

Small Group Leader Notes

Matthew 26:57-75

Context

The plot against Jesus (26:1-5) - The religious leaders have been planning to arrest and kill Jesus but they don't want it to happen during the passover festival. It looks like they are in control of events but really it's Jesus who is in control (see 16:21, 26:1, 26:20-25) and things will happen when he wants.

Peter's Denial of Jesus - Jesus has not only prophesied his death (26:1-2) and his betrayal by Judas (26:20-25) he has also prophesied Peter's denial (26:31-35) which is tragically fulfilled in our passage. The picture that is building therefore is that events are unfolding just as Jesus said they would.

The Old Testament witness to Jesus - Arguably the key verse in the passage is v64 when Jesus says, "... from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." This brings together Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 to make a powerful statement about Jesus. From Psalm 110 we see that he is God's Son, the cosmic King who will come to judge and destroy his enemies. Similarly from Daniel 7 we see that Jesus is the Son of Man who has been given all power, glory and authority to reign over his everlasting kingdom. Again we're told that he will come in judgment on his enemies and to bring his people eternal salvation and rest in his kingdom.

Big Idea

Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah, the cosmic King who will come again to bring judgment on his enemies and salvation for his people!

It's really important that our groups see this because the identity of Jesus is central to this passage. It's what the leaders needed to know - they were killing God's Son, the eternal king and judge. It was also what Peter lost sight of in the courtyard. When the pressure was on and people were crowding around, Peter was more concerned about what these people thought of him rather than Jesus, his eternal King and judge.

Application

This passage invites us to see ourselves in Peter. At one time or another every Christian will have been in a situation where they were ashamed to be a Christian or didn't speak when they should have. Alongside recognising our failures we also need to see afresh who Jesus is because when we remember that he's God's King and judge and that one day we will see him it encourages us to stand up boldly for Jesus.

Questions

Starter - Peter had been very confident that he'd not deny Jesus but when the pressure was on he crumbled. Have there been times when you have been embarrassed to be a Christian? Can you think of times when you stayed silent when you should have spoken up?

This is perhaps quite a personal question to start with so if you use this question then you need to have an example from your own life that you can share to help the group to open up and be honest.

1. Look at v57-68. What accusations are made against Jesus?

Jesus is accused of planning to destroy God's temple (see John 2:19-21 for the background.) When the high priest realises that their efforts are getting them nowhere he confronts Jesus directly under oath to say once and for all whether he is 'the Messiah the Son of the living God?'

2. How does Jesus respond to these accusations?

Jesus is at first silent and only chooses to respond when directly challenged as to his divine identity.

- Why do you think he remains silent in v63 but answers in v64?

If Jesus is going to be killed then he wants them to kill him for being the Messiah. He wants them to know exactly who it is that they are condemning to death. Jesus is orchestrating everything so that he will go to the cross at just the right time and for just the 'right' reason.

3. What does Jesus want them to know about him?

Jesus wants them to know that he is the Messiah (God's Anointed King) and God's Son who will come again in judgment. You might find it useful to get your group to look at Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 to dig into these passages to flesh out what Jesus meant in v64. Perhaps you could divide the group into two smaller groups then each group could study and report back on one of the passages each.

- What's the warning to those who aren't Christians?

The religious leaders think that this is the last that they are going to see of Jesus. Jesus is warning them that they will see him again and then the tables will be turned. Now they sit in judgment of him but when they meet again he will be the judge and they will be the judged. This is a warning to all of us - we will see Jesus and when we see him it will be as our judge!

- How does this reassure Christians?

Whilst it's a warning that we will see Jesus as our judge it is also a reassurance to Christians. When you look at Daniel 7 it is striking that when Christ returns it will be to bring salvation for his people so that they will live with him in his kingdom. Now we can face persecution, opposition and hostility. We can be mistreated because of Jesus but we need to lose heart, Jesus will come again as judge and every wrong will be put right.

