

Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings— individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups— virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at ScriptureAwakening.com. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at info@scriptureawakening.com.



“The time has come,” He said. “The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Mark 1:15

Introduction

As the battle for separation between Church and State has raged on in the United States, someone recently began lobbying to remove all crosses from federal property. But one person captured the irony of this effort by circulating a picture of Arlington National Cemetery—with thousands upon thousands of cross-engraved tombstones in neat rows lining the hillsides. The caption under the picture was, “Really?”

What does the cross stand for in this modern world? We see crosses all over—not just adorning churches and headstones, but also everywhere from the elaborately gilded baroque crosses in museums to the enormous diamond studded jewelry worn by pop stars. Is the cross a religious relic to be studied like the pyramids of Egypt? Is it an icon of pop culture? Or is it truly a reminder of the sacrifice of a Savior?

Whatever the cross represents for different individuals, we know its modern meaning is vastly different from how the early church understood it. Consider all those places where you have seen crosses, and now imagine if, instead of a cross, there was an electric chair. That is the original meaning of a cross. It was an instrument of torture and death. And not just any death—a death worse than anything we can imagine. Cicero, the great Greek philosopher and rhetorician, described a cross death in this manner: “To bind a Roman citizen is an outrage; to scourge him a crime; it almost amounts to parricide [killing a family member] to put him to death; how shall I describe crucifixion? No adequate word can be found to represent so execrable an enormity.” The cross was a horrifying way to die. It was far worse than the electric chair, the noose, or even the guillotine, that “humane” invention of the French Revolution.

Yet this was the means by which God chose to lift up his Son and show the world how much He loved them. This was where Jesus’ blood was spilled to pay the price for our sins. This was the brutal kind of death that Jesus conquered through His resurrection. This was, and is, the heart of Jesus’ ministry here on earth and the heart of the Christian faith.

It is time to give the cross a fresh look. The cross no longer speaks to the culture at large and its message is easily lost on those who profess the Christian faith today. The cross needs to be rediscovered and lodged squarely again in the center of the church and in the center of our hearts. Theologian John Howard Yoder writes, “The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come.” We need to see the cross through new eyes, to see its humility, to see its power, to see its offer of freedom and grace. And in doing so, we will discover the true Kingdom of God.

Signs of the Coming Cross

What kind of Kingdom comes with a cross? Kingdoms are supposed to come with power! Didn’t the Old Testament describe a Messiah who would come to conquer and vindicate? Isaiah paints the picture of the Messiah coming, saying, “The Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots

Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:4

like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.” Surely that is the image of God acting upon the earth, bringing redemption to His people and retribution to all who have rebelled against Him.

However, in Jesus, our God chose a path that seems the complete opposite of success and power. He chose a path that involved sacrifice, humiliation, and death. One song describes it as, “The kingdom in reverse, where the least are most, and the last will be the first.” The cross is the ultimate reflection of this paradoxical, upside-down kingdom.

We see hints of this upside-down kingdom throughout Scripture. Abraham and Sarah, the old and childless couple, were a very unlikely pair to select as the parents of God's chosen people. Rahab the prostitute helped the Israelite spies escape Jericho. And David, the “runt” of seven brothers, became the conqueror of giants and the great king of Israel. Somehow these characters help us understand the God who chose to come to earth in the form of a helpless baby, Whose first bed was a dirty feed trough.

If we look closely, we see that Scripture prepares us for this unlikely form of the Messiah, following in the footsteps of other unlikely heroes. But beyond that, we find that it also warns us of the violence He will encounter. Three passages in particular point straight to the cross—the Suffering Servant prophecy in Isaiah 53, plus two events at the time of Jesus' birth.

An Image of the Cross, 400 Years Earlier

Although Isaiah has many images of the Messiah as the conquering hero, he also gives us the clearest picture in the Old Testament of the Messiah's death. Chapter 53 is often referred to as the “Suffering Servant” passage and describes the Man of Sorrows, who will die to save His people from their sins.

He was despised and rejected by men... He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities... By His wounds we are healed... He was assigned a grave with the wicked... though He had done no violence... After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied... He poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:3-12).

As much as the Israelites clung to the idea of their Messiah as vindicating King, this passage makes it clear that the coming Messiah would not just be a political figure. He would die to be a guilt offering, even though He Himself would have done no violence. He would embody the sacrificial lamb, the offering to take away Israel's sins. But that would not be His end. He would again see the light of life, and the Lord would prolong His days (Isaiah 53:10-11). The Messiah would conquer, but in a different way than most expected.

A Shadow Over the Nativity

In addition to this Old Testament prophecy, two events at the time of Jesus' birth also give us a

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Luke 2:34,35

hint of what is to come: Simeon's prophecy over Jesus when His parents brought Him to be circumcised, and the “slaughter of the innocents” as Herod killed all the young boys in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the Messiah.

For the first event, we turn to the Gospel of Luke. The first few pages are filled with the beautiful nativity story that we hear each Christmas. Then, in Luke 2:21-35, Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised. The wizened old Simeon comes up to them, takes the Child in his arms, and, raising Him up, says, “My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people” (Luke 2:30-31). And then he turns to the child's mother and says, “This Child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own heart too” (Luke 2:34-35). Did Mary know before this moment that her son would have to endure the sword? How could it be that this holy Child for whom angels sang would be the victim of such hatred? After Mary left the temple with her baby boy, we can be sure that Simeon's words echoed in her ears for years to come. However, they could not have fully sunk in until, thirty-three years later, the soldier stabbed her son's side while He hung on the cross.

The second event after Jesus' birth is the gruesome scene Matthew described in his Gospel, chapter 2:1-18. King Herod began planning Jesus' death almost as soon as he heard of Him. The Magi had come to ask Herod where they might find this newborn King of the Jews. The priests and teachers told the Magi to look in Bethlehem, and Herod instructed them to come right back to him when they had found the Child. But then the Magi were warned in a dream not to report back to Herod. Herod found out about their betrayal and instantly set out to kill the Child. And not just Jesus—Herod killed all boys two years old and younger in and around Bethlehem. Here we have the first of many to be killed in the name of Jesus.

Such a horrific act illustrates the enormous threat of a coming Messiah against the rulers of the day. Herod and his line had set up a very comfortable system of power in league with the occupying Roman forces. He controlled the whole territory of Judea, commanded armed forces, and enjoyed great prestige. The last thing he wanted was for an upstart to cause rebellion and usurp his throne.

But the Lord had much greater plans than simply overthrowing Herod. He planned to overthrow death itself—“The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Final Thought

In C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Christ-like lion Aslan is killed by the evil witch on the Great Stone Table. But much to the surprise of the girls who saw him murdered, he comes back to life with the rising sun. When the girls asked Aslan what had happened, he explained to them, “If the witch knew the true meaning of sacrifice, she might have interpreted the Deep Magic differently. When a willing victim who has committed no treachery is killed in a traitor's stead, the Stone Table would crack and even death itself would turn backwards.”

In many ways, the cross is God's way of turning death backwards. In God's kingdom, the Roman executioners cross becomes the ultimate symbol of triumph. What seems like a complete failure is revealed to be all part of God's masterful plan, laid out from the beginning of time. Defeat becomes victory, weakness becomes power, the last becomes the first. The kingdom in reverse.

Spending Time With God

This series "The Kingdom and the Cross" is a seven lesson study on the Cross. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Begin now by praying to God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Read Isaiah 53. Write down three or four images that are particularly striking to you. What made them stand out?

3. What expectations do you think the Jews had about their coming Messiah? How is this passage similar or different from those expectations?

4. Even in the midst of the painful images, the passage offers hope of God's ultimate triumph. What images and promises of hope do you see?

5. Meditate for a few moments on the images that struck you in this passage, and the promises offered here. Record your thoughts.



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 1

The Kingdom Comes with a Cross

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

7. The commentary described God's rule as an "upside-down kingdom." What are some characteristics of a successful earthly kingdom? Are those different from the way God has chosen to act? Are there similarities? Discuss.

8. Reread Luke 2:21-35. Describe the emotions, expectations, and fears Joseph and Mary may have experienced as they heard Simeon's words. Name several ways in which Simeon's prophecy was fulfilled during Jesus' life.

