

## The Crucified Messiah Small Group Guide

**Warm-up Question:** (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. What is one of your most prized possessions?
2. What is one generous thing somebody has done for you this year?

**Read the following passage:** Read Luke 18:31-34; 23:26, 32-34.

On a Friday in the spring of 30 or 33 AD, at the time of the Jewish Passover, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Roman authorities. Crucifixion was the most extreme penalty handed out by the Romans. One scholar describes the significance of crucifixion this way.

*It was not just a means of liquidating undesirables; it did so with the maximum degradation and humiliation. It said, loud and clear: we are in charge here; you are our property; we can do what we like with you. It insisted, coldly and brutally, on the absolute sovereignty of Rome, and of Caesar. It told an implicit story, of the uselessness of rebel recalcitrance and the ruthlessness of imperial power. It said, in particular: this is what happens to rebel leaders. Crucifixion was a symbolic act with a clear and frightening meaning.*

N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*

Why, exactly, was Jesus crucified? The Scriptures indicate the following motivations. Pontius Pilate condemned Jesus out of self-interest. He did not want to risk the accusation that he was disloyal to Caesar. (See John 19:12-16.) The Jewish leadership felt that Jesus was a threat to the Temple and the Torah, and that Jesus' claims to divine prerogatives were blasphemous. (See, for example, Mark 2:1-7; Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 14:55-64.) Jesus himself believed that he was called to give himself as a ransom for sinners. (See Mark 10:45; Luke 22:19-20.) For believers like the apostle Paul, Jesus' sacrifice was a life-changing event. (See Galatians 2:20.)

**Questions for Discussion** (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Pontius Pilate condemned Jesus out of self-interest. What are some ways that a preoccupation with our own self-interests might influence us to dismiss Jesus' will for our lives?
2. The fundamental Christian confession is "Jesus is Lord." How might this statement have been perceived as a threat politically, religiously, and socially? What are some ways that a commitment to Jesus and his teaching might be perceived as a threat to particular beliefs or practices in our present cultural context?

3. Read Romans 6:1-14. How is Jesus' death and resurrection relevant for our lives today?
4. Consider the following statements: "Jesus is not a path to freedom. He is the *only* path to freedom." Read Acts 4:12. Did Jesus' first followers believe these statements? If so, why would they have believed this? Do you agree with the above statements? Explain.
5. Read Romans 6:11; 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:20-24. The apostle Paul exhorted followers of Jesus to change their thinking. In light of Jesus' death and resurrection, what are some ways we need to change our thinking? Do you find this difficult? What can help us change our thinking?
6. Read Luke 6:27-36. We are called to follow Jesus' example by loving our enemies. Jesus was clearly not a pushover, nor did he allow his enemies to control his life. What might it look like practically for us to love the people around us, even those who have no concern for our good?
7. What is one way you would like Jesus' sacrifice for us to shape your life this week?

**Pray**