

Small Group Study Guide: Christ's Victory Over Death

Based on Ken Holsberry's sermon "Descended Into Hades: The Death Of Death"

Session Overview

Main Idea: Jesus' descent into Hades demonstrates His complete victory over death and reveals the extraordinary depth of His love for us.

Key Passages: 1 Corinthians 15:26, Romans 6:23, Hebrews 2:14-15, Matthew 27:50-53, Psalm 24:7-10

Time Needed: 60-75 minutes

Opening (10 minutes)

Icebreaker

Share about a time when you had to go somewhere dark or scary (basement, attic, camping, etc.). What made it less frightening - a flashlight, a friend, or something else?

Prayer

Ask God to help the group understand the depth of Christ's love and victory over death.

Setting the Stage (15 minutes)

Background Discussion

Leader Note: Briefly explain the sermon's context about the Apostles' Creed and the phrase "He descended into hell."

Discussion Questions:

1. How familiar are you with the Apostles' Creed? Have you ever wondered about the phrase "He descended into hell"?
2. Ken mentions that many people fear death because it's unknown, final, and involves separation. Which of these aspects concerns you most, and why?

Key Distinction

Leader Explains: The sermon clarifies that Jesus didn't descend into "hell" (place of torment) but into "Hades" - the place where all dead souls went in biblical times. This changes everything about what happened.

Diving Deeper (25 minutes)

Scripture Study

Read together: Hebrews 2:14-15

Discussion Questions:

3. **Jesus as Human:** Why was it important that Jesus experienced death just like every other human being? What does this tell us about God's understanding of our human experience?
4. **The Great Reversal:** Ken describes Satan expecting to claim another victim but instead finding himself "face to face with the eternal Son of God." How does this image change your understanding of Jesus' death?

Read together: Matthew 27:50-53

5. **Miraculous Signs:** The sermon describes earth shaking, rocks splitting, and dead saints coming back to life. What do you think it would have been like to witness these events? What message were they sending?

Read together: Psalm 24:7-10

6. **Gates of Victory:** The sermon uses this psalm to picture Jesus demanding that the gates of Hades open for "the King of Glory." What emotions does this imagery evoke for you?

Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Silent Reflection: Think about this question: "If Jesus truly conquered death by going through it, what does that mean for your own fears about dying?"

Making It Personal (20 minutes)

Life Application

7. **Spiritual Markers:** Ken emphasizes having specific "markers" where we can point to God's work - like the cross for our forgiveness and Hades for death's defeat. What are some important spiritual markers in your own life?
 8. **Love's Depth:** The sermon concludes that Christ's descent shows "there was no depth he was not willing to go down into to save all of mankind." How does this demonstration of love impact you personally?
 9. **Death as Passage:** The sermon suggests that for believers, death becomes "just a place I pass through into Paradise." How does this perspective change the way you think about:
 - o Your own mortality?
 - o Grieving loved ones who have died?
 - o Comforting others facing loss?
 10. **Fear vs. Confidence:** On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current level of peace about death? What specific truths from this study might help increase your confidence?
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Living It Out (10 minutes)

Practical Application

11. **Sharing Hope:** If someone in your life was facing death or grieving a loss, how would you use the truths from this sermon to bring them comfort? Practice with a partner - what would you actually say?
12. **Personal Response:** Ken ended by asking, "Jesus went to Hades and back for you - what will you do for Him?" How do you want to respond to this incredible demonstration of love?

This Week's Challenge

Choose one person in your life who needs to hear about Christ's victory over death. Commit to praying for them this week and looking for an opportunity to share hope.

Closing (5 minutes)

Prayer Requests

- Share specific fears about death or dying that need prayer
- Pray for unsaved loved ones who need to hear this message of hope
- Thank God for Christ's complete victory over death

Closing Prayer

Leader prays or asks a volunteer to pray, incorporating the themes of Christ's victory, our freedom from fear, and gratitude for His incredible love.

Take-Home Resources

Key Verses to Memorize

- **1 Corinthians 15:55:** "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
- **John 11:25-26:** "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.'"

Further Study

- Read the full context of the passages mentioned: 1 Corinthians 15, Romans 6, Hebrews 2
- Research the historical background of the Apostles' Creed
- Study other biblical references to Sheol/Hades vs. Hell/Gehenna

Discussion Continues

Encourage group members to continue conversations throughout the week via text, email, or coffee meetings about how this study impacted them.

Leader Notes

Preparation Tips

- Review the full sermon beforehand
- Be prepared to explain the difference between Hades and Hell clearly
- Have tissues available - this topic may bring up grief or emotions
- Consider sharing your own struggles with fear of death to model vulnerability

Handling Difficult Questions

- If someone asks about loved ones who died without faith, focus on God's character and justice while acknowledging mystery
- If grief becomes overwhelming for someone, offer to pray with them individually after the session
- Remember: you don't need to have all the answers - it's okay to say "I don't know, but let's explore that together"