9. The visit of the Magi generates turmoil in Jerusalem. Read the account of the Herod and the Magi, Matthew 2:1-18. What powers are in conflict in this scene? How does Jesus encounter these powers later in His ministry?

10. Are these powers still in conflict? How are we, the Church, engaged (or disengaged) in these conflicts today?

11. Looking over each of these passages, how might the shadow of the cross be present in these events? What do these events tell you about the Kingdom of God?



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 1

The Kingdom Comes with a Cross

12. Imagine what expectations the Israelites must have had for their Messiah. After these early incidents in Jesus' life, would those expectations be changed? If so, how? Are those expectations similar or different to the expectations we have of Jesus today? Discuss.

14. In what ways is the cross a stumbling block in today's world? In what ways does it seem foolishness?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. Read 1Corinthians 1:18-31. Paul describes the cross as "a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles." As you read Paul's explanation of the kingdom, where do you see similarities with the passages you have discussed earlier?

15. Where do you see the Kingdom of God in your life and world today? Is it still an upside-down kingdom? How is that frustrating to you? How is it encouraging?

Scripture for Meditation

After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:11



At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:9,10

Introduction

Agatha Christie is the master of suspense. She has an uncanny ability to keep the reader guessing until the very end of her novels, when the true killer is revealed. At that point, the reader is forced to go back over the story and reinterpret every clue and false assumption along the way. When we look back over her stories, we realize that all the pieces fit together beautifully, even though the first time through, our assumptions were completely wrong.

In many ways, Jesus’ disciples found themselves in the middle of a mystery novel. As we saw in the previous study, Scripture does provide us with hints of the cross, but it is far easier to see them in retrospect. The disciples were much more focused on what was going on in front of them. Jesus had crowds coming to Him from everywhere; He had amazing power that allowed Him to feed the masses, heal the sick, and cast out demons. The disciples must have been sure that Jesus was headed to victory, and they expected it to come in the form of political power from a throne in Jerusalem. What could stop the Son of God, the rightful Ruler, from setting up His Kingdom?

But then Jesus threw them a curveball.

The Secret and the Surprise

Mark’s gospel has a big secret. Scholars often refer to it as the “Messianic Secret.” Mark makes it clear to the reader that Jesus is the Messiah, but, until the middle of the gospel, we find that Jesus does not want anyone to know about it. Three different times (Mark 1:24, 3:11, and 5:7-8), demons identify Jesus as the Messiah, but Jesus tells them to be quiet. He does not want His true identity revealed until it is time. It seems like the disciples are beginning to catch on, but even they do not know the whole story.

Mark waits until the middle of his gospel to reveal His big secret to the disciples, and he chooses this point of the story for a very specific reason. The custom in classical times was to place the main point of a speech or essay at the center, unlike our style today which places it either at the beginning or end. This is Mark’s way of telling the readers that this secret was of central importance—the main thing. Everything that comes before the secret is leading up to it. Everything that follows from it is intended to explain it.

Thus, right in the middle of the Gospel, the disciples get a double whammy (Mark 8:27-35). When Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus affirms that Peter has discovered the secret—but not the whole secret. In almost the same breath, Jesus goes on to tell them that He must die and be raised again. Even the reader is taken aback—Mark has let us in on the secret that Jesus is the Messiah, but no one is prepared for the surprise that the Messiah must die on the cross.

The Messiah and the Cross

Before Jesus makes His announcement of the cross, He asks the disciples a question about His

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the Law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

Mark 8:31-32

identity, “Who do the crowds say that I am (Mark 8:27)?” Peter responds for the disciples and says that there are three possibilities under discussion: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (Mark 8:28). Jesus then asks the disciples the question, “But who do you say that I am (Mark 8:29)?” Peter says that the disciples have concluded that He is the Messiah, the Ruler foretold by the prophets from the line of David who will restore the Jewish nation to its former glory.

Peter’s confession is to be expected. The Voice from heaven declared Jesus to be the designated ruler sent by God (Mark 1:11). Likewise, Jesus’ message that the kingdom of God was breaking in would communicate to Peter and the disciples that Jesus’ own personal sense of mission was to rule in God’s name. And, of course, there were the works of power which demonstrated that Jesus was connected with God—certainly Jesus was the Messiah.

The question of His identity just before the announcement of the cross underscores that Jesus felt that His identity was foundational. He wanted to emphasize, in the minds of His disciples, that He is the Messiah before He uncovers for them what is next. If He is not the Son of God sent to rule in God’s name, then He will merely be one more rebel crucified for insurrection by the Romans. Without His identity, His crucifixion is meaningless. But, if He is truly the Son of God sent to rule and He is crucified, then this crucifixion must have some role to play in the exercise of His rule. The disciples needed to know that it is no mistake. It is no surprise. It was part of the plan from the beginning. And Jesus also wants them to know that the crucifixion is not the end for His rule because He will be raised from the dead (Mark 8:31).

The Power of Jesus and the Cross

One can imagine the disciples stopping here and gasping for breath. This news has turned their world upside-down. With Jesus’ announcement of the cross, the mystery of the kingdom of God is taken to a new level. For Peter, this news is inconceivable, and he takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him (Mark 8:32). Jesus’ intense response to Peter is arresting. It is not a mild correction but a stunning rebuke. Jesus seems to address not only Peter, but Satan as well: “Get behind Me, Satan! You do not have in the mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Mark 8:33). Jesus makes sure that all the disciples pay attention to His rebuke of Peter. Mark writes, “But when Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter” (Mark 8:33). It is a warning we would do well to heed today as well.

As we reflect on Jesus’ response we can discern an important dimension of the kingdom of God. The human way of kingdom making is also the satanic way, a way of darkness. Human history is a record of the constant conflict of powers. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In far too many places even today, a new regime must kill their opponents in order to seize power. However, Jesus is not going to bring in His kingdom in this human and satanic way. Jesus is going to bring in His kingdom by surrendering to His enemies and allowing them to kill Him. He will trust that God will raise Him from the dead so that He can open up a new realm of existence on the other side of death. The cycle of power and death will end with Him.

Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:34,35

The Discipleship of the Cross

Having revealed that the cross is going to be the instrument of His victory, Jesus is now in a position to tell the disciples what He could not have said before. They must also be prepared to die for the sake of his kingdom. No, more than being prepared to die, they must die for it. This is very difficult to understand because it is so counter to all our instincts. Just as Jesus brings in His kingdom only by going through death on the cross, the only way to get into Jesus' kingdom is by dying. “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the Gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). Self-preservation is a natural instinct, but even this instinct must be renounced for the kingdom. Jesus desires not only our allegiance, but our very lives. And fully surrendering ourselves to Christ—heart, soul, mind, and body—is the only way to gain life. Jesus is not merely calling His disciples to be faithful to His cause to the point of death. More than that, He is saying that the only way to get into His kingdom is through death—surrendering one's life for Him and His kingdom is the way to save it (Mark 8:35). In Jesus' hands, the cross will become not merely an instrument of death, but a gate of glory.

Final Thoughts

Seven verses before Mark reveals his big secret about the coming death of the Messiah, he describes an unusual healing (Mark 8:22-25). A blind man asks for his sight to be restored, so Jesus touches him. But the man says that the people look like “trees walking around” (v. 24). Then, when Jesus touches him a second time, his sight is restored to full clarity, and he can see normally.

Many have compared this story to the disciples' ability to see what Jesus has planned. They have an idea at first, but it is hazy. Jesus has to touch them a second time (and a third and fourth!) so that they finally begin to understand the true Kingdom of God that includes this difficult journey to the cross.

Unlike the disciples, we have all the chapters of the mystery laid out before us. We have the complete Bible, right to the end described in Revelation—which one person summed up in two words: “God wins!” Even with all of these clues of the mystery, though, our vision can be very hazy. The cross continues to be a stumbling block and apparent foolishness. We must continually seek the touch of the Holy Spirit to help us comprehend and to help us surrender ourselves. This is one mystery that can only be understood by living inside the story.

Spending Time With God

This series “The Kingdom and the Cross” is a seven lesson study on the Cross. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 2

The Surprise of the Cross

with Him. Begin now by praying to God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Jesus announces his mission at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19). What is it? What expectations do you think it created in his disciples and those who heard him?

3. Read Mark 8:27–9:1. How are the revelations in this passage different from what the disciples expected? How are they similar?

4. Jesus hadn't spoken of His cross until now. Why do you think He waited to reveal it?

5. The disciples went from a sense of elation to despair at the news Jesus shared with them. Are there times in your life you have been disappointed when you learned that God's plan was different from what you expected? Did that disappointment change later? Write down your reflections.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.



7. Concerning Jesus' identity, there were three options proposed by the people of His day: Elijah, John the Baptist, and the Prophet (Mark 8:28). What options are proposed today?

8. In response to Peter's insight about His identity, Jesus now uncovers the upcoming events of the cross (Mark 8:31). Imagine that you were one of the disciples hearing this for the first time. What would your reaction have been?

9. The announcement of the events of the cross were shocking to Peter and created an unpleasant encounter (Mark 8:32-33). What do you think is going on between Jesus and Peter?

10. What does Jesus' call to discipleship (8:34-9:1) reveal about his expectations for those who follow him?

11. How would you explain the challenge to "take up your cross" and "lose your life" in modern terms? What are some ways we can do that in our daily lives?

12. How is the "way of the cross" different from the typical human way of dealing with power? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this way?



Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. After Jesus' stunning revelation of the cross He takes Peter, John, and James with Him on a high mountain and is transfigured before them (Mark 9:2-10). How might this experience have been helpful to the disciples after the revelation of the cross?

14. Even though they saw Jesus in His glory, they were still confused about the resurrection (Mark 9:9, 10). If you were there, what would you have told them?

15. In what ways has God confirmed His presence and purpose for your life when you have faced challenging and confusing experiences?

Scripture for Meditation

If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it.

Mark 8:34-35



When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

Genesis 17:1

Introduction

“This is My body, broken for you... this is the cup of the new covenant, poured out for you...” Words so familiar, yet so revolutionary. We hear them all the time, but we often slide past them and on to the little bite of bread and sip of grape juice. And when we do, we miss the radical transformation Jesus invoked when He spoke the words the first time. With those simple words uttered at a simple meal, Jesus overturned the entire sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. He described what would happen to Him the next day when He was lifted up on the cross: He Himself would become the atoning sacrifice, to be offered once for all. The requirements of the Old Covenant of the Law would be fulfilled, and no blood offering would ever be needed again to cleanse away sin. Christ Himself would pay all that was due to the Lord. God’s gift to us would become our gift back to God.

The Old Covenant

Our God is a covenant-making God. A covenant is far more than a contract; it is a binding promise of relationship and reconciliation. God uses covenants as a way to begin to restore His relationship with humanity, the deep rapport which was severed by Adam’s Fall. The word “righteousness” literally means to be “right-wised”, to be turned around and placed in right relationship, and that is exactly what God desires. God made a covenant with Noah in the form of a rainbow (Genesis 9:1-17), with Abraham, promising him descendants that outnumber the stars, and with David promising that his kingdom would last forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16). However, it was God’s pledge to Moses that formed the heart of the “Old Covenant,” the law by which the Israelites followed and worshiped their God.

When we think of Moses, we often think of Cecil B. de Mille’s epic movie, “The Ten Commandments.” We see Moses—a white bearded Charlton Heston—roaring in his unmistakable voice as the Red Sea parts, and roaring even more when he discovers the Israelites worshipping the golden calf while he met with God on the top of Mt. Sinai. It was with these wayward people that God still desired a relationship, and it was because of their waywardness that He put down His covenant in writing (Exodus 20). God’s earlier covenants with Noah and Abraham had listed a few simple guidelines for them to follow, but with Moses, He gave hundreds of laws, rituals, and guidelines.

God specified His covenant requirements on every topic from household practices to judicial laws dealing with various crimes and offenses. God also knew that His people would fail to keep these requirements and would stray from Him time and time again. Therefore, He also instituted a system for frequent sacrifices and offerings (Leviticus 2-4). The heart of the sacrificial system was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Each year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, Aaron and the priests would offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins for the Israelites: “On this day, atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins” (Leviticus 16:30). It was around these requirements that the whole temple

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:31

system built up, with hundreds of priests employed to carry out God's decrees.

The Old Covenant, Entrenched

This covenantal system had two drawbacks: first, it was easy for the people to forget the heart of the covenant, and second, it was easy for the system to become corrupted. The heart of the covenant was for God to bring His people into right relationship with Himself. But the people quickly turned it into a set of empty rules to follow. Hosea captured this mistake, prophesying, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offering” (Hosea 6:6). David reiterated this sentiment in Psalm 51 when he wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

Secondly, it was easy for this system to become corrupted, whether by priests or others desiring to exploit the sacrificial system. When God first called to the boy Samuel, it was to give him a prophecy against Eli's corrupt sons, priest who were stealing the best of the sacrifices for themselves (1S amuel 3). In the book of Malachi, the Lord spends most of the first two chapters condemning the actions of the priests who “placed defiled food on the Lord's altar” (Malachi 1:7). The Lord lambasts them for this action and for false teaching, saying that they had caused many to stumble and had broken his covenant (Malachi 2:7-8).

While God kept His promise in the covenant and forgave His wayward people over and over again, it became painfully clear that humans were not capable of upholding their end of the agreement. So God promised a new covenant, one that could not be broken by human frailty (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This covenant would uproot the entire bureaucracy of priests and sacrifices and transform the world, not only of the Israelites, but of all people for all time.

Overthrowing the Old Covenant

When Jesus entered Jerusalem to the euphoric cheers of His followers, the people had high hopes of the Messiah conquering the Roman oppressors and restoring the throne of David. But each of Jesus' steps between the Triumphal Entry and the Via Dolorosa show that He was not targeting the political system but targeting the Old Covenant system instead. He is bringing in a New Covenant, not centered on the temple but centered on the cross.

All of Holy Week is filled with the escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Everything Jesus says and does offends the authorities and fans the flames of their hostility, but one controversy overshadows everything else: the temple. After Jesus' much-acclaimed ride into Jerusalem, He concludes His day by inspecting the temple (Mark 11:11). The next day He goes straight to the temple and cleans it out, driving out those who found a way to make money off of the pilgrims who came to sacrifice (Mark 11:15-17). The temple was the center of Jewish life, the instrument of the covenant. To assault the temple was to assault the heart and soul of the Jewish nation.

When Jesus cleans out the temple and throws out the money changers, it is possible to get the

“This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” He said to them. “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”

Mark 14:24,25

impression that the commerce in the temple was the source of Jesus' anger; certainly fleeing pilgrims in the name of God seems worthy of righteous indignation. But Jesus' anger was directed at something much deeper, illustrated by the strange event of the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14). On His way to clean out the temple, Jesus comes across a fig tree without any figs and so He curses it: “May no one ever eat fruit from you again” (Mark 11:14). The next day as Jesus and the disciples walk by the fig tree Peter notices that it had withered (Mark 11:21). What is going on here? Was this some arbitrary display of anger and power?

Between the cursing of the fig tree and its withering is Jesus' cleaning out of the temple. After driving out the money changers, Jesus, quoting the Old Testament, says, “Is it not written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’” (Mark 11:17)? The issue, first and foremost, was fruit—in the case of the temple, the fruit of prayer. The temple was to be producing the fruit of prayer in order to facilitate a spiritual interaction with God for the Jews and all the nations of the world. Instead of bearing the fruit of prayer, the Jewish leaders had “made it a den of robbers” (Mark 11:17). Since the temple and the religious system that sustained it had failed, Jesus was going to remove it. Jesus' cleaning out of the temple was only a graphic physical illustration of His intentions—the temple had to go. The cursing of the tree and its withering was a real-life parable showing His disciples His true intentions.

It is not surprising then that a few verses later, Jesus foretells the temple's destruction. “Do you see all these great buildings? ... Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down” (Mark 13:2). Nor is it surprising that when Jesus was hauled before the religious leaders, one of the charges against Him by false witnesses was that Jesus was going to physically destroy the temple. “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands’” (Mark 14:58).

Once we have the eyes to see it, the temple is at the center of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leadership, and all the events of Holy Week revolve around it. In fact, Jesus does destroy the temple system—not by pulling down the stones; the Romans will do that some 38 years later. Jesus destroys the temple and its system and brings in the promised Kingdom of God by His sacrificial death on the cross.