4. Look at v69-75. How do you think Peter was feeling as he followed Jesus into the courtyard?

- How do you think he was feeling as the people questioned him?

There aren't really right or wrong answers to these questions. They are just designed to help us resonate with Peter and get into the story. I'm sure many of us know what it's like for feelings of bravery to give way to fear.

5. How will Jesus' words in v64 help you next time you feel embarrassed or are tempted to stay silent?

*In many ways this is similar to the last part of Q3 but this time we want to really apply what Jesus has said about himself to those times when we are embarrassed about being Christians. This provides us with a chance to talk **and pray** about particular situations where we find it hard to stand up for Jesus. Again you will need to be prepared to set an example of being honest and open.*

Matthew 27:27-44

Small Group Leader Notes

Context

This passage is rich with fulfilment from both the Old Testament and Matthew's gospel. Psalm 22:6-18 finds its fulfilment in the dividing of Jesus' clothes (27:35), the mocking shake of the head (27:39) and mocking words (27:43.) The mocking offer of a bitter drink (27:34) is a fulfilment of Psalm 69:19-21. There numerous fulfilment from the passages in Isaiah that speak of the suffering servant (see Isaiah 50:6, 53:3-9.) It is also important to see that these events fulfil Jesus' own words in Matthew 16:21.

It is also important to see this passage in the context of the rest of the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:20-25 shows us that the way Jesus suffered is to be an example to us. Similarly we need to see that Jesus practised what he preached in the sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5:11-12, 5:38-48.)

Big Idea

Matthew emphasises Jesus' kingship (v37-31, v37, v40, v42) and the mockery that he receives (v31, v34, v39, v41, v44.) Through allusions to the Old Testament we see not only Jesus' sovereign control but also the salvation that his suffering is winning for us. Putting this together we can say that Jesus is the mocked king that we need.

Applications

We could draw out a number of applications from this passage but I suggest keeping the focus to just a few.

Firstly, there is great comfort for believers in knowing that King Jesus was still in total control even as he was mocked and crucified. Even though what was happening was terrible it was all going according to plan. We might not want a king who is mocked and suffers but his sovereignty even as he suffers gives us hope and comfort in suffering even if it doesn't provide us with all the answers we might want.

Secondly, 1 Peter 2 shows us that these events provide us with an example to follow when we suffer unjustly at the hands of others. Jesus didn't retaliate or threaten those who mocked and crucified him, instead he entrusted himself to his Father. Jesus not only calls us to imitate him by not retaliating, he also shows us that the key to doing this is to entrust ourselves to our Heavenly Father. The more confident I am in God's love for me and his concern for justice the more I will be able to leave room for his justice rather than seeking to take matters into my own hands.

Questions

Starter - Can you think of a time when someone said or did something to you that left you wanting to get revenge?

We're driving towards the application that comes from 1 Peter 2 where we're told that Christ has set us an example of not retaliating but instead entrusting ourselves to God. To get us going in the right direction we need to start by talking about times when we have been wronged. Be prepared to share an example where you were hurt or wronged if the conversation is slow to get started.

1. Divide your group into smaller groups and look at the following passage; Psalm 22:6-18, Psalm 69:19-21, Isaiah 50:6, Isaiah 53:3-9 and Matthew 16:21.

- **How are these passages fulfilled in the crucifixion?**
- **What do they teach us about Jesus?**

Give each little sub-group one or two passages to look at and then get them to report back what they have seen and learnt.

2. The precise fulfilment of the Old Testament shows us that Jesus is in complete control even as he is being mocked and crucified.

- **How can this comfort and encourage us when we are suffering or going through tough times?**
- **Who do you know who could be encouraged by this? How will you share this with them?**

As Christians we do not have all the answers in every incidence of suffering but we do have great hope and comfort because of the cross. Because Jesus suffered we have a King who is not cold and distant. He is sympathetic, he knows the pain of this world and so he is close to us in our suffering. There may be specific difficult situations that members of the group are going through right now. This will require care and sensitivity from you and the rest of the group. Similarly there may be others who are suffering who need the hope and encouragement that this passage can bring. Let's not keep the comfort and hope of the cross to ourselves, let's think practically about how we can share the comfort we have received with others (2 Corinthians 1.)

