



Day 4: One Living Savior

Bible Passages: Luke 23–24:12,36–49

Central Bible Truth: The one true God offers salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Teaching Aim: To lead adults to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and to tell others about Him

The death of someone you love always hurts. Jesus' death traumatized His disciples just as the loss of a loved one grieves you. The disciples knew Jesus as Teacher and Friend. His death left them at a loss as to what to do. Although Jesus' death fit into God's purpose, God raised Jesus from the grave to defeat death. This opened the way for people to receive salvation through Jesus Christ, which was God's plan. Through this lesson, adults can discover how they can trust Jesus as Savior and accept the charge to tell others about Him.

Our Savior Died *(Luke 23:44-49)*

A tragic series of events led to the crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 23:1-43). The religious leaders of Jerusalem pressured Pilate, the local Roman leader, to punish Jesus by death. Pilate judged Jesus to be innocent and prevailed on Herod Antipas to render an opinion. Herod was Rome's puppet ruler over the Jews in Galilee. Although Jesus did not fulfill Herod's hope of seeing Him perform some miracles, the ruler likely knew Jesus was innocent. After making fun of Him, Herod returned Jesus to Pilate.

This time Pilate sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. Roman soldiers paraded Jesus through the streets and then nailed Him on a cross between two criminals. The soldiers and crowds mocked Jesus as He suffered this agonizing ordeal. Amazingly, while He hung there, Jesus gave salvation to one of the criminals next to Him.

Jesus' death impacted those who witnessed it. After He had been on the cross about three hours, a fearful series of events occurred. About the sixth hour (noon) darkness came over the land and remained until about three o'clock, for the sun stopped shining. Why? Some wonder if a natural occurrence such as an eclipse took place. Since it was Passover, the moon was full. Thus the sun and moon were on opposite sides of the earth at the time, and a solar eclipse could not have occurred. No scientific explanations suffice for the phenomenon. God acted supernaturally. What did this darkness mean? Perhaps God showed His displeasure and judgment on the world for this heinous act.

At the same time the darkness came, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The Jerusalem temple had three basic parts: the outer courts for worshipers, the holy place for priests only, and the holy of holies for only the high priest. The curtain here probably was the one hung between the holy place and the holy of holies. This curtain was elaborate in design and several inches thick. The torn curtain symbolized a new accessibility to God.

The Jews believed God dwelt in the holy of holies. The high priest entered the holy of holies only one day a year to ask God's forgiveness for the people's sins (Lev. 16:1-34). The average person thus remained separated from God. Anyone who dared go behind the curtain, except the high priest, faced certain death. The death of Jesus broke down this barrier. The absence of the barrier opened the way for any person to stand in God's presence. Our God lives not behind a veil but in the hearts of people who welcome Him.

Then Jesus cried out loudly to the Father from the cross. This cry must have taken extra effort since Jesus was about to die. Jesus never lost confidence in God's work throughout this ordeal. Praying words from Psalm 31:5, He committed His spirit into God's hands, What peace Jesus displayed in this prayer! He put Himself into the safekeeping of God. Jesus allowed His life to be taken so God could use Him to bring

salvation to those who trust Him. Jesus willingly offered His life to accomplish God's redemptive purpose.

After this prayer, Jesus breathed His last breath. He died. Compared with other crucifixions, Jesus' death happened quickly. Sometimes death on a cross took days. Remember, though, that Jesus endured extreme torture in the hours preceding His crucifixion.

Jesus began His experience on the cross in a weakened condition. A Roman centurion observed Jesus' death, probably having supervised the execution process from beginning to end. Possibly this man had participated in other crucifixions. He saw something special in these supernatural events and the calm manner in which Jesus gave up His life. The centurion praised God for what he saw. This seems to indicate an awareness of God's presence in the day's events. Further, the centurion proclaimed Jesus to have been a righteous (innocent) man.

A crucifixion usually drew a crowd. Some who previously had clamored for Jesus' death then watched Him die. Others probably were curiosity seekers. What they saw shook them. These people beat their breasts and departed. This action served as a sign of remorse. Were they sorry for their part in Jesus' death? Or were they simply upset by what they had seen? We cannot know definitely. Certainly the stage was set for any of these people who also heard the gospel a few weeks later to be open to it.

Followers of Jesus also watched from a distance. Specifically mentioned are "the women." This probably refers to the women who accompanied Jesus as He preached and taught. The Gospel accounts name various ones. Certainly these events stunned the followers. The Lord in whom they had put their trust was dead.

Our Savior Was Buried *(Luke 23:50-55)*

All cultures develop burial traditions. Typically people executed by Roman crucifixion received no burial. In Judea, Rome accommodated the Jewish law that specified a crucified person was to be removed before sundown. A man named Joseph from the town of Arimathea stepped forward to give Jesus a proper burial. Joseph held a high position as a member of the council. This Jewish ruling body, also called the Sanhedrin, consisted of the religious leaders who had passed judgment on Jesus. Joseph refused to consent to the action of the council to accuse Jesus. Either he voted no to their recommendations, abstained from voting, or was not present at the time. In any case Joseph opposed what happened to Jesus.

