

life group study guide

April 5, 2015

Easter Sunday!

“But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three – sin, guilt, death – are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!” I Corinthians 15:57 (The Message)

Max Lucado, in his book “He Chose The Nails”, uses his own imitable style to give us a wonderful overview of Christ’s life, death and ministry. Enjoy Max’s wry sense of humor...

His Birth

The words of King Herod when told of the birth of Jesus. “Kill him. There is room for only one king in this corner of the world.”

The number of religious leaders who believed a messiah had been born in Bethlehem. Zero.

The type of people who did. Some stargazers, night-shift shepherds, and a couple of newlyweds who claimed their baby to be the result of a virgin birth.

The reward given to Joseph and Mary for bringing God into the world. Two years in exile, learning Egyptian.

This was the beginning of the Christian movement. (And those were the calm years.)

His Ministry

The word on the streets of Jesus’ hometown when he claimed to be sent from God. Weird family. Have you seen his cousin?

The reaction of the hometown folks. Stone him.

The opinion of his brothers. Lock him up.

The number of disciples Jesus recruited. Seventy.

The number of disciples who defended him to the authorities. Zero.

The assessment of Jesus’ followers as found in the Jerusalem editorial page. A group of unemployed ne’er-do-wells recruited off the shipping docks and out of the red-light districts.

The number of lepers and blind and lame people Jesus healed. Too many to count.

The number of healed lepers and blind and lame people who defended Jesus on the day of his death. Zero.

His Execution

The popular opinion regarding Jesus before he cleansed the Temple. See if he’ll run for office.

The popular opinion regarding Jesus after he cleansed the Temple. Let’s see how fast he can run.

The decision of the Jewish council. Three spikes and a spear.

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The talk on the streets of Jerusalem after Jesus died. He should've stayed in the furniture business.

The number of times Jesus prophesied that he would come back to life three days after his death. Three.

The number of apostles who heard the prophecy. All of them.

The number of apostles who waited at the tomb to see if he would do what he said. Zero.

The number of his followers who believed in the resurrection before it occurred. You do the math.

The odds a street-corner bookie would've given the day after the crucifixion on the possibility that Jesus' name would be known in the year 2000. "I'll give you better odds that he'll rise from the dead."

His Movement

The official response of the Jewish leaders to the rumors of the resurrection. Of course they say he's alive. They have to. What else can they say?

The actual response of the Jewish leaders to the resurrection of Jesus. "A great number of the Jewish priests believed and obeyed." (Acts 6:7)

The decision of the Jewish leaders about the church. "If their plan comes from human authority, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them." (Acts 5:38-39)

The response of the church. "The number of followers was growing." (Acts 6:1)

The official response of the Jewish leaders to the conversion of Saul. Good riddance to the former Pharisee. Won't be months before he is in jail, and then what will he do? Write letters?

What Saul, turned Paul, understood that his former colleagues didn't. "God gave (Jesus) as a way to forgive sin." (Romans 3:25)

The Movement Continues

The belief of French philosopher Voltaire. The Bible and Christianity would pass within a hundred years. He died in 1778. The movement continues.

The pronouncement of Friedrich Nietzsche in 1882. "God is dead." The dawn of science, he believed, would be the doom of faith. Science has dawned; the movement continues.

The way a Communist dictionary defined the Bible. "It is a collection of fantastic legends without any scientific support." Communism is diminishing; the movement continues.

The discovery made by every person who has tried to bury the faith. The same as the one made by those who tried to bury its Founder: He won't stay in the tomb.

The facts. The movement has never been stronger. Over one billion Catholics and nearly as many Protestants.

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The question. How do we explain it? Jesus was a backwater peasant. He never wrote a book, never held an office. He never journeyed more than two hundred miles from his hometown. Friends left him. One betrayed him. Those he helped forgot him. Prior to his death they abandoned him. But after his death they couldn't resist him. What made the difference?

The answer. His death and resurrection.

For when He died, so did your sin.

And when He rose, so did your HOPE.

For when He rose, your grave was changed from a final residence to temporary housing.

The reason he did it. The face in your mirror.

The verdict after two milleniums. Herod was right: there is room for only one King.

NAILING IT DOWN:

What statement within each section holds the greatest significance for you? Why?

1. His Birth
2. His Ministry
3. His Execution
4. His Movement
5. The Movement Continues

GLIMPSING GOD'S HEART

Read Colossians 2:11-15.

1. How did God turn the cross from an object of shame into an object of exaltation? From an object of death into an object of life? From an object of horror into an object of joy?
2. How did the cross give God his greatest victory over Satan?
3. Do you think Satan saw his defeat coming? Explain.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-57.

1. What three enemies were conquered at the cross? Who made this possible and how?
2. What is to be our response to this glorious victory?

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Read 2 Corinthians 2: 14-17.

1. What are we promised in these verses and what kind of “victories” are in view for us?
2. How is the cross an example of these victories?
3. What does the reality of the cross suggest about the appearance of our own spiritual victories?

MAKING A CHOICE

The cross promises us victory, a new creation, a complete transformation. But we have to respond to it. In order for the cross of Christ to be the cross of our lives, we need to bring something to the hill of Calvary. Next time you are worried about your health or your house or your finances or your family, take a mental trip up the hill. Spend a few minutes looking at the pieces of His passion for you. Run your thumb over the tip of the spear. Balance a spike in the palm of your hand. Read the wooden signs written in your own language. And as you do, touch the velvet dirt, moist with the blood of Jesus.

Blood He bled for you.
The spear He took for you.
The nails He felt for you.
The sign He left for you.

He did all of this for you. Knowing this, knowing all He did for you there...know that He'll look out for you here, also. As Paul wrote:

“God did not keep back His own Son, but He gave Him for us. If God did this, won't He freely give us everything else?” (Romans 8:32)

“I pass on to you what is most important and what has also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

*Living, he loved me; dying, he saved me;
Buried, he carried my sins far away;
Rising, he justified freely forever:
One day he's coming. Oh, glorious day!*

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