Lesson One: Jesus and His Disciples in the Upper Room

**Here is my servant . . . my chosen one in whom I delight. (Isaiah 42:1)**

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, how often our spiritual lives resemble bruised reeds or smoldering wicks. As we study your suffering, death, and resurrection, bind us up strongly in your grace and fan our faith into flame. Lead us to delight in your merciful service to miserable sinners so that at all times we put our hope in your Word. Amen.

**Background**

On Thursday afternoon of what we now call Holy Week, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. God’s people had celebrated this feast for fourteen centuries, ever since that night in Egypt when the blood of unblemished lambs had rescued them from the angel of death, who had struck the firstborn of the Egyptians.

The Passover was a powerful picture of the Messiah, who came to rescue not only the Israelites but all people from the bondage of their sins and the plague of eternal death.

Jesus knew this would be the last Passover he would eat with his beloved disciples. He knew that in less than 24 hours his body would lie still and cold in Joseph’s tomb. He gathered his disciples about him, anxious to institute a new meal in which he would give them his body and blood.

Here, in this upper room, the disciples would see their Lord as one who came to serve.

**The Disciples Illustrate Our Need for a Servant-Lord**

**In betrayal**

Jesus had once told his disciples: “There is nothing . . . hidden that will not be made known” (Matthew 10:26). What Judas did in secret—agreeing to betray his Lord—now is made known to Jesus’ disciples.

*Read Matthew 26:1-5,14-16,20-25.*

1. How do you see the hand of God the Father guiding the details of his plan of salvation?
2. The disciples were distressed when Jesus announced that one of them would betray him. What good attitude did the disciples show when they all asked, “Surely not I, Lord?”

3. What impression does Scripture wish to make on our hearts by holding before us the sad story of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus? (See 1 Corinthians 10:11,12.)

In denial and desertion
The Old Testament made it clear that the Messiah would face his greatest hour of suffering alone:

- “He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him.” (Isaiah 59:16)
- “You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.” (Psalm 88:18)

Speaking to his disciples, he now explains how that would happen.

Read Matthew 26:31-35.

4. As Jesus shared with his disciples the sobering news that soon they would flee from him, he also shared with them the hope of his resurrection. Why do you think the often-repeated promise of the resurrection seemed to have so little effect on them?

5. What is the “fatal flaw” in Peter’s objections to Jesus’ warnings?

6. When are we most vulnerable to Satan’s temptations?

7. List some modern-day examples of situations in which we, in ways all too similar to Peter and Judas, are tempted to betray and deny our Lord.

By wanting to be the master, not the servant, of all
As “father” of this household, Jesus would occupy the head position at the Passover meal. The two places closest to Jesus, at his right and left, were the positions of greatest honor. The positions of least honor would be those furthest from Jesus. Seeming favoritism may have sparked the old argument about who of them was the greatest.

8. What inborn sinful tendency was behind this dispute?

9. Give examples from everyday life (home, work, school, church) that show that this inborn tendency troubles us just as it did the first disciples.

What a sight were the apostles! One would betray Jesus, one would deny Jesus, and all the rest would flee from him. All of them were too proud to take the lowest place at the meal. What powerful evidence that they needed—and we need—our Servant-Lord!

See the Beauty of the Lord who Serves

The Lord of heaven makes himself the lowest of servants

Jewish custom dictated that everyone come to celebrate the Passover meal freshly bathed and wearing his or her finest clothing. However, walking on dusty roads in open sandals left the feet covered with dust. It was the task of the lowest servant to wash the feet of the family members as they arrived. This poor family (the disciples and Jesus) likely had no servants to do this work. Who would do it?

Read John 13:1-17.

10. Imagine that you were one of the disciples. Describe your reaction, as Jesus begins to wash everyone’s feet.

11. How does Peter overreact twice?

12. What does Jesus teach his disciples of all time by washing the disciples’ feet? (Note verses 12-17.)

The Servant-Lord offers us his meal

Under the old covenant, God gave his people the Passover as a festive meal in which they remembered God’s mercy in the past and rejoiced in his promises to come. So also in the new covenant, our Servant-Lord offers us a joyous meal in which we celebrate his mercy, receive his goodness, and anticipate the joy that will be ours forever.

Read Matthew 26:26-29.

13. Why did Jesus pick the Passover celebration as the time to begin his Supper?
14. Together with the bread and wine, Jesus tells those who receive this meal that they are receiving his actual body and blood, given and shed on the cross of Calvary. While the words he speaks are plain and simple, few words of Scripture have caused greater debate and disagreement in the visible church. We simply maintain that Jesus meant what he said: “This is my body. . . . This is my blood.” Although Jesus’ words are clear enough by themselves, how does 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 help assure us that we in the Lutheran church are not misunderstanding what Jesus is saying here?

15. The greatest blessing of the Lord’s Supper is the forgiveness of sins. Why does Jesus give us this gift in the Lord’s Supper when we already have his Word, which tells us we are forgiven?

16. See Matthew 26:29. What additional gift does our great Servant give us whenever we eat and drink at this meal?

What an amazing truth it is that the Lord of heaven and earth came to be our Servant! Every weakness and need we have as his disciples are met by his serving mercy and grace.

**During the week**

Since we cannot focus on everything that happened in the upper room, read through the Scripture references listed below. Try to find at least two more examples of how Jesus served us.

- Matthew 26:1-35
- Mark 14:1-31
- John 13

**To prepare for the next lesson**, read through John 14–17. This section usually receives little attention in the midst of all the action of Holy Week.
Background

That last Passover evening the disciples were shaken by what they had heard. In the upper room and later in Gethsemane, Jesus revealed that

- one of them was going to betray him,
- Peter was going to deny him three times,
- all of them would run from him in his hour of suffering, and
- a time of difficulty and persecution was fast approaching.

These things would really happen. Nevertheless, Jesus gave his disciples comfort. He assured them that they could take heart, for although they would have trouble in this world, their Lord Jesus had “overcome the world” (John 16:33). Everything would end up all right—forever.

Jesus has told us also that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Yet we can be thankful that Jesus’ comfort for his disciples is for us too. We will learn about this comfort in today’s lesson.

**The Counselor comforts us with the knowledge that an eternal home awaits us**

*Read John 14:1-14.*

1. Why was Jesus’ departure not a source of sorrow but a reason for rejoicing?
2. What is the comfort of knowing that a place in heaven exists with your name on it?

3. In verse 6 Jesus makes the exclusive claim that he is the only way to heaven. How do we answer those who say it is cruel to claim that all who do not believe in Jesus are headed for hell no matter how pious or religious they may be?

**The Counselor offers us another Counselor**

*Read John 14:15-17,25-27.*

4. Look at verse 17. In what way could Jesus say that the Spirit already lived with the disciples and yet *will be* with them?

5. What special work of the Holy Spirit did Jesus have in mind when he tells his first disciples that the Spirit would “remind you of everything that I have said to you” (verse 26)? (Read 2 Peter 1:20,21.)

6. In what way is the peace given by Jesus (and sealed by his Spirit) different from the peