

HOSANNA

1

FROM PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE

Background from the Author

If this study is held during the five weeks between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday, it is hoped that the combination of studying the big events of Holy Week combined with participating in the corporate worship services of Lent will help to deepen and expand the participant's faith and understanding. But this study can be held at any time since it is concerned with the bedrock events of the Christian faith. It is obviously not possible to do a thorough study of everything that the Gospel writers and Paul record about the time bounded by Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Fully one third of each Gospel treats the events of Holy Week. All four Gospels contain large sections of Jesus' teaching within these bounds. This subject can scarcely be touched at all. In addition, Paul's major concern in most of his writings is primarily with the meaning of the crucifixion/resurrection. Rather this study will focus on the "main events" which are usually covered by the Sunday services during Holy Week: the Triumphal Entry, the Cleansing of the Temple, the Last Supper, the Arrest and Trial of Jesus, The Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Even here, an entire study could consist of any one of these themes!

The purpose of this study is to give the participants an opportunity to stop to think about what God is doing in these events. They will also be given the chance to see that faith means more than believing that these things "really happened." They will be challenged to think about what the death of Jesus means, what the message from God is in the resurrection, how the Church is the body of Christ made and visible in the Eucharist. We will explore

different ways to view and understand what God is doing in all of this and, hence, be better able to receive this work of God for ourselves and to celebrate it with new understandings. This is one reason for focusing at the beginning of this session on the fact that the Gospel writers are not primarily interested in “getting the facts straight” but in trying to show their readers who Jesus Christ is and what God is doing through him. Throughout this study we will note that the Gospel writers differ on details as well as including or excluding certain material. We may hope that, before this study is concluded, the participants will have ceased to be concerned with why John has no Eucharist on Maundy Thursday and how many times Peter’s rooster crowed. Rather, the hope is that the participants will begin to engage these texts in order to hear what God is saying to God’s world, and what God is saying to each individual reader.

Those who lean toward fundamentalism or are primarily concerned with everything being “true” in the sense of written down exactly as it happened, are going to be uncomfortable with this study—and that is not a bad thing. Encourage any such participants to “hang in there,” giving this method of study a fair chance.

There will be great gifts given to those who can come to the texts honestly, willing to listen to what the Scriptures have to say, rather than coming to the texts with the assumption that they already know what the texts have to tell them. It may be helpful to introduce the ideas of “exegesis” and “eisegesis.” When we exegete a text we try to come to the text with “fresh eyes” and are careful to read exactly what the author has written. When someone is guilty of eisegesis, it means that he/she has come to the text already sure of what the message is and is ready to say what the text “means” when the ideas expressed are not found in the text. Those who tend to eisegesis also commonly try to impart the ideas of another author into the text, sometimes assuming that since it’s in the Bible, all biblical authors will have the same, somewhat interchangeable ideas. Encourage the participants to read carefully and to ask themselves, “Where does the text say that?”

SESSION PLANS

Learning Objectives

This session is intended to enable participants to:

1. Get to know the members of the study group.
2. Discover the probable audiences to which the Gospels were written.
3. Explore the idea of the Church as the body of Christ.
4. Be able to state several meanings of the resurrection.
5. Look at Jesus' death as the ultimate act of obedience.

Resources You May Need

Newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Hymnals for everyone

Slips of paper with resurrection texts

Copies of **Worksheet 1A**

Several Bible dictionaries

NOTE: Look ahead to all the other sessions now to see what resources are suggested. Some of them will take time to acquire.

Leadership Strategy

SETTING THE STAGE

1. **Welcome the Group.** Encourage them to sit wherever they choose.
2. **Open with a prayer.**
3. **Housekeeping Items.** Take care of any "housekeeping" items. Make sure folks know where the rest rooms are located. If this is a two-hour session, set

a break for the end of the first hour. Coffee and “munchies” help to make the atmosphere relaxed. You might want to set out a “Munchie Sheet” so people can choose a date on which to bring refreshments. Have nametags already filled in and displayed on a table. Find out what versions of the Bible people have brought to the study. Discourage the use of the *Living Bible*, *The Message*, and any other paraphrases. They will not be useful in this study. *The King James Version* is also not the best. Encourage the use of study Bibles with reliable notes such as *The Access Bible*, *The Oxford Annotated New Revised Version*, *The New Jerusalem Bible*, or *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*.

4. **Small Groups.** In small groups (around tables is best) have each person share his/her reasons for committing to this study. If the group is a dozen people or fewer, the group members as a whole may share their reasons.
5. **Major Events.** On the chalkboard or newsprint make a long horizontal line. Ask people to call out the major events of Holy Week in order. List them along the line. As you go, fill in some of the events that are secondary, such as Peter's denial, Judas' returning the money, and others

or

5. At the tables let each small group make a chronological list of as many events of Holy Week as the members can think of. Come back together and complete and correct the lists.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

1. **Audiences.** Put at least one Bible dictionary on each small-group table. Have each group look up the probable audience of one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. One person can read the findings to his/her table. Call the group together and share the information. Briefly discuss the following questions:
 - Look at Matthew 1:22-23 and 2:14-15. Why would these references to prophecies be especially important to Matthew's audience?

Sample Session/Hosanna/Leader's Guide

- Why do you think Luke sometimes uses the word “sinners” where Matthew uses “Gentiles”?
- If you were writing to an abused woman about Jesus, what are some of the things that might be important to include?
- What might you emphasize about Jesus if your audience were in danger because of their Christian beliefs?
- What are some reasons why it is important to know the audience to which a work is written?

or

1. **Lecture.** Give a minilecture on the probable audiences of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
2. **Restate.** On a sheet of newsprint or on the board, print the following verses, leaving room after each for notes:

1 Corinthians 11:17-29

1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 12:12-13, 27

Ephesians 4:11-16

Assign one text to each small group (repeating texts, if necessary). Give them 10 minutes to restate the point of the text—not rewrite the entire thing. The answer should be a small paragraph. They are not to use the words of the text. When the time is up, call the group back together. Let each group share its restatement of the main idea. Discuss briefly what it means for us to be the Church—the body of Christ.

and

3. **The Church’s Purpose.** As a group finish the sentence: “Since the Church is the body of Christ, its purpose is” Write down several answers. Which answer or answers do most people agree with? Why?
4. **Worksheet 1A.** Hand out **Worksheet 1A**. At the tables, let the participants each choose a text to work with. Have them individually answer the questions at the top of the worksheet. Have them share answers at the table. Then bring the group together to discuss, one text at a time, the answers they have found.

or

4. Write the information from **Worksheet 1A** on the board or on newsprint. Assign a text to each participant or go through the texts as a whole group. Discuss the answers.

5. **Resurrection.** In the *Resource Book* turn to “What the Resurrection Says About Christ.” Have someone read it aloud (do not stop to look up the texts). Then hand out slips of paper with one of the following texts on each slip: Romans 1:3-5; Romans 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Colossians 1:15-20. Have everyone look up his or her texts. Going from table to table, have those who were given slips read the text aloud. When all have finished, have the group members turn over **Worksheet 1A** or give them sheets of blank paper. Ask them individually to finish the sentence, “The resurrection of Christ means . . .” in as many ways as they can in five minutes. Have those who are willing share some of their answers.

CLOSING

1. **Scripture.** Close by having everyone turn to Colossians 1:13-20. Have someone read it aloud, slowly.

and/or

2. **Hymn.** Sing “*One Bread, One Body*” or verse 3 of “*It is Well with My Soul.*”

Worksheet 1A

The Power of Jesus' Death

Read the texts listed below from Paul's letters. As you read each text ask: "What is the outcome of Jesus' death? Does Paul state how this is accomplished? If yes, how? What word or words does Paul use to describe Jesus' giving himself over to death?"

Romans 5:18-19 (the "one man" is Adam)

Romans 6:3-6

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Philippians 2:5-11

Colossians 2:12-15