr or the suffering righteous one side by side with the conception of expiatory sacrifice. Another example of Jesus' martyrdom is to be found in the support

¹² We refer here only to a few of the scholars who deal with Jesus as a martyr, although some of them prefer to speak of the presence of 'martyrological details': Schürmann 1955:115-123; Beck 1981:28-47; Taibert 1982:209; Ehrman & Plunkett 1983:401-416; Green 1986:39-41.

¹³ Green (1983:127) claims that crucifixion and therefore cross-bearing was mainly intended to stress submission to the rule against which the person was formerly in rebellion.

Jesus received from the angel in Gethsemane (Lk 22:43). This event seems to indicate him as a martyr and model for his followers (cf Green 1986:41). Like the martyrs in 2 Mac 7:2,11 and 4 Mac 6:1 Jesus is silent before his accusers (Lk 23:9) (cf Talbert 1982:213). As in the case of the martyrs slain by Herod (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.6,2-4), there is an eclipse at Jesus' death (Lk 23:45).¹⁴

During the four trials recorded in Luke's passion narrative, the narrator makes a point of indicating that Jesus was *innocent*. In spite of the serious indictments of the Jewish Council against Jesus, Pilate can find no guilt in this man. The Roman governor finds Jesus officially not guilty (cf Lk 23:4,14,22). Even the Jewish king Herod found him innocent according to Pilate (Lk 23:14-15). Jesus' own words on the cross praying to God to forgive his transgressors (Lk 23:34), presents Him as the innocent and righteous martyr.¹⁵ Whereas Mark says that both criminals crucified with Jesus reviled him, Luke deviates by indicating only one of the criminals as guilty of this behaviour while the other one rebuked him, referring to Jesus' innocence with the words 'this man has done nothing wrong' (Lk 23:41b).

After Jesus' death the scene ends with the Roman officer declaring: 'Beyond all doubt, this man was innocent!' (Lk 23:47). The translation of δίκαιος with 'innocent' is followed by most modern translations¹⁶ and it fits in well with the theme of Jesus' innocence as portrayed by Luke, particularly within the context of the four trials of Jesus, where his innocence is pronounced by both Pilate and Herod several times. The word δίκαιος can of course not be limited to 'innocent' as Beck (1981:42) and Karris (1986:66) have correctly indicated. This Greek word also has the meaning of 'righteous', which provides a different and perhaps a broader perspective on the matter. The centurion's reaction is remarkable, because Luke's version differs from the parallel in Mk 15:39 which reads: 'Truly, this man was a Son of God.' Whereas in Mk 15:39 the centurion's cry functions as a confession that Jesus is the Son of God, it has a different function in Luke. In Luke there is no need for such a confession at this point in the narrative, because Luke has already made Jesus' identity clear in the earlier course of his narrative (Lk 1:32-35; 2:10-11,25-38; 9:20: Jesus as Son of God; as David's royal heir, and as Messiah). Throughout his Gospel Luke seems to use the adjective δίκαιος in its classical Old Testament sense. Thus Schenk (1964) declares: 'This δίκαιος is the man who fulfills his duties towards God and the theocratic society, meeting God's claim in this relationship.' Other examples in Luke's Gospel of such 'righteous' people can be found in the characters of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Joseph of Arimathea (Lk 1:6; 2:25; 23:50). In Acts it even becomes

¹⁴ In the case of Josephus, however, the reference is to an eclipse of the moon.

¹⁵ According to Dibelius (1971:202-203), the value of the death of Jesus was first of all moral and exemplary. Cf also Osborne (1979:89).