Tasting the New Covenant

On the night before He is crucified, Jesus has a meal with His disciples (Mark 14:12-26). During the meal, Jesus makes this startling statement: “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). Finally, here is the heart of Jesus' plan: A New Covenant in place of the Old. Instead of sacrificing animals continually to cleanse people of their sins, Jesus will sacrifice Himself, and His death will be the instrument of the New Covenant. Christ's sacrifice fulfills God's requirement for righteousness, once and for all (Hebrews 9:26-28). And no more sacrifices meant no more temple.

As the scene moves from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion, we see that the heart of this New

Covenant is not only sacrifice and forgiveness, it is also reconciliation. God's longing with each of His covenants had been to restore His relationship with His people. In the Old Covenant, however, only the High Priest could communicate directly to God in the Holy of Holies. Now, Mark describes the way God literally rips apart this barrier. "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:37-38). The temple system that contained and restrained God's presence under the control of the Jewish leaders was destroyed. God removed the final barrier that restricted our relationship, making Jesus' death on the cross the means by which we can once again enter into right relationship with the Father. Neither sin nor any other human barrier now stands between us. As Jesus promised, the Kingdom of God is now, literally, at hand.

Final Thoughts

Each time we eat the bread and drink the cup at the Lord's Table, we celebrate this New Covenant that God has offered us. We receive the gift of grace and atonement. We are reminded that through the cross, Jesus has removed all the barriers that stand between ourselves and right relationship with Him. We are marked with the sign of the New Covenant, and we are bound together in this simple meal. We are blessed to be a blessing, as we live out God's covenant and proclaim Jesus' death until He comes again.

Spending Time With God

This series "The Kingdom and the Cross" is a seven lesson study on the Cross. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Begin now by praying to God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. Read Exodus 20:1-6 and Deuteronomy 6:4-7. What would you say is the heart of the Covenant God makes with the Israelites?

3. How is the heart of the Old Covenant similar or different from the New Covenant? In what ways should we still follow the Old Covenant?



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 3

The Covenant and the Cross

4. What are some of the things that have changed since Christ brought in the New Covenant?

7. Read Romans 7:1-6. Paul uses the image of a marriage covenant to explain how we relate to the Old and New Covenants. The Law given at Mt. Sinai was understood to be a binding covenant, a marriage between God and Israel. The marriage failed through Israel's spiritual adultery and her consequent guilty, slavish compulsion to keep the smallest details of the Law. How has God solved the problem of this bad marriage through the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 7:4)?

5. Read Psalm 51. This is the song David wrote after Nathan confronted him on his sin of adultery. Spend some time in prayer and confession before the Lord. What does the Lord desire of you instead of sacrifice?

8. The word "forgive" literally means "to release." In light of Paul's teaching in these verses, how has Christ's death and resurrection brought release/forgiveness to us?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

9. Marriage is a covenant, a binding agreement between a man and a woman. What are some of the obligations that are part of our understanding of marriage in America?



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 3

The Covenant and the Cross

10. What are some of the consequences of being married to someone who is emotionally and sexually unfaithful?

11. Continuing with the metaphor of marriage, we could say that we have a new covenant, a new marriage with Christ. What were the results of our bad marriage before in our lives (Romans 7:5)? What now are the good results for our new covenant in Christ (Romans 7:4-6)?

12. How will the study of this passage help you live in the new life and new covenant?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. Read Hebrews 9: 1-16 (or chapters 8-10 if you have time). In what ways is Christ the mediator of a New Covenant?

14. How is our Christian faith related to the Old Testament?

15. Jesus was concerned to remove the barriers which separated us from God. What stands between you and entering into God's presence?

16. Consider Hebrews 10:18-31. What responsibilities do we have as people of the New Covenant? What happens if we sin again after we have received Christ's forgiveness? How can we encourage one another and build one another up to follow the New Covenant?

Scripture for Meditation

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Hebrews 9:14



Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law, and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate. “Are You the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.

Mark 15:1,2

Introduction

In JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, our hero Hobbits are helped by a scruffy, shadowy wanderer named Strider. At first, they don't know whether they can trust him. Then they are confused by how much he knows about their quest. As they encounter people from distant lands, they begin to realize that there is more to him than his appearance indicates. In the end, it is revealed that Strider, also known as Aragorn, is actually the rightful heir to the throne of the kingdom of Gondor. As they journey, they did not realize that their helper and guide was a king all along.

In the Gospel of Mark, we see the disciples traveling faithfully with their Guide and Teacher. Slowly over their months and years together, they begin to learn more about this man they follow. They come to realize that He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, though they are deeply troubled when Jesus tells them He must be crucified. However, it is not until the end of the book that the disciples fully understand who Jesus is. He is not only the promised One, He is the king.

We may be accustomed to hearing Jesus referred to as a king, but Mark does not use that title even once in the first fourteen chapters of his gospel. And then, in chapter 15, he uses it six times. What is the author trying to tell us with this? Mark had revealed the secret of Jesus the Messiah and the surprise of His upcoming crucifixion in the middle of the gospel. Why did he not call Him king at that point? Matthew referred to Him as king early in his gospel, with the Magi asking Herod to help them find the “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). Mark seems to wait until the last possible minute. When he does finally use the title of “King,” it is painfully obvious that he does not mean it in the usual earthly sense. He uses the term with great irony. Jesus is crowned and condemned at the same time. What kind of king is enthroned on a cross?

Announcement of the King

At the opening of Mark 15, Jesus has already been tried by the Sanhedrin and is standing before Pilate (Mark 15:1-5). Pilate's first question is, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus' replies, “Yes, it is as you say.” The chief priests continue to hurl accusations against Him, but He does not say another word. The answer to the first question is sufficient. The question is not, “Are You trying to be the king of the Jews?” Or “By what right do you call Yourself the king of the Jews?” It is a yes/no question, and the answer is yes.

No one but Caesar had the right to proclaim someone king. By referring to Himself as king, Jesus was claiming an authority even higher than Caesar, the ruler who considered himself a god. Jesus had absolutely no right to do that—unless, of course, He really did have an authority higher than Caesar. Asserting Himself as king was making a profound political statement in that context. Who was this Man who dared call Himself king in front of the Roman governor, while bound in chains and condemned by the very leaders of the Jews themselves? Was He insane? Or was He referring to a kingdom far different from the one run by the men gathered around Him?

They put a robe on Him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on Him. And they began to call out to Him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck Him on the head with a staff and spit on Him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took off the purple robe and put His own clothes on Him. Then they led Him out to crucify Him.

Mark 15:17-20

In the next scene, Pilate presents Jesus to the crowd outside (Mark 15:6-15). As was traditional during Passover, Pilate offered to release a prisoner. He asks the crowd, "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?," but they demand the criminal Barabbas instead. Then he asks, "What do you wish me to do with the man you call king of the Jews?" (v. 12). Their immediate response: "Crucify Him!" Pilate is puzzled by their response and asks, "Why? What crime has He done?"

This is an interesting question coming from Caesar's representative. Jesus' claim to the title of king was more than sufficient evidence for Pilate to accuse Him of insurrection. And yet there was something so compelling about Jesus that Pilate does not seem to hold this against Him.

Coronation and Enthronement

Once the crowd convinces Pilate that they want Barabbas released instead of Jesus, Pilate hands Jesus over to the Roman soldiers (Mark 15: 16-20). The soldiers are more than happy to taunt Jesus with this title He claims, and for the fourth time, Jesus is called the king. They take Him into the palace, clothe Him with a royal robe, crown His head with thorns, and mockingly bow before Him.

This scene presents a striking image. Here is the coronation of the King of Kings, the One before whom every knee will bow and tongue confess. He is in the palace of Jerusalem, the most appropriate royal residence for the king of Israel. And yet the soldiers have absolutely no idea that what they say is true.

After the soldiers have their fill of mockery, they take Jesus to Golgotha, Skull Hill. As they nail Him to the cross, they also inscribe a sign above His head that reads, "The King of the Jews." Here, in three languages, is the charge against Him, that He claimed power beyond Caesar. And here is the truth about Him, that He is the power above Caesar and every other earthly king. Here He is, enthroned on a cross instead of a jewel-encrusted seat of power. Here He is, high and lifted up, that all may be drawn unto Him.