Verse 50 identifies Joseph as a good and upright or righteous man, a contrast to the self-righteous religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead. Joseph was a man of spiritual integrity. His commitment to God led him to be good in his actions. Joseph's sympathy toward Jesus is indicated by his desire for the kingdom of God to come. Possibly Joseph already believed in Jesus and anticipated God's will being accomplished through Him.

As a person of high station in Jewish life, Joseph obtained access to Pilate and asked to be put in charge of Jesus' body. Pilate granted the request. Joseph removed the body from the cross and prepared it for burial. He wrapped Jesus' body in a linen cloth and then placed it in a tomb. A tomb cut from rock was expensive. This one had never been used, which made it even more valuable. Often these walk-in tombs contained more than one chamber to allow whole families to be buried within them. A fresh, clean tomb was appropriate for Jesus.

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee watched Joseph and followed to see where he put Jesus' body. They intended to return later and finish the embalming process and made preparations to carry out their plan.

These verses explain the burial of Jesus in great detail. Jesus' death was a fact, and this passage presents the evidence supporting it. Anyone who claims Jesus' death was an illusion or sham has strong evidence to refute.

Our Savior Lives Now *(Luke 24:36-43)*

On the Sunday morning after Jesus' death and burial, the women carried out their plan to take spices to the tomb (Luke 24:1-12). To their surprise Jesus was not there. With some help they remembered Jesus' teachings about His death and resurrection and they understood. Jesus lived! These women reported their experience to the disciples. Some of them considered the account to be nonsense. Peter, however, ran to the tomb to see for himself.

On several occasions after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers. One such manifestation occurred as two men walked on the road between Emmaus and Jerusalem (Luke 24:13-35). These two related their encounter to the disciples of Jesus. As they discussed the report, Jesus appeared in their midst. Apparently He simply materialized in their presence, which was certainly an unconventional arrival! Although Jesus' resurrection body carried physical characteristics, it no longer had the limitations of a human body.

In verse 36, Jesus appeared to His disciples and greeted them with a blessing of peace. This traditional greeting held a deeper meaning in light of the resurrection. Jesus tried to calm His disciples. His resurrection opened the door to a new kind of peace. Naturally, this event startled the disciples. Who can blame them? Would not most people react similarly to a supernatural event? Only three days previously they had watched Jesus die on a cross.

Here Jesus appeared in their midst, alive. The disciples wrestled with the situation. They wondered if they were looking at a ghost. Was this Jesus' spirit without a body? They knew it resembled Jesus. But how could it be? Jesus asked why they were troubled and why doubts arose in their minds.

Perhaps His questions here were less an attempt to chastise the disciples for a lack of faith and more an effort to help them sort out their confusion. Jesus offered them help. He showed them His hands and feet, which bore the nail marks of crucifixion. He patiently provided evidence He was the same Jesus they had seen die. They could even touch Him to prove He was real. Disembodied spirits do not have human flesh and bone.

The disciples had difficulty believing Jesus was in their presence. They expressed joy and amazement. This was too good to be true. Jesus' followers were happy, but they were reluctant to let themselves get too carried away. Jesus asked if they had anything to eat. They produced a piece of broiled fish. Jesus ate it while they watched. This offered further proof that Jesus was alive and had a body. What ghost eats fish? Jesus acted to provide the disciples with evidence that He lived. This information later proved invaluable for the personal testimonies they delivered about Jesus.

Our Savior Fulfilled Scripture *(Luke 24:44-49)*

In each of His post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, Jesus instructed them about their future ministry. What Jesus instilled during those 40 days repeated what He had explained to the disciples previously. In light of the cross and resurrection, however, they heard Jesus from a different perspective. He pointed out that His death and resurrection fulfilled Old Testament teachings. In fact, Jesus identified all three divisions of the Old Testament—the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Writings)—as bearing witness to Him. How? The Old Testament highlights the redemptive purpose and power of God. In harmony with the Old Testament, Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection perfectly display God's redemptive purpose and power.

Verse 45 says Jesus opened "their [the disciples'] minds so they could understand the Scriptures." For sake of their future ministry, the disciples needed to be clear about the kind of Messiah Jesus was. This experience as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection helped them appreciate the Old Testament as never before.

Jesus summarized and interpreted the events of Easter weekend in light of the Old Testament. Through His suffering and resurrection, He offered the victory available through repentance and forgiveness. Jesus linked these two terms. Repentance means "a change of mind and direction in life." Forgiveness of sin indicates "release from sin." God intended this good news to be preached far and wide. To preach something means "to announce or proclaim." The message was to go out in Jesus' name or under His authority as God's Son. Jesus stated the evangelistic purpose of the church when He said His message would go to all nations. God always planned to save all those who would receive His truth. The preaching began at Jerusalem, a natural starting place, but it spread from there.