¹⁶ The RSV, NAB, and NEB all translate with 'innocent' while the NIV uses 'righteous'.

a messianic title (Ac 3:14; 7:52; 22:14). As such it can also be found in the Old Testament (Jr 23:5; 33:15; Zch 9:9). We could therefore understand δικαίος in Lk 23:47 in the Old Testament sense of Jesus being declared 'righteous' before God. Walaskay (1975:81-93) suggests that Luke is here interpreting the meaning of Mark's title 'Son of God', from the Roman perspective. This seems possible if we accept that Luke was only trying to interpret Mark. If, however, we take Luke's independence more seriously, and accept his fondness of using the Old Testament, his version of the centurion's call could have been an attempt to interpret Jesus as a suffering righteous one (cf Karris 1986:67). We could therefore conclude that the officer's words are actually a religious pronouncement with the purpose of saying that a righteous/just man has been crucified (cf Osborne 1979:89). It is quite possible that Luke made use here of a particular genre found in the Jewish literature dealing with how a persecuted and innocent person is finally vindicated,¹⁷ with the purpose of proclaiming Jesus as a righteous and innocent martyr. The officer's declaration could then be seen as an indication that Jesus stood in the right relation to God and died for this conviction. It seems as if, what Luke wants to convey to his readers by means of the concept δικαίος, is not only, or even in the first place, forensic evidence of Jesus' juridical or political innocence, but rather the fact of Jesus being righteous before God.¹⁸ For Luke the centurion confirms the quality of Jesus' entire life as demonstrated throughout the Gospel. He has fulfilled the course of his life as God's righteous sufferer.¹⁹ We therefore suggest that Karris's attempt to prove that the Lucan Jesus is not a martyr (1986:68) has misled him not to see that the semantic field of 'innocence' and 'righteousness' overlaps in the way Lk 23:47 uses δικαίος. Luke presents Jesus' death as the perfect example and model for his followers, the church.²⁰

Returning to Lk 22:19b-20, we could concur with Tannehill (1986:285) that these verses give expression to Jesus' death as a community-founding event which does not *directly* address the issue of how individuals find salvation through Jesus. Luke-Acts shows remarkable independence from the widespread theme of Jesus' death for sins, because Luke has other ways of expressing Jesus' saving significance. The institution of the Eucharist and his death on the cross are definitely connected, but in a different way, as we shall point out in the discussion on the new covenant below.

In pursuing this matter further, we do need to look at another significant facet

¹⁷ Cf Nickelsburg (1980:153-184) for a detailed discussion and comparison between the Marcan passion narrative and Jewish wisdom literature.

¹⁸ Matera (1985:482) puts it as follows: 'Surely Jesus is politically innocent, but more importantly he stands in the right relationship to God because of his trust in the Father'.

¹⁹ Cf Matera (198:483). Cf also Untergassmair (1980:195).

²⁰ Schneider (1969:189) says in this regard: 'Jesus ist nicht als der nachzuziehende Heros geschildert, sondern als die paradigmatische heilsgeschichtliche Gestalt, mit der sich der Leser vereinigen soll und deren Weg er nachgehen muss.'

of the institution of the Eucharist, namely, the fact that Jesus' death is used here as the sealing of a *new covenant*: 'This cup, poured out for you, is the new covenant sealed by my blood' (22:20). The reference to 'blood' as symbol of Jesus' death gives this statement a more cultic connotation than the parallel in v19. In the Old Testament we sometimes read of a covenant that was sealed by a sacrifice (Gn 15; Ex 24:3-8). These words in Lk 22:20, however, do not focus on a sacrifice for sins, but one that seals the pact made between Jesus and his followers (cf Talbert 1992:27). This position is even supported by the parallels in Mt 26:28a and Mk 14:24, as well as Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:25: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'. This 'new covenant' of which Lk 22:20 speaks, could refer to Jr 31:31-34 where the Lord promised to make a new covenant with Israel, which would not depend on external obedience, but would come from the heart (cf also Ezk 36:26-27). Jeremiah's notion of a covenant of the 'heart' gives expression to the new concept that obedience to God's will and the relationship with God are not so much an *external* matter but rather an *internal* urge to be faithful to this relationship. This new covenant mentality is used by Luke in 22:20. The newness of this covenant lies in the fact that God has taken the initiative and responsibility to create a relation of trust between Himself and believers (cf Talbert 1982:209). This covenant has been sanctioned by the blood (death) of Jesus. Jesus sees his death as the seal and guarantee for this new agreement between God and man. He regards his death as an offering He brings to seal and confirm the covenant as true. It seems as if Luke does not consider Jesus' death a sacrifice to expiate sin, but rather regards it as the highest price a human being can pay to show that He cares for his followers, and that they may know and be reminded how much he cares²¹. That is why the Eucharist should be celebrated regularly to remind people visually and physically of their agreement (covenant) with God.