The sixth and final use of the word "king" comes from the crowd themselves. Up to this point, only Gentiles have used the term "king." But now, the people say, "Let this Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15: 32). If only they could truly see the majesty of the dying King before them.

The final reference in Mark 15 to Jesus' sovereignty does not use the word "king." After Jesus breathes His last, a Roman centurion standing at His feet is the one person to realize who Jesus really is. The soldier says, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (v. 39). The fact that this statement comes from a Roman is particularly significant. Caesar considered himself to be the son of God. This Roman realizes that the authority of this king (the true King) is in fact greater than Caesar's.

The written notice of the charge against Him read: **THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save Yourself!"**

Mark 15:26-30

Victory of the King

Both the announcement of the coming crucifixion and resurrection combined with the event of the resurrection make the point that everything in these final days went according to Jesus' plan. Instead of seeing the cross as a failure, we must see the cross as the instrument of the kingdom and the means by which Jesus chose to commence His rule. It is the gate by which Jesus opens up the realm of eternal life. It is the demonstration of the character of God who embraces human suffering in order to transform it. It is the standard of citizenship, what Jesus expects of all who live in His kingdom. It inspires us to humble service because we want to be like the king.

In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, John Scott describes the crucifixion as the king's victory over the tyrannies of evil and death. He specifically identifies four tyrannies Jesus conquered: 1) the tyranny of the law, 2) the tyranny of the flesh, 3) the tyranny of the world, and 4) the tyranny of death. By breaking the power of the law, Jesus has freed us from the tyranny of condemnation. Romans 8:1-4 reminds us, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law in our stead and freed us to live under the rule of grace. Jesus has also conquered the tyranny of the flesh by breaking the bonds of our slavery to sin. No longer are we overpowered and driven by the desires of our "old nature", but we are set free to live under Christ's gracious rule, in right relationship with Himself and others. The third victory Jesus enacted on the cross was over the tyranny the world. This includes the ruler of this world, Satan, and the powers around us that pull us away from God. It also includes all the powers that hold the earth under control—the oppression, injustice, and horrible atrocities humans perform upon one another and upon all of God's creation. Finally, Jesus the King conquered the tyranny of death. We no longer need to be controlled by the fear of death, because Christ has overcome even that. "Where, O Death is your Victory? Where, O Grave, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Jesus is King, set in place by the authority of the Father, to rule over all the earth. His kingdom is not from this world—His power and authority comes from heaven (John 18:36). But His kingdom is very much over this world, as He brings everything into submission under the rule of God.

Final Thoughts

Christ was enthroned on that dark day, by subjects who had no idea of the truth they proclaimed. But there will come a day when Christ will return. On that day, there will be no doubt then about His identity. Everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow before Him and proclaim Him the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).



Spending Time with God

This series “The Kingdom and the Cross” is a seven lesson study on the Cross. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Begin now by praying to God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. The kingdom of God is the prevailing theme of Jesus’ teaching and ministry, but Mark does not actually call Jesus “king” until chapter 15. Matthew and John refer to Jesus as the King of the Jews in the early chapters of their gospels (Matthew 2:2, John 1:49, and John 6:15.) Why do you think Mark waits until the end to use this title?

3. Mark writes in a way that all the references to Jesus as king are ironic, that is, the speakers used the title not as homage, but as insults. In what different ways and by what different groups is Jesus mocked and insulted?

4. a. At the beginning of their reigns, kings and queens receive a coronation ceremony and are enthroned with much public acclamation. Are these elements, even if ironically, present in the crucifixion of Jesus?

b. What does Jesus’ mocking coronation and enthronement tell us about the kingdom of God?



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 4

The Coronation on the Cross

c. Have you ever been mocked because of anything you believe? Write down your experiences.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

6. It is perhaps the ultimate irony that Jesus' initiation into the kingdom of God took place by his death at the hands of His enemies. How have you experienced the irony of Jesus' kingdom as one of His followers?

7. The mocking of Jesus related to the temple is also ironic (Mark 15:29). How is Jesus replacing the temple at that very moment (compare to 15:38)?

8. There is even some truth to the mocking statement of chief priest (Mark 15: 32) about coming down from the cross. What would have happened to Christianity if His crucifixion had been the end? (See also 1 Corinthians 15:17.)

9. The nature of spiritual blindness is such that we can say what is true but miss the true meaning. How many different expressions of spiritual blindness can you find in this passage?

10. What kinds of spiritual blindness do you see in your community? In the world around you?

11. In the midst of all of the mocking there is one statement of affirmation, made by the Roman centurion after Jesus died (Mark 15:39). How has Jesus' death affected the way that you see Him?

12. Have you had an "aha" moment with Jesus—a moment where you see clearly either something about His person or his plan? Describe that moment to the group.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. What do you think are the most significant aspects of Jesus being the King? How does this facet bring out a different perspective from His titles of "Savior," "Redeemer," "Lord," and even "Messiah?"

14. Read Psalm 2. Describe the image of the coronation of the King portrayed here. In what ways is this psalm prophetic about Jesus' coming kingship?

15. The commentary lists four areas where Christ the King conquered tyrannies that rule over us: the law, the flesh, the world, and death. Would you agree with this list or add anything? How do you see these areas impacting your life? What difference does it make that Christ is King over these areas?

Scripture for Meditation

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard His cry and saw how He died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Mark 15:37-39



For you know it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

1 Peter 1:18-20

Introduction

In the first lesson of this series, we recalled the lion Aslan, in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, who offered to give his life to save the traitor, Edmund. Edmund had fallen under the control of the evil witch, lured by an innocent-looking box of Turkish Delights. When Aslan offered his life in place of Edmund's, Aslan saved him and also reversed the power over death, so that Aslan himself was able to come back to life.

This is a beautiful depiction of Christ's death on the cross. However, it only scratches the surface of all that Christ accomplished. Jesus did not die for one, He died for all. He did not conquer death once, He conquered it for all time. Jesus did not cancel the debt only for past sins, He did so for the sins of generation after generation of those who would follow Him. Scriptures offer us a rich picture of all the many things Jesus achieved on the cross. Theologian Stanley Grenz highlights four of these accomplishments in particular: Jesus is our redeemer, our mercy, our example, and our reconciliation. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He had truly done an incredible work.

Jesus Our Redeemer

In the Old Testament book of Ruth, the widow Naomi found herself in a very difficult place. She had no husband to protect her, no sons to provide for her, and, since she was beyond the age of childbearing, there was no hope of any future sons to care for her. She could rely only on her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, who gathered grain left behind by the field workers. But in the Hebrew culture, they were not completely without hope. The tradition of the "kinsman-redeemer" provided that a close relative could purchase their land, marry Ruth, and, in so doing, redeem both women from their hopelessness. Along came the faithful Boaz, who agreed to buy the land and marry Ruth. When their first son was born, they gave him to Naomi so that her line could continue. And that son, Obed, went on to become the grandfather of King David, from whose line the Messiah would come.

This story is often told to exemplify Ruth's faithfulness, but it is Naomi to whom we, the fallen ones, should most identify. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We are without protection, without anyone to provide for us, without any means of saving ourselves. We are in desperate need of a redeemer.

The ideas of redemption and ransom are almost identical, and indeed many translations of the Bible use these words interchangeably. Scripture uses the image of ransom many times, as in 1 Timothy 2:6, Jesus "gave Himself a ransom for all." Indeed, Romans 6 reminds us that we are slaves to sin and deeply in debt because of it. In fact, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). All we have earned for ourselves is death, cloaked in a mask of false freedom. We are held captive, and we need both rescue from sin and repayment of the debt we owe. Through Christ's death on the cross, the ransom is paid and we are set free.

And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Revelation 5:9-10

The problem with the ransom image, however, is its limited focus. The focus is on the economic transaction, not the goal of the one paying. The nuance added in the word “redemption” is the restoration of relationship. The power of Boaz’s actions with Ruth and Naomi is that he not only pays a price, he does so to bring them into relationship with himself. He even gives up his first-born son for Naomi. In this same way, through the One born from the line of Boaz and Ruth, God gives His own Son up for us, to restore us to Himself. We see this emphasized in the book of Revelation, when the elders and creatures sing a song of praise to the Lamb Who was Slain: “With Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). It was precisely for God that this purchase was made, so that God’s relationship to His people could be restored.