3. Read 1 Peter 2:20-25. What is our calling as Christians?

- **What example did Jesus set for us?**

We often love to talk about our calling as Christians but we don't normally think of our calling being to suffer unjustly. Through his suffering and crucifixion Jesus calls us to follow him by enduring unjust mockery, insults and suffering. He has set us an example and teaches us that we are not to retaliate when we suffer unjustly but instead we're to entrust ourselves to God.

4. Think back to the situation you thought of at the beginning. What would it have meant for you to entrust yourself to God?

- **What would it have looked like to bless and love that person? (Luke 6:28.)**

Let's not let the application simply hang in the air. Use these questions to 'land' the application in real life examples. To help honest discussion you might want to split into pairs.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Matthew 27:45-54

Context

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

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

Tricky Bits

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Applications

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

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

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

Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Small Group Leaders Notes

Matthew 28:16-20

Context

- **Matthew's Gospel** - It can be very easy to read 'The Great Commission' in isolation and forget the context of Matthew's gospel in which it is situated. Jesus has been powerfully raised from the dead and now he gives his people his marching orders before he ascends into heaven. The disciples are to go and make disciples of all nations by baptising and 'teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.' This is a vital phrase in the context of Matthew's gospel because Matthew's gospel is full of Jesus' teaching. Matthew structures his gospel around 5 major teaching blocks (chs 5-7, ch10, ch13, ch18 and chs24-25.) When we see this we see that Matthew's gospel is about making disciples. Matthew is giving us Jesus' teaching so that we can go and make disciples and also grow as disciples ourselves. In this sense the big application of Matthew's gospel is found here in 28:16-20 - go and make disciples. If we really do believe that Jesus is the risen Messiah who has been given all authority and power then we will go and make disciples for him.
- **The Whole Bible** - We must read these verses in the context of Genesis 12:1-3. God promised Abram that through him and his descendants God would bless the whole world. Now through Jesus God's blessing and rule is going to all nations as his people go and make disciples. The blessing promised to Abraham is found as we become disciples of Jesus, bowing the knee in repentance and faith.

Big Idea - Disciples are learners of Christ who obey him not just believe in him!

Applications

- **Us as Disciples** - Jesus defines discipleship for us. A disciple is someone who has been baptised (a symbol of our genuine repentance and faith in Christ) who then receives Jesus teaching and obeys it! As disciples of Jesus we are not just to believe that he died and rose for us. We are then to obey what he tells us to do. This passage challenges us to look seriously at our obedience. Are we people who are hungry for Jesus' teaching and then eager to put it into practice. In the words of Matthew 7:24-27, 'are we those who are actively building our house on the rock?' In 28:16-20 Jesus commands us to go and make disciples? Are we obeying this command of Jesus? We might not be overseas missionaries but are we actively seeking to go and make disciples where God has placed us?
- **Us as Disciple Makers** - Some argue that this command was just for the apostles but I don't think this is true because they are referred to as disciples in 28:16. Jesus gives his disciples the command to go and make disciples and so if we are disciples then this command is for us. Our role in making disciples of all nations will be different to them (we're not apostolic eyewitnesses of the resurrection) but we are to be actively involved as we go and speak to people. Very often our approach to making disciples has been a 'come and see' approach where we invite people to church or a course of an event and then hand them over to the preacher/speaker to do the work of making disciples. There is undoubtedly a place for this, but here Jesus is commanding us to 'Go' not just invite. We are to go to people where they are with the gospel. As more and more people live and work in different places it is not possible to invite a colleague from work to church because they often live in a different town or city. We cannot therefore rely on inviting them to church. We need to be trained and equipped to go and make disciples where

we meet them. It is this idea of personally going to make disciples that we will focus on in this study.