The other two synoptics show the same tradition, but also differ significantly. Mk 14:24 says: 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many'. It is not without significance that he leaves out the *newness* of the covenant in comparison with Luke. It underlines the notion that Jesus' death is considered a sacrifice in the traditional way—it is actually a continuation of the sacrificial cult of the old dispensation. The reference that his blood is 'shed for many' indicates a truly expiatory character to Jesus' death. The parallel in Mt 26:28 also presents Jesus' death as an expiatory sacrifice: 'For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins'. Matthew, even more clearly than Mark, links Jesus' death with the forgiveness of sins—and says so in so many words. Like Mark, he also omits any reference to the fact that this covenant is a 'new' covenant. From the comparison with the synoptic parallels, it

²¹ We may agree with Talbert (1982:209) that 'if the death of Jesus is in any way to be regarded as sacrificial in Luke-Acts, it is as a sacrifice that seals a covenant (cf Gen 15:8-21; 17): it is not an atonement for sin.'

seems as if Luke purposely limits Jesus' death to its covenantal effect—particularly its function as *final* seal of this pact. He moves away from the notion of a vicarious death (ὕπερ πολλῶν), as in Mk 14:24 and Mt 26:28, and thus presents Jesus' death rather as that of a martyr, which could act as a sign of Jesus' faithfulness to those sharing in the new covenant.

Luke's presentation of the suffering Jesus as martyr fits into the basic *plot* of his Gospel, namely, God's plan of salvation for mankind as revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus' prophetic knowledge and the repeated use of δεῖ and μέλλειν indicating the fact and the manner in which God's plan was made known in the life of Jesus, indicate that Jesus' suffering and eventual death fit into the plan of God. For Luke the death of Jesus completes an important step in the plan of God (cf Bovon 1987:169).

6 JESUS' DEATH AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

We have argued above that Luke views Jesus' death as a martyrdom which is a model for his disciples. In contrast to Paul and even the other synoptic Evangelists, Luke avoids any connection between Jesus' death and the forgiveness of sins. The cross is no longer the expiatory sacrifice that it was in Paul and Mark. It has rather become 'the fate, equally positive, of the righteous one, suffering for his own' (Bovon 1987:167). Luke, indeed, presents Jesus with the traits of a martyr. In the speeches recorded in Acts, Luke portrays Peter and Paul as preaching the forgiveness of sins based on repentance, the resurrection of Christ and faith in Christ, but in none of these cases is the forgiveness of sins directly combined with the death of Jesus (Ac 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:37-38; 26:18-19). Repentance and conversion are the keynotes when it came to salvation. Bovon (1987:166) rightly suggested that Luke was very reserved in presenting Jesus' death as a sacrifice in order not to transform salvation into a mechanical redemption and thus overshadowing the indispensable conversion. It is also very significant that the well-known reference in Mk 10:45 ('give his life as a ransom for many') is omitted in the Lucan parallel (Lk 22:27), thus avoiding any mention of an atoning death. Even in his references to Is 53, which became the traditional prophetic utterances quoted in the early church as proof of Jesus' sacrificial death, we find Luke using this well-known Isaian chapter without combining it with Jesus' death as a sacrifice. In Lk 22:37 and Ac 8:32-33, Is 53:12 and 53:7-8 are quoted, but no mention is made of the sacrificial death of the servant. Added to these, the institution of the Lord's Supper in Lk 22:16-20—as discussed above in 5.5—is not connected with Jesus' atoning death.