Jesus Our Mercy

In Lesson 3 of this series, we discussed the link between the Old Covenant (Law) and the New Covenant established by Jesus’ death on the cross. Under the Old Covenant, sacrifices were offered to God to provide a covering for the sins of the Israelites. They offered the sacrifices both for God and for the people: God received a sacrifice, and the people received forgiveness. Under the New Covenant, Jesus took the place of the atoning sacrifices required by the law. He offered Himself to be our eternal sacrifice, giving God the sacrifice He required and giving us forgiveness. Jesus became our cover, blanketing our sins by His righteous blood. John writes in his first epistle, “[Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2), and “the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Jesus’ sacrifice completed God’s requirements under the law and it changed us forever. The impact of this gift of mercy is the same impact of redemption: restored relationship.

Through Jesus, God provided both the means of mercy and the mercy itself. He offered up His Son to be the perfect sacrifice. And through this incredible gift, not through any merit of our own, He gave us forgiveness. Christ’s blood has made us clean. As Grenz writes, “Because Christ’s atoning sacrifice covers sin, God is now able righteously to forgive our sins and to declare us righteous, resulting in a restored relationship.”

Now that we are cleansed and restored to right relationship, Jesus’ blood also prepares us for our new life. The author of *Hebrews* writes that if even a goat’s blood can make one outwardly clean, “How much more, then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14) Through the Lord’s mercy, we are granted mercy, restoration, and a new life in Christ.

Jesus Our Example

Many evangelicals cringe when they hear that Jesus’ death on the cross is our example. Some Christians have distorted this aspect of the cross until it has become the only accomplishment they acknowledge. They emphasize the greater love of giving one’s life for a friend (John 15:13),

Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:34-35

while neglecting our great need for forgiveness and covering for real sin. They speak of Jesus as the “Good Samaritan,” who pulls us out of a ditch, but neglect the brokenness that put us in the ditch in the first place. Following this path, it is easy to see how some have slid away from understanding Jesus as divine, limiting His role in their lives to that of teacher and example, but not Lord and Savior.

However, it is also important not to “throw the baby out with the bath water.” Jesus commands us to take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). The Apostle Paul reminds us that we must have the same mind-set as Christ, who “humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5, 8). We are the servants of the upside-down Kingdom. We are not to seek power; we are to seek the way of sacrifice. We are to honor God no matter what the cost and to trust that God’s justice will be done—in God’s time, whether that means it is in this life or the next. By having this mind of Christ, we too, can be in right relationship both with God and with each other.

Jesus Our Reconciliation

Each of these different aspects of Christ’s accomplishments on the cross have led to one thing: reconciliation. By paying the price for us, God bought us for Himself, that we might be the “Bride of Christ.” By offering us mercy through Jesus’ blood, we are able to approach the throne of grace with gladness. By giving us Jesus as an example of how to live, we can order our lives so that we glorify God and restore our relationships to one another as well. Reconciliation is the heart of God’s ministry to us. Paul writes that God “reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). In the next lesson, we will explore this ministry of reconciliation, looking at how Jesus’ accomplishments on the cross affect the way we live our lives today.

Final Thoughts

The entire Bible is the unfolding story of our God, who longs to be in relationship with us—who are created in His own image. That relationship was broken by Adam’s sin, but even from the moment of the Fall, God did not stop seeking restoration. Through His covenants and laws He guided His people back to Himself. None of these means provided a lasting reconciliation, though. But through Jesus’ death on the cross, He accomplished this once and for all. One song says, “You would rather die than to ever live without me.” Jesus paid this incredible price to purchase us out of slavery, grant us forgiveness for our sins, and lead us forth into a new life. Jesus did this all through His blood shed on the cross, all so that we might be in right relationship to our God. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God” (1John 3:1)!

Spending Time With God

This series “The Kingdom and the Cross” is a seven lesson study on the Cross. The devotion ques-



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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

3. What must it have been like for Naomi to have Ruth accompany her home? Write down a time in your own life where someone has shown you faithfulness in a difficult situation.

4. Read Ruth 4. What sacrifices must Boaz make to redeem Ruth and Naomi?

5. What similarities are there between Boaz's redemption of Ruth and Naomi, and God's redemption of us?

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. Read Ruth 1. With whom do you identify more—Ruth or Naomi? Have you ever felt completely helpless?

6. Meditate for a few minutes on how God has redeemed you. From what kinds of captivity did He release you? How has that changed your relationship to Him?



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 5

The Accomplishment of the Cross

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

11. Imagine yourself standing before God's judgment seat without the covering of Christ's blood. What would that be like? Now imagine yourself standing before God with the righteousness of Christ's blood. How is that different from the first picture?

8. Read Hebrews 9:11-28. What did Old Covenant sacrifices accomplish?

12. What are the sources of guilt that God has removed through the work of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:13-15)? How is it that God has been able to remove that guilt through the cross?

9. What similarities are there between Jesus' sacrifice and Old Covenant sacrifices? What differences are there?

13. Even though God has removed our guilt, we still sin. What sorts of things can we do on a daily or weekly basis to deal with our sin and guilt?

10. What impact does Christ's death and sacrifice have on our lives?



Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. Read Philippians 2:1-11. The commentary describes the tensions that exist in the church today surrounding the idea that Jesus is an example. What do you think Paul's response would be to this?

15. What are some of the ways you can live more like Jesus, specifically through Paul's charge here?

16. Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. In what ways has God worked to reconcile us to Himself?

17. How would you describe our ministry of reconciliation? What can you do as an individual to help accomplish this? What can you do as a church to do this?

Scripture for Meditation

Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!

Romans 5:9-10



When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, He sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna! “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

Mark 11:7-10

Introduction

It must have been quite a scene. Pilgrims from all over the country, all over the world, lined the streets. Jews came from as far away as Greece and Rome for the annual Passover feast, and even Samaritans and Gentiles were probably caught up in the throngs. Young and old alike craned their necks to see the Man, the legend, come down the street. Children waved their palm branches to greet this Man from Nazareth, the One who raised people from the dead. Rich and poor threw their cloaks along the cobblestones to make way for the miracle worker. What would He look like? What would He do? Would He really be their Messiah, the Anointed One, the One for whom their people had prayed for 400 years? “Hosanna!” they cried, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” In one voice, this multitude roared in praise of the Man slowly making His way into Jerusalem on the borrowed colt of a donkey—the Man who had His eyes set on something far greater than a throne. He had His eyes set on a cross.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem that day, His very actions made it clear that He was not a typical conquering hero. He came in on a donkey, not a great Arabian stallion like a conquering military hero. He came with a rag-tag bunch of disciples on foot, not with a battalion of armed warriors. He came not to lay siege to the palace, but to lay down His life. And all of this was so that we could be reconciled to God.

Healing the Broken

Those few moments of triumph on the first Palm Sunday give us a glimpse into the perfection we are promised when “Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess” that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10). When the Lord comes again, we will all be joined together to praise our Messiah, our Savior, no matter what our age, race, gender, or nationality. We too—in that moment—will cry out with one voice, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Unfortunately, for the moment, that image of perfect harmony is very far away from us. It is difficult for American Christians to worship together, much less Christians of other nationalities. In fact, many wars have pitted Christian against Christian, as the Germans fought the French and English in the two World Wars, and the Orthodox Serbians fought the Catholic Croats just a few years ago. Even today, it’s been said that 11:00 AM on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. If we as Christians cannot agree to get along, what hope do we have to find reconciliation among other nations or other religions?

There is truly nothing new under the sun, and we can trace the roots of the brokenness we see in our society today all the way back to Adam and Eve. After Adam and Eve tasted the forbidden fruit, we instantly see a break in their relationship with God and also with each other. First, the guilty couple hides in the bushes when God shows up for a walk with them (Genesis 3:8). Next, they are eager to pass the buck as Adam blames Eve (Genesis 3:12) and Eve blames the Serpent (Genesis 3:13). The fraying and fragmenting of relationships carries over even into their relationship with creation, as God curses the ground and Adam must experience “painful toil” (Genesis

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

Ephesians 2:1-3

3:17-19) in the cultivation of their food.

