

The cross and the empty tomb

Romans 3:21-25a, Acts 2:23-24 – Leaders version

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

There are a lot of long words in this passage, so explain to the group that you will explain them as you go through the study.

What does the passage say and mean?

45 minutes

1. Read Romans 3:21-25a. What does it mean to say that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', v23?

Verse 23 tells us that all people are sinners. Sin is rebellion against God's rule and authority over our lives i.e. not living the way that God wants us to live. God isn't a dictator setting rules to spoil our fun, he's our Creator who has told us in the Bible the way that we are designed to live. The Bible tells us that we are made in God's image and are designed to love and obey him.

When we sin, we don't live up to God's standards and we fall short of the glory of God which means we don't bring honour and glory to him. Our sin separates us from God because it's so offensive to him and there's nothing we can do to fix that. This is the biggest problem we are ever going to have and we all have it.

2. What does Romans 6:23 tell us about the consequences of sin?

Sin leads to death (physical and spiritual i.e. separation from God). So somebody has got to die for my sin and for your sin. If you die for your own sin, you will end up dead...

3. Read Romans 3v23-24 again. What does v24 mean? Can you rephrase with simpler words, but the same meaning?

Let the group suggest answers. Then unpack the words 'justified', 'redemption' and 'grace' (it might help to write the definitions on the flip-chart) and then, in view of the definitions, ask them again what v24 means.

Justified – made righteous i.e. made right with God.

Redemption – to redeem something is to buy it back, to pay for it.

Grace – a free and undeserved gift which cannot be earned or paid for. The gift is Jesus' death in the place of ours and his resurrection.

A suggestion of a paraphrase of the verse might be 'and are made right with God for free because Jesus has paid for their sins'.

3. Read v25a (first sentence only) again. What price did Jesus have to pay to redeem (buy back) sinners?

Atonement – bringing those who are estranged back into relationship. Theologically, it refers to 'the work of Christ in dealing with the problem posed by the sin of man, and in bringing sinners into right relation with God' (NBD).

Jesus paid for us with his blood (his life) when he died in our place. To receive this gift of salvation, we each need to put our faith in him.

(If it's helpful, explain that this fulfils the OT sacrificial system which said that an animal had to die to pay for people's sins because sin leads to death. Therefore a life must be given to save a life, so an animal's blood was spilt instead of the person's blood to pay for their sins).

4. Read Mark 10:33-34. What did Jesus say was going to happen to him?

He predicts his death and resurrection. Make sure you pick out each detail, don't just summarise.

5. Read Acts 2:23-24. Peter is speaking to the people in Jerusalem, less than 2 months after Jesus' death. What does he tell us about why Jesus died?

Jesus died because it was God's purpose and plan that he should. It wasn't an unfortunate turn of events, rather, it was the plan all along that Jesus would die. However, there is also human responsibility for Jesus' death – the people of Jerusalem, with the help of the Romans, literally put Jesus on the cross.

Explain to the group, that although we weren't there, we are equally responsible, because our sin put Jesus on the cross.

6. Why was it necessary for Jesus to die?

You've already covered this, but it's worth asking again, to make sure that people understand.

7. Read Acts 2:24 again. Why is Jesus' resurrection so important?

(The answer is not in the passage – they will have to brainstorm!) Jesus' resurrection means that:

- We can be raised to eternal life too if we are following Jesus
- Jesus said he would rise again – since he got this right, we can trust everything else that he said!
- It proves that sin is fully paid for (because death, the consequence of sin, has been defeated)
- It means his death wasn't a pointless execution – he couldn't rise again, having conquered death, without dying!

8. Considering all this, why is Christmas so important for Christians?

Christmas is when we remember the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became human and led a life of complete obedience to God, choosing to die in the place of sinners. Jesus is the only person who is sinless and therefore able to pay the price of sin for us. He is the only one who can defeat death. He is the only one who can save us. Jesus was not separated from God by sin so he is the only one who can show us the way to God.

We should be remembering all these things as we remember the baby born in Bethlehem, and it should lead us to worship God who loves us so much that he went through all this just to save those who have rebelled against him.

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Read Acts 2:38-39. Have you understood who Jesus is, why he came and what it means to follow him? Have you accepted God's gift to you by repenting and believing?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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2. What does Romans 6:23 tell us about the consequences of sin?
3. Read Romans 3v23-24 again. What does v24 mean? Can you rephrase with simpler words, but the same meaning?
3. Read v25a (first sentence only) again. What price did Jesus have to pay to redeem (buy back) sinners?
4. Read Mark 10:33-34. What did Jesus say was going to happen to him?
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