Luke, however, has other ways of expressing Jesus' saving significance (see 5.5). We read quite often of Jesus forgiving people their sins and promising salvation; but where did He get this authority? According to the Old Testament, forgiveness of sins is the prerogative of God. According to Jewish tradition, not

even the Messiah could forgive sins (cf Strack & Billerbeck 1961:495). The Old Testament, however, leaves no doubt that God can forgive sins (Ps 103:3; Is 33:24; Mi 7:18-20; Jr 31:34). How could Jesus legitimate his forgiving activity and words? In his very first sermon—according to Luke's narrative-chronology—Jesus spoke of forgiveness of sins as the one commissioned by God to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). For Luke, Jesus is the Agent of God, and as the one who is sent, represents the one who sends Him, so Jesus represents God and functions as a speaker for God.

Luke presents Jesus as one who right through his ministry exhibited the authority to forgive sins without the atoning apparatus (cf Antwi 1991:23). Even though Jesus forgave sins without use of any sacrificial means, it is clear that He took the sacrificial system for granted. Lk 5:14 is a good example where Jesus cleansed the leper but then ordered him to go show himself to the priest and make the offering laid down by Moses (cf Lv 13-14) that would certify the cure. The reference in this passage to the cultic requirements and atoning terminology leaves no doubt as to Jesus' attitude towards the sacrificial cult. In Lk 6:1-5, however, Jesus is put on a par with king David when he entered the 'House of God and ate of the sacred bread', thus putting himself above the sacrificial agents (=priests). Jesus is also identified with the Son of man and regarded as 'sovereign even over the sabbath' (6:5). This passage prepares the way for Jesus' action in the temple when He acted with the same authority to drive out the merchants defiling the temple premises. By the cleansing of the temple Jesus claimed the temple as the focal point for his final preaching and teaching. He was not hostile towards the temple but laid the foundation for the concept of the new and transformed temple in which God would be worshipped in spirit and truth (cf Antwi 1991:23).

In Lk 5:20-24 we have another example where Jesus justified his right to forgive sins on the grounds of his claim to be the Son of man. As heavenly judge, the Son of man has the power to forgive sins. The designation 'Son of man' reflects the sense of authority which appears in Jesus' act of forgiving sins without the sacrificial rituals. In Luke this reference to Jesus as Son of man refers to Him as one who is acting with divine authority, is repudiated by Israel and the Gentiles, but vindicated and exalted by God (cf Kingsbury 1991:78). Luke's story of Jesus is presented from the angle of one who has authority to act on God's behalf—therefore as one who has the divine power to forgive sins.

In the incident in Lk 7:36-50, Jesus' association with sinners and his forgiving of sins are related to his being a true prophet. When this episode is analysed, it becomes clear that God takes the initiative in forgiving sins. Acting as God's Agent, Jesus shows that forgiveness comes before conversion. He could act as He did by associating with sinners and forgiving them because God had already done

so. The omniscient narrator, who knows what goes on in the minds of his characters (7:39), succeeds in proving Jesus to be a true prophet when He (Jesus) in his turn, knows what goes on in the Pharisee's mind and rebukes him for his lack of hospitality. In v47 it is this woman's great love for Jesus which proves that her many sins have been forgiven. The proof lies in the fact that little love is shown where little forgiveness has been received. The outcome of the story is presented in a chiasmic parallel (v47) which strengthens the notion of forgiveness of sins. Jesus' concluding command: 'Your sins are forgiven' (v48), seems unnecessary after v47 ('her many sins have been forgiven'). On the other hand it underlines the fact that Jesus' act of forgiveness is strongly related to the prerogative of God to forgive. Whereas God can forgive unconditionally, Jesus links his act of forgiveness in this case to the faith of the woman (v50); a statement with which Luke ends this episode.

