

Jesus' death and resurrection Handout 4

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things
and then enter into his glory?

Luke 24.26

Jesus tells his disciples that his death and resurrection are at the heart of his ministry.

The cross in the gospels

The cross casts a shadow forward over the whole of Jesus' ministry. Jesus knew that He had to die and bear the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.

Search through the gospels again in small groups, dividing up the references between you. This time note down anything Jesus says which gives you an understanding of his own death.

- Luke 9:22-27
- Luke 13:31-33
- Luke 18:31-34
- Luke 22:14-20
- Luke 22:39-46

What happened when Jesus died?

Jesus was not the only person who ever died on a cross. Yet, Jesus death was not like any other crucifixion. Jesus died on the cross under special circumstances.

One record of these circumstances you will find in Mark 15:21-29. Read the account together and discuss together a number of the special circumstances using the following key words:

- the darkness (15:33)
- the scream (15:34-37)
- the curtain in the temple (15:38)

The meaning of the cross

God made us and loves us.

God calls us to a close relationship with him. But we have turned away from God. Our hearts are restless. The walls of pride and guilt and fear of change cut us off from God. We deserve to die.

God sent Jesus to save us from our sins and their effects (the name Jesus means 'Saviour'). Jesus died in our place so that we can enjoy a new relationship with God. God wants to give us to accept this gift by accepting his judgment over our sins and believing that Jesus died for our personal sins.

The Bible speaks of the meaning of Jesus' death in the great images of salvation.

- On the cross Jesus identified with our human predicament and took our place.
- As a friend betrayed, Jesus deals with all that destroys relationships and offers restoration.
- In his death, Jesus makes a new covenant between God and his people.
- In his death, Jesus pays the penalty for sin.
- Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- In the cross, Jesus triumphs over all the powers of sin and evil.
- In the cross, Jesus identifies with all the pain and suffering in the world.
- On the cross, Jesus sets an example of perfect love.

Discuss the following two questions together in small groups:

- Which of these great pictures speaks to you about the meaning of Jesus' death?
- What questions do you have?

The evidence for the resurrection

The empty tomb

Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter Day, despite the guard on the grave.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, where did his body go?

If the authorities had taken it (and why should they?) they would have produced it when claims about the resurrection were made later.

The disciples were as surprised as anyone by the resurrection. Most of them were killed because of their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. It is impossible to believe that they took the body and told lies.

The witnesses

More than 500 people claimed to see Jesus alive. Their encounter with the risen Jesus changed their lives and they were prepared to die for their belief.

The witnesses not only saw him, they talked with him, walked with him, learned from him, ate with him and touched him.

The first witnesses were women. In Jesus' day, women were not valid witnesses in a court of law. If Jesus' disciples would have fabricated his resurrection, they would have had men be the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. At least then they would have had some success that people would believe their story.

The church began

After the cross, the disciples were demoralized and defeated. They were afraid of the Jews and denied that they had ever known Jesus.

Only a few days later they were risking their lives to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. Their witness was to turn the world upside down. What event (other than the resurrection) could have so transformed the disciples?

The testimony of Christians

For nearly 2,000 years, in every culture, men and women have claimed that we can know the risen Christ for ourselves, today.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men (1 Corinthians 15:14-19).

Discuss the following questions together in small groups:

- How convincing do you find the evidence for Jesus' resurrection? Are you left with any questions?
- In what sense can we meet with the risen Lord Jesus today?

The meaning of the resurrection

Easter is the greatest celebration of the Christian year. The resurrection gives us a completely new view of Jesus, of death and of life.

Jesus

- Jesus really is God's Son.
- Everything He said about Himself is true.
- Jesus was crucified for our sins and rose again.
- Jesus defeated death.
- Jesus is alive today.
- We can know him for ourselves.

Death

- Death is no longer something to be afraid of. Death has been conquered.
- We do not have to be afraid for the Day of Judgment at the end of history, that moment when Jesus will pronounce his just judgment on all people, the living and the dead. Everyone who believes in Jesus will be acquitted and receive access to God's heavenly glory.
- Jesus has gone before to prepare a place for us (John 14:3).
- We shall be raised with Christ (1 Corinthians 15:15:20).

- Jesus resurrection tells us lots about life after the resurrection. We are invited to participate in this life (1 Corinthians 15:35-44).

Life

- Eternal life begins now, not when we die.
- Jesus gave his life for us. There is something unique in this that we will never be able to imitate: He died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Yet, Jesus is also our example. Because He gave his life for us, we give our lives back to him in love and service. We also give our lives to each other in love and service.
- Like the Jesus' disciples, we are called to be witnesses to the power of the resurrection. The power that was at work in Jesus' resurrection is now also at work in us, making us into new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Which do you think is the most important consequence of believing that Jesus is risen from the dead?

For reflection

Reflect this week on the meaning of the cross and the resurrection.

Continue the Bible reading through Luke's Gospel.