Questions

Starter - Give everyone a copy of the table and ask them to fill in the 5 columns with the names of non-Christians who they know in each sphere of life.

Reassure people that it is ok if they have more names in one column and fewer names in other columns. We all live very different lives depending on our age and stage of life and whether we're working. Someone who is retired may know a lot more people in their neighbourhood whereas someone who is working will know more people in their workplace. People don't have to share the names or show people their table though you may want to ask people how they found this exercise and if anything stands out to them?

1. Have a look at Matthew 28:19-20 and Matthew 16:24-25. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What's involved? How can we become a disciple of Jesus? How can we grow as disciples of Jesus? What does it look like to be growing as a disciple of Jesus?

You don't have to ask all these questions because many of them overlap but you can use as many of them as you need to help people get into the passages. The big thing that we want our groups to see that a disciple is someone who has been baptised (you may need to tease out that this is a symbol of repentance) and that they are learning to obey Jesus' teaching. A disciple isn't just a believer, a disciple is a learner. Matthew 16:24-25 helps us to see that this learning Jesus will involve denying ourselves and even making painful sacrifices so as to put Jesus first and obey his teaching.

2. Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all nations. What encouragements does he give us in these verses?

The encouragements come in v16 and v20 sandwiching the command to go and make disciples. Firstly Jesus is the risen King who has been given all authority over everyone everywhere. That means that wherever we go and whoever we speak to ultimately belongs to Jesus. We are to go and tell everyone everywhere about Jesus because he is the rightful King of everyone everywhere. The second great encouragement in these verses comes in v20 when he reassures us that he is always with us and will never leave us. Jesus has given us his Spirit to help us so no matter where we go or who we speak to we are not alone!

3. Look at Acts 18:26-27. What do these verses tell us about God? How does he use his power and authority? Think about the people you know, how does this change the way you think about them?

We're going to this passage because we want to see how God uses his power and authority for mission. God has ordained where and when everyone lives so that people will come to know him! That is an amazing thought! It is not by chance that you live and work where you do and with the people you do. It's not random that your neighbours are your neighbours. God has placed them there so that they will come to know him. That means that we are the most important person that our non-Christians friends, colleagues, neighbours and family know because we know Jesus! When we begin to grasp that God orders where we live and work and who we spend time with so that they will become Christians it really does begin to transform how we think about day to day life. Spend a fair

bit of time on this helping the group to think about this in their situation. You could do this by breaking into smaller groups.

4. Have a look at 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. Who is involved in making disciples? What's God's job? What's our job?

Here we want to see that our job is to preach Christ but it's God's job to open blind eyes. We can't do that, it takes a miracle like creation to open someone's eyes but wonderfully God does this as ordinary people like us speak about Jesus. If God could do a miracle of opening our blind eyes then he can open anyone's blind eyes. We need to see this so that we are clear on what we are to do. We can't make someone a Christian, only God can do that, but we are to speak about Jesus and share the gospel with them and then pray desperately for God to open their eyes.

5. In pairs or smaller groups. Think about one sphere of life (work, home, neighbour etc.) What could you do to be more intentional about making disciples in that context?

Everyone's situation will be different so everyone will come up with different things which is fine. Encourage the group not just to think about inviting someone to church or an event. Encourage the group to think about how they can move towards actually speaking to people about Jesus themselves. Perhaps they could be intentional about getting to know new people at work or on their street? Perhaps they need to make more time to spend with friends or family? Perhaps a first step would be to let people know that we are Christians. We can all get better at asking good questions? For example after a weekend take a genuine interest in what other people did at the weekend and when they then ask us about our weekend be prepared to talk about church? Perhaps you could invite Christian and non-Christian friends to the same thing (e.g. a meal or going to watch sport.)

The aim in all this is to get us thinking practically about the small steps that we can be taking to help move others slowly towards becoming disciples of Christ.

