GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

* **In our culture, what crimes would one have to be convicted of in order to face the possibility of receiving a death sentence?**
* **What is the execution of a criminal meant to communicate to the general public?**

**Main Point**

Jesus died on the cross for sinful mankind but was victoriously resurrected three days later.

Only the most heinous of crimes, usually those that involve taking the life of another, lead one to face execution. Proponents of capital punishment emphasize that it serves as a formidable crime deterrent to the public. In effect, it is said to communicate, “If you commit these crimes, we will use our power to do this to you.” Roman crucifixions held similar purposes, but something else took place in Jesus’ crucifixion other than a display of Rome’s power. In Jesus’ execution, God the Father powerfully demonstrated both His righteous judgment and His gracious love.

Have a volunteer read Luke 23:32-49.

* **What is the main difference between the two criminals’ responses to Jesus? How do their responses compare with responses today from unbelievers?**
* **The second criminal’s admittance of his unjust life is an example for us of a repentant heart. How would you describe repentance? Why is a repentant heart something God values so highly?**

On the cross Jesus fulfilled the ultimate purpose for which He came—providing a way of salvation for sinful humanity. His immediate extension of salvation to the dying criminal demonstrates this truth. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus used the death of another man to explain the gift of eternal life He offers.

* **How did Jesus’ statement in verse 46 show that He was in control to the very end of His life? What does this statement suggest to believers today about reliance upon God?**

Jesus spoke to God from the cross in a loud voice, “Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit” (v. 46). This statement reflected Psalm 31:5. The psalmist spoke of finding refuge in God’s care. Jesus’ trust in God never wavered. As He gave His life, Jesus rested in the security of total reliance on His heavenly Father. After this statement, “He breathed His last” (v. 46). Jesus died. Death by crucifixion usually took longer than the few hours Jesus spent on the cross; certainly He came to the cross in a weakened state because of the trials and beatings He endured. As Jesus willingly gave up His life, however, He remained in control to the end.

Have a volunteer read Luke 24:1-12.

* **How do you think the women felt when they saw the empty tomb? How might you have responded?**
* **Why is it hard to trust God when our plans don’t match up with His plan? How can we marvel as Peter did when we experience and better understand God’s plan?**
* **What responsibility have we been given in light of Jesus' resurrection?**

The woman came to anoint Christ’s body. With the exception of John, the disciples did not go to the crucifixion. When Christ was arrested, they hid to try and protect themselves. The woman must have been astonished that the tomb was open, especially given that Roman guards had been stationed there.

Jesus Christ knew what He was getting into. He knew He would die, and He told the disciples that after He died, He would raise on the third day. The idea of their leader dying was difficult for the disciples, and they missed out on Christ’s glimpse into God’s plan.

Peter was the one who had to see it for himself. He had followed Jesus to the High Priest’s house and denied Christ three times. If Christ was raised, then he could see Christ again and possibly make up for his mistakes. Peter marveled at the empty tomb. He saw a clear picture of the plan that Jesus had taught about all along: the plan to fulfill the Scriptures, die, and be raised.

**Application**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

* **Read 2 Corinthians 5:14. In your own words, explain Paul’s statement that “one has died for all, therefore all have died.”**
* **How would you explain our need for Jesus’ crucifixion to someone else?**
* **How can you use the resurrection as a tool when you share your faith with others? How can it show others the plan of God?**

**Pray**

Close your time in prayer, praising God for who Christ is. Praise Christ for being God made flesh who died and who rose. Thank God for the resurrection which is the power of salvation.