In Israel's history forgiveness was brought about by cultic acts and priestly pronouncements. Sins could only be forgiven by God on the strength of an atoning ritual—thus a transference of guilt in a ritual act. In presenting Jesus as forgiving sins, Luke implies that Jesus' role can be identified with the institution for atonement.²² The presentation of Jesus' death can thus be seen as the replacement of the cult. Where the atoning ritual was an expression of the substitution of the life of an animal for that of a human being, Jesus' words at the last passover meal can easily be taken as a proof that his death would put the final seal on his work as God's Agent who could forgive people their sins. His willingness to offer his life as martyr for the sake of his followers, could be seen as a guarantee or seal of the covenant (agreement) Jesus made with them.

7 SOME CONCLUSIONS

Although most of the topics which have been raised here—e.g. salvation, forgiveness of sins, last supper—are very fundamental and wide-ranging ones which cannot be discussed in any detail, we do think that some conclusions, or at least trends, can be offered with regard to Luke's presentation of the gospel of Jesus:

- 1 The *salvific significance* of Jesus' death is afforded a very low key in Luke-Acts.
- 2 *Paul's* way of looking at the significance of Jesus' death in his letters has influenced and even warped our interpretation of the significance of Jesus' death. It has led to an over-emphasised dogmatic look at the death of Jesus as presented in Luke-Acts.

²² Antwi (1991:28) claims 'that by performing acts of forgiveness of sins without the cultic apparatus, Jesus was redefining the role of the cult as an institution for atonement'.

- 3 *Traditions* of Jesus' death as a sacrificial one date back to very early in the Christian era. This makes the virtual *absence* of this central Christian dogma in Luke's Gospel even more problematic.
- 4 According to Luke's portrayal, Jesus took the *sacrificial system* for granted, even though He forgave sins without any sacrificial means.
- 5 Although Luke makes many references to Jesus' death, his portrayal of Jesus puts the focus more on his *life* than on his *death*.
- 6 Luke presents Jesus' role in the forgiveness of sins as due to his being the Agent of God acting with *full authority* on God's behalf.
- 7 In Luke-Acts forgiveness of sins is based on *repentance*, the *resurrection* of Christ and *faith* in Christ, but it is not directly connected to the death of Jesus.
- 8 The picture Luke paints of the early church in Acts presents Jesus' *resurrection* as much more central with regard to salvation than his death. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that Luke presents Jesus' resurrection as a sign of God's *vindication* and as proof that He was the *Son of God*.
- 9 Luke portrays Jesus as Son of God, Son of man, Messiah and Lord from the very beginning of his life. His role with regard to forgiveness of sins and salvation therefore forms part of his ministry *from the beginning*. This underlines and explains the *integrative* role played by the inclusion of the *birth narratives* in Luke's Gospel.
- 10 In Luke's presentation of the last supper, Jesus *reinterprets* the passover, applying it to his giving of his own life as proof that He cares and as a promise and a guarantee of a new life.
- 11 According to Luke, Jesus applied his coming death as a *symbol* and *seal* of his *new covenant* to be commemorated by his future church. His death is presented as the *culmination* of his life's work, as a token of his loyalty, and as a model for his followers.
- 12 Luke presents the last supper as part of a *table fellowship* where Jesus gave his *last speech* and teaching to his closest disciples who would follow in his footsteps. It was done to encourage them and remind them of his loyalty and care. The fact that it was presented as part of a farewell speech, explains why Luke's presentation of the last supper *differs from that of the other synoptics*, and at the same time gives expression to his particular point of view with regard to the significance of Jesus' death.

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Prof Dr I J du Plessis, Department of New Testament, UNISA, P O Box 392, PRETORIA, 0001 Republic of South Africa.