The relational fraying and fragmenting continued violently into the next generation when Cain killed Abel. It is sobering to think that the firstborn human, Cain, was a murderer. It is even more sobering to realize that the first murder was religiously motivated! Cain was murderously furious with his brother, Abel because Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's was rejected (Genesis 4:3-8).

Reading through Genesis prologue we arrive at the account of the Tower of Babel in which God frowns on the attempt of the human race to build an international city with a "tower that reaches to the heavens" (Genesis 11:3). All the tongues of the earth had united together, all right, but they did so to worship themselves, not God! So God confuses their languages to prevent them from ever accomplishing that again (Genesis 11:7).

The source of all this conflict is failure to trust God. We think we can trust in ourselves and become gods. When we turn from our Master God, then sin masters our lives instead. Once Adam and Eve broke faith with God, it was inevitable that they broke faith with each other. Living in competition and conflict with each other, it is not surprising that their children did the same. Further, it must be noted that the human experience of estrangement in the world is intensified as God Himself curses the ground so that it is naturally resistant to human efforts and then confuses the languages at Babel. Could anything or anyone ever heal this enormous chasm dividing us both from God and each other?

God Sends the Peace Child

A missionary named Don Richardson tells the story of trying to serve as a missionary to a tribe in a remote area of Indonesia. He struggled to find some way of explaining to the tribe what it meant that Jesus had died on the cross and rose again. This was made more difficult by the fact that this tribe and another neighboring group were involved in a generations-long brutal warfare. Finally, the chief of the local tribe decided they must do something to bring peace. After much grief and mourning, he and his wife gave their own son to the other tribe. The chief explained to Richardson that their culture had a tradition that as long as this "Peace Child" lived, there would be peace between the tribes. But if he was killed, the war would resume.

Richardson realized that this was the perfect image of what God had done for us. Nothing could bring about peace until God sent His own Son, as a "Peace Child" to us. But we rejected Him anyway. We killed Him. But not even that could stop God's work for peace. God brought Jesus back to life, to prove that absolutely nothing could separate us from His love for us. He even conquered death, to bring us back into relationship with Himself.

Out of His grace and love, God makes it possible for humans to be reconnected to each other by first reconnecting back to God through the cross. When Jesus was crucified, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), opening access for all into the presence of

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-13

God. By Jesus’ death, “God has reconciled us to Himself” (2Cor. 5:19), and He will allow us access to His presence (Ephesians 2:18). When we were enemies of God, Christ died for us and we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ who made peace by the blood of His cross (Romans 5:1-10).

Reconnecting Community

Not only is the veil between God and humanity removed by Christ’s cross, the barrier between humans is removed by Christ’s cross as well. There was a sign posted in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem that warned Gentiles that they were forbidden to go beyond the entry level, the Courtyard of the Gentiles. Paul writes that Jesus “has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14) referring to that wall. Through His death, Christ has broken down the barriers erected to keep out the Gentiles. Where before Jews and Gentiles were hostile to each other, Christ has made peace by His cross so that now together Jew and Gentile “both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18).

As we embrace the cross we are restored into harmony with God and each other. Competition and conflict at all levels resolve at the foot of the cross, in the place of humble surrender.

Final Thoughts

If Christ’s cross has created a reconciled community, then why are we so divided? Why are we so mono-cultural, mono-racial and mono-generational? Could it be that there is a lack of knowledge, lack of experience and a lack of vision of the cross? Could it be that we have failed to understand the cross as removing the barriers that drive division? And have we failed to practice the cross as lifestyle of reconciliation? Whether Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, each of us must surrender to the cross of Christ. No race, nationality, or other arbitrary division of humankind has a privileged place before God; nor is one generation more special to God than another.

Paul reminds us that because God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, He also “gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). Our calling as His Church is to take up our cross, to take up this ministry of reconciliation and be ambassadors of God’s peace—even when it means taking it to our “enemies.” We are surrounded by dividing walls that God calls us to tear down. It can be a long, difficult, and discouraging work, but we must all keep our eyes on the promise of living at last in perfect harmony. We, together with all of creation, long for the day when we will join in with “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. [We will be] wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9). And together with our palm branches held high, we will all cry out in one voice, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”



Spending Time With God

This series “The Kingdom and the Cross” is a seven lesson study on the Cross. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are for small groups; members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Begin now by praying to God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. What different words do you find that express exclusion? What words do you find that express inclusion?

3. Write down several areas where you see dividing walls and broken relationships around you:

In your family

In your church

In your community

In the nation and world

4. What promises can you find in Ephesians 2 that affect these relationships?

5. Spend some time in prayer, lifting up to God these areas in need of reconciliation. What specifically would you like to see God do in these areas?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.



7. In Ephesians 2, Paul mentions a great deal of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Are there ways in which you have experienced exclusion either because of race or some other social prejudice? How did it affect you?

b. What was the original intent of this promise (see Genesis 12:2-3)?

8. Paul writes that the Gentiles were “Without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Why do you think he makes such a point about their pre-Christian condition?

10. Paul explains how Christ's death on the cross creates the church (Ephesians 2:13-18). Based on Paul's teaching in these verses describe in your own words the essential character of the church.

11. Before our faith in Christ we were foreigners and aliens (2:19). Now, in Christ we are citizens and members of God's family. How are citizens and members different from foreigners and aliens?

9. God made a covenant with Abraham, that his descendants would be the chosen people of God.

a. According to the passage in Ephesians, how had this great promise to the Jewish nation become a problem for the Gentiles?

12. Because of Jesus' work, the church is supposed to be a place of social and racial reconciliation. How does your church experience reflect that? How can it grow in this area?



13. What divides churches in your town? From this list, what would you say are the top three factors: theology, race, politics, class, economics, lifestyle, morality, worship style, tradition, or other factors. What are a few ways your church could bring reconciliation into these areas?

16. Describe for one another an experience you have had where a broken relationship has been healed through Jesus Christ. Or, how has God's peace affected your relationships at home, in your church, and/or in your community?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. Write down several insights you discover about Jesus Christ and reconciliation from the following passages:

Romans 5:1-10

1 Corinthians 5:18-21

Hebrews 10:19-24

15. In your own words, based on these passages, how would you explain our "job description" as ministers of reconciliation? What are the most important parts of the message God has given to us?

Scripture for Meditation

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19



So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell His disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me.”

Matthew 28:8-10

Introduction

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. It is wonderful that Jesus was raised from the dead. It is fitting that many churches wave flags, fill the chancel with flowers and add trumpets, trombones and brass to the choir. The defeat of death and the beginning of the new creation is worth shouting about!

But after all the shouting and singing on Easter, we go home and life goes on—life in a broken world still very much in need of a savior. Jesus’ resurrection raises a number of pressing questions. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then why isn’t He here now? Where did Jesus go? The answer, “He went to heaven,” may seem like an evasion or an excuse. To understand this mystery fully, we must explore how His presence in heaven completes the biblical narrative that began in the Garden with Adam and Eve in Genesis and finds its consummation in the book of Revelation. Jesus is the “Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:18), and we will join in the chorus of the entire communion of saints as we sing, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12).

A Glimpse of Heaven

If we are to understand what Jesus is doing in heaven, then we need a glimpse of what is going on there. We can do that through the eyes of John, beginning in chapter 4 of the book of Revelation. In his meditations, John hears a voice which invites him into the very courts of the Lord (Revelation 4:1). He is awed by the colorful sights of the One who sits on the throne and by those beings, human and celestial, that surround Him. (4:2-6). John hears unceasing praise that swirls through heaven celebrating God’s holy character and God’s power expressed in creation (4:8-11).

As chapter 5 begins, we read about a crisis in heaven. There is a sealed scroll in the hand of God which needs to be opened. Initially, it appears that no one is worthy to open it. John is overwhelmed with grief and it is not immediately clear why (5:1-4). What is going on? Then Jesus steps forward and great rejoicing breaks out. Those gathered break out in song, praising the Lamb and saying, “You were slain, and with Your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9). Jesus’ crucifixion made Him worthy and enabled Him to save all of us from the power of sin and death.