God desires that all people hear about salvation through repentance and forgiveness. Every person has a problem with sin. To receive salvation you must admit your sin, confess it to God, and trust Jesus to give you victory over death. Ask Him to be Lord of your life. He will give you eternal life.

When you receive Jesus as Savior, you accept a responsibility to tell other people about Him. Jesus wanted His disciples to give a witness of what they saw and heard. What more convincing testimony can be found than that from an eyewitness? They were to explain to others what they had experienced through the death, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus.

To aid the disciples in the witnessing task, Jesus told them He would send what His Father had promised. God would provide the Holy Spirit to help them. Jesus cautioned the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they were empowered from on high. God made the Holy Spirit available. He would empower the disciples. Then they were to go out with the good news of God's offer of salvation available through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Day 4: Discussion Points

1. After Jesus had been on the cross about three hours, darkness came over the land from noon to three o'clock. What is a possible meaning for the darkness?
2. Who was the only one who could go into the holy of holies? How often did he go and for what purpose? What happened to anyone else who went behind the curtain into the holy of holies?
3. What did the torn curtain symbolize? Where does God dwell today?
4. What was the significance of Jesus' final prayer on the cross?
5. What were characteristics of Joseph of Arimathea? How was Joseph different from other members of the Sanhedrin?
6. Why were Jesus' post resurrection appearances important to His disciples and to their future ministry?
7. What is the significance of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection? What must a person do to be saved? How were the disciples empowered to carry out their mission of sharing the good news?
8. Do you share the good news of Jesus with others? What are hindrances some Christians experience that keep them from sharing the plan of salvation with nonbelievers?
9. Are there people in your family, in your neighborhood, and/or at your place of work who need to hear the good news of Jesus? Ask God to help you show and share His love with those who don't know Him.
10. Is your Sunday School Class or other Bible study group welcoming to new members? Do you intentionally seek to tell nonbelievers who come to your class and worship services about the way to salvation and then follow up during the week?

Day 4: Case Study

Moving from Proof of Faith

Les and Paula are in their mid-thirties and have been married for seven years. He is a structural engineer and thoroughly enjoys the challenges in his job. Paula works in the medical field as a technician for a mobile blood bank. They look forward to weekend when they can work in the yard or make improvements to their home in an older neighborhood of the city.

As children, both Les and Paula occasionally attended nearby churches with their families. But neither of them has ever been actively involved in a church. Though Paula became a Christian about 10 years ago, she and Les have not attended church regularly since they married.

Paula's friendship with Joyce, an older Christian lady next door, began to rekindle a spiritual yearning in Paula. She convinced Les to attend worship services with her at a nearby Baptist church, but after six months they stopped attending. Les told Paula, "I know I'm not a believer, and I feel like a hypocrite when I am in church."

Two months later, Joyce and two other members from her Sunday School class visited with Paula and Les. Paula and Les both asked questions, and Joyce and her friends answered the questions about the church and about God and salvation.

Then Joyce asked Les, "In your opinion, what does it take for a person to enter heaven?" Les wasn't sure—maybe a person needs to do a lot of good deeds for others. When Joyce asked permission to share how the Bible answers that question, Les indicated a willingness to listen. Joyce and her two friends used appropriate Bible verses to explain why every person needs the salvation Jesus Christ offers.

First, we must recognize and admit that we are sinners and ask for forgiveness of our sin. We cannot have eternal life and enter heaven without God's forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7).

Second, forgiveness is available for all (John 3:16). Even though forgiveness is available, it is not automatic (Matthew 7:21a).

Third, it is impossible for God to allow sin into heaven. God is love and He is just. (James 2:13) but people are sinful (Romans 3:23). Then Joyce posed a question that Les already was thinking about: How can a sinful person enter heaven where God allows no sin? Then she continued with her explanation.

Fourth, A person must turn or repent from sin and self (Luke 13:3) and must turn to Someone—Jesus Christ—and trust Him only. The Bible tells us that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3b-4). A person must believe and confess this truth (Romans 10:9).

And Fifth, understand and acknowledge that heaven is eternal life—both here on earth and in the hereafter (John 10:10b; 14:3).

As Joyce finished sharing the good news from the Bible, she asked Les if, understanding what had been shared, he would like to receive this forgiveness by trusting in Jesus as his personal Savior and Lord. Les replied that he wanted to believe but couldn't right then—his engineer's mind wanted to study the proof in more detail.

As the visit concluded, Joyce and the other two invited Les and Paula to their Sunday School class. They agreed on a time and place to meet at the church the next Sunday. Paula was thrilled that Les agreed to go to Bible study, and Les was pleasantly surprised at the warm reception they received and at how comfortable he felt in a small Bible study group.

After a few weeks, Paula and Les joined the Sunday School class and are regular attendees. Paula told the teacher that for the first time in his life Les had begun to read his Bible. The class is praying with Paula that God will use them to help bring Les to know Jesus in a personal relationship as Savior and Lord.