

Small Group Leaders Notes

Matthew 27:45-54

Context

The Darkness - In numerous Old Testament passages darkness during the day is a sign of God's judgment. Look up Exodus 10:22, Amos 8:9-10, Isaiah 5:30, 13:10-11 and Joel 3:14-15 to see this. In Matthew's gospel Jesus has repeatedly used darkness as a picture of God's judgment (Matthew 22:13 and 25:30.) When this is combined with Jesus' cry of dereliction in v46 we see that God's judgment is falling on Jesus.

The Curtain - From Exodus 26:31-33 and Hebrews 9:1-5 and 9:11-14 we learn that this curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. It was only the High Priest who could enter the Most Holy Place, and he could only do this once a year. In order to enter sacrifice had to be made. This helps us to see that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross has immediately won for us access into the most holy place. Through Christ's death we can now enjoy new life in communion with God in a way not previously enjoyed.

Tricky Bits

Jesus' Cry - Jesus quotes from Psalm 22:1 expressing his forsakenness by God. We could spend a lot of time speculating about exactly what it meant for Jesus as the Son of God to be forsaken by God. JC Ryle is right when he says, "There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom." Whilst we cannot fully understand what it meant for Jesus to be forsaken we can understand what his forsakenness achieved for us. "In the cry of dereliction, the horror of the world's sin and the cost of our salvation are revealed." (Carson.)

Elijah - Elijah and 'my God' sound quite similar in Hebrew which might explain the confusion. Elijah was also believed to be a miracle who could come to save people in their hour of need.

Many holy people raised to life - There are several tricky things about v52-53. Firstly is that it is only Matthew who records these holy people being raised to life.

The second tricky thing is to work out when they were raised to life. Option 1 is that they were raised to life on Good Friday when Jesus died. But if this is the case then it seems strange that they only came out of the tombs (v53) on Easter Sunday after Jesus had risen. Why would they stay in the tombs? The second and better option is to say that the earthquake happened when Jesus died (v52) but that the bodies were not raised to life until Easter Sunday. The '.' between 'open' and 'The bodies' is key to understanding the chronology of these resurrections.

The third tricky thing question is what was the nature of their resurrection? Were they raised like Lazarus with their original bodies or were they raised with resurrection bodies like Jesus? If they were raised with natural bodies like Lazarus then we must assume that they died again. If they were raised like Jesus with resurrection bodies then we must assume that having appeared in the holy city they were then taken into heaven. I don't think this is worth spending much time on. For what it is worth I think that they were raised like Lazarus with their natural bodies and that they would therefore have died again at a later date. The big point in v50-53 is to see that Jesus' death opens up the way to God

(v51) and makes new life with God possible (v52-53.) Make sure that your group see this rather than endlessly speculating about the exact timing and nature of the resurrection.

Big Idea - Jesus' death makes new life with God possible for everyone!

Applications

Appreciate the seriousness of our sin and the wonder of Jesus' death for us - For many of us there can be a familiarity with Jesus' death that can rob us of the impact. We need to dwell in the darkness and appreciate afresh the significance of what Jesus is doing for us. Here we see how serious our sin really is and how great our saviour's love for us is! Whoever we are and whatever our sin, through faith in Christ it has been paid for.

Live out our new life with God now - We need to think about how we are to live now that we have access to God through Jesus. Hebrews 10:19-24 says that because of the access we have through Jesus' blood we are to draw near to God with a clear conscience trusting that Jesus washes us clean. We're to keep on holding to our profession of faith in Christ because our only hope in life and death is Jesus' blood. It also says that we're to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Jesus didn't just die for individuals, he died for his people. We are to reflect that as we live out our new life by regularly meeting together and serving one another.

Take the news of Jesus' death to everyone - It is amazing to think that the soldiers who crucified Jesus are then those who recognise his identity having seen his death. In 28:19 the disciples will be told to go and make disciples of all nations and here we are being encouraged to believe that even hardened Roman soldiers can come to know forgiveness and new life in Jesus. There is no one who cannot benefit from what Jesus did at the cross.

Questions

Starter - If you had to describe the cross in 1 word what would it be and why?

Here's a simple introduction that is simply designed to get people talking. There are all sorts of words that people could come up with.

§1 Focus on the darkness. Read Amos 8:9-10, Matthew 22:13 and 25:30. How do these passages help us to understand what is happening to Jesus for us?

Darkness during the middle of the day is a sign of God's judgment on sin. Jesus is being punished for the sins of his people which is confirmed by his cry.

§2 Focus on the curtain being torn in two. Read Hebrews 9:1-7.

- a. **What was the significance of the curtain?**
- b. **Who was allowed to enter? What did they have to do?**
- c. **What does it mean for us that the curtain was torn in two?**

We can now have access to God. The barrier has been removed because the problem of our sin has been removed. We must not lose sight of the fact that blood was required, and the perfect blood that was shed was Christ's for us.

§3 Through Jesus death we can have new life with God. Read Hebrews 10:19-25.

What do these verses say we are to do as a result of our new life with God?

Look out for the phrase 'let us' that is repeated several times in the passage. What does it mean to draw near to God with a sincere heart(v22)? What would the opposite look like? What will it mean for us to hold unswervingly to the hope we profess (v23) when so many ridicule that hope? Practically what will it mean for your group to be a group that spurs one another on to love and good deeds? (v24-25)

§4 How do the soldiers respond to what they have seen? What is remarkable about their response?

Here are the men who have just crucified Jesus who when they see the circumstances of his death declare that he must be the Son of God. These hardened, gentile soldiers would be some of the last people we'd expect to respond like this.

- a. **Matthew's gospel finishes with Jesus telling us to go and make disciples of all nations. How does the soldiers' response encourage us in this task?**

If even these Roman soldiers can come to realise who Jesus is then anyone can. It's worth noticing that it is Jesus' death that reveals his identity to people. If we want people to come to faith in Jesus then we must take them to the death of Jesus. You can only really know Jesus when you understand his death and what it means for you.

Prayer - Spend time as a group praying about what you have read and discussed. Spend time thanking and praising God for what you have seen. Why not get everyone to write out a one sentence prayer thanking God for what Jesus did at the cross.