Saving the World

If God’s world is to be restored, then death, sin and all corrupting forces need to be arrested, judged, and removed. The problem is that in this world, God determined to rule through human stewards: “Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness so that they may rule” (Genesis 1:26-27). After Adam and Eve fell, there was the degenerating spread of evil which showed up first in the murder of Abel and then goes downhill from there. As Paul quotes in Romans, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

seeks God” (Romans 3:10-11). As great as people like Moses, David, and Paul have been, still, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). At the end of history, in the throne room of heaven, John sees that there is no human who can take up the role of God’s agent to execute God’s justice. And without someone standing up for humanity, then the world will come to an ugly end. Therefore, John is full of grief.

Son of Man, Son of God

But there is hope. The prophet Daniel described a vision which is the key to understanding this scene in heaven in Revelation 5. Daniel writes of a court room in heaven in which the “Ancient of Days” takes His seat and the Books of Judgment are opened and the causes of evil are condemned (Daniel 7:9-12). The judgment unfolds as new figure appears: “In my vision at night, I looked and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and people of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

The Son of Man, in Daniel, is the human given authority from God to execute His rule on earth; He is the true heir of Adam. It is no coincidence that Jesus’ favorite title for Himself was “the Son of Man” recorded 78 times in the four gospels. He could have chosen the titles “Son of David” or “Son of God” as they were true of Him as well and expressed His mission from different perspectives. However, it is the title “Son of Man” which shows Him to be the true regent of God’s world. Jesus is fully human and fully God—He is able to take on the frail flesh of humanity while maintaining God’s perfect love and wisdom.

As the Son of Man, Jesus can do what Adam and Eve forfeited because of their faithless betrayal. He has authority on earth. Jesus can forgive sin as He does when He heals the paralytic: “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin” (Mark 2:10). He can also execute condemnation, which He is about to do as He stands in the throne room of heaven. Just as in the scene from Daniel, Jesus takes the scroll from the hand of God (Revelation 5:7). When He does so all the creatures in heaven break loose with new songs of celebration (Revelation 5:9-13). God’s plan to restore the cosmos can be consummated.

God My Savior

In chapter 5 of Revelation, Jesus, as the Son of Man, is about to execute judgment on the sin of the entire human race—a terrifying task which is recorded with vivid images in Revelation 6-20. What right does He have to do this? Those in heaven, who celebrate His coming judgment, attribute His worthiness and His right to judge to His crucifixion. “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because you were slain” (Revelation 5:9). Jesus is worthy specifically because He has faced the darkness of evil and sin head on, received in His person, body, and soul, all its destructive consequences, and then conquered them through His resurrection.

And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Revelation 5:9-10

Before that judgment begins, we are reminded that Jesus is the savior. Four times, Jesus is called the “Lamb” in chapter 5. Drawing upon the Passover (Exodus 12), the image of the Lamb invites us to see that God offers salvation, but not only to Israel from slavery and death in Egypt, or even through the atonement of the Old Covenant. Instead, the salvation through the blood of this Lamb is for all people for all time: “He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). Because Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, He saves “members of every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9) from sin and death. Wow!

It is by means of His cross that Jesus exercises authority as the Lamb “who sits on the throne” (Revelation 5:13). The cross was the instrument of His Kingdom. On it, Jesus was enthroned as the King of the Kings. On it, He exercised the saving power of God. His death demonstrated the character of God. And finally, by His blood shed on the cross, Jesus made a new covenant for a new creation which He brings about when He rose from the dead. The cross is absolutely central to Christ’s person, His kingdom, His accomplishments, His character, and His covenant. We could not have a Kingdom of God without it.

Thy Kingdom Come

Why did Jesus ascend to heaven after the resurrection? On that hill in Galilee, Jesus appeared to His disciples and commissioned them to go unto all the earth, sharing the good news of the gospel in his name (Matthew 28:16-20). Then in Luke 24:51 we are told that He rose up into heaven. And with His rising, the kingdom of God moved from a local experience in Palestine in the first century A.D. to a universal kingdom with sovereignty over both heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). By ascending to heaven, Jesus is at the right hand of God from which He rules. As He takes authority, He fulfills the vision of Daniel, in which universal authority is given to the Son of Man, and it is in the throne room of heaven that He will execute His justice.

No wonder there is a celebration in heaven! No wonder we celebrate with songs, instruments and flags on Easter. We will go home Easter afternoon with gratitude for what Jesus achieved and with anticipation for the next actions of His saving rule. We can trust Him, because He has proved worthy to handle all the authority He has been given. And as those who have been purchased by His blood and who have been made “a kingdom and priests” to reign on earth, we share in His kingdom work. While we look forward to his finishing that which He has begun, we have work to do. And as we work, we join with John and the other apostles, to listen for His words, “‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Spending Time With God

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Begin now by praying to God for special insight into His Word.

Deliver us from evil

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the cross for which you are especially thankful to God.

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Consider the Lord's Prayer from the perspective of Revelation 5. What new insights do you gain about these phrases in particular?

3. Read Revelation 5:9-14. Take a few moments to write your own song of praise to the Lamb. Spend time in prayer and meditation, considering what Jesus has done for you through His death on the cross.

Hallowed be Thy name

Thy kingdom come

Discussion (Small Group Study)

Thy will be done

4. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

On earth as it is in heaven

5. Chapter 5 begins with the image of a throne and a sealed scroll (Revelation 5:1). As subsequent chapters of Revelation make clear, this is the scroll of judgment (Revelation 6-21). How do you feel knowing that God is going to judge the world?

Forgive us our debts/trespasses



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 7

The Celebration of the Cross

6. Read Romans 8:31-39. Consider in these verses: Who is the judge? Who is the prosecuting attorney? Who is the defense attorney? Who has paid the penalty for our crime? In what ways do these verses impact your understanding of judgment in Revelation?

7. Jesus' royal Jewish origins are important in His task of judgment; He is referred to as "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (Revelation 5:5). What pictures/images of Jesus do you get from these phrases? (For further reading, look up the original images in Genesis 49:9-12, Hosea 5:14, and Isaiah 11:1-10).

8. After Jesus is described as royalty, John sees Jesus as the Lamb (Revelation 5:6). What pictures/images of Jesus do you get from this phrase?

9. The title "Lamb" is intended to evoke images of the Jewish Passover (Exodus 12) in which Israel is delivered from slavery in Egypt. We were never slaves in Egypt of course, but the Scriptures say that we were once slaves to sin, darkness, and evil (Romans 6:16; Ephesians 2:1-4). Where do you see the presence of spiritual slavery in the world today?

10. How are you aware of spiritual slavery in your own life? How have you experienced spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ?

11. The first song (Revelation 5:9-10) is the longest. For what is the Lamb celebrated? What do you learn about the kingdom of God from this first song to Jesus?

12. What do these verses have to say to character, composition and activity of the Church today? What might need to change in your life in order to live within the spirit of this song?



SERIES

THE KINGDOM AND THE CROSS | THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

LESSON 7

The Celebration of the Cross

13. The chorus of praise for the Lamb continues to swell for the two final songs of chapter 5 (Revelation 5:11,13). How might your worship be different if you were aware that you were sharing in this vast cosmic worship?

16. God's saving of the world arrives in fresh power when Jesus begins to proclaim the kingdom of God. Is there a particular portion of the Gospels that you find helpful in understanding God's saving work?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. After reading Revelation 5 (and the previous studies in this series), how would you explain to a friend that the cross is the solution to the problem of pain and evil?

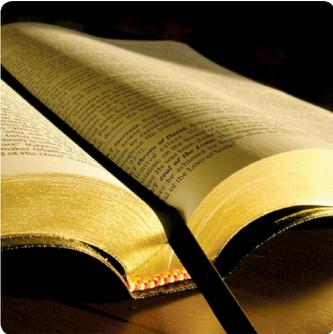
17. What might you understand about the kingdom of God in fresh ways after this series of the Kingdom and the Cross?

15. God's saving of the world comes through the Jewish nation, and the Old Testament is a record of this. Is there a particular portion of the Old Testament that you find helpful in understanding God's saving work?

Scripture for Meditation

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Revelation 5:9-10



BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/. (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?"
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
 - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
 - b. Discuss the format of the BNEXT study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.
3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)
 4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week
 6. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.

2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)

3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

5. Dismissal

SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
 - Go to ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/ for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
 - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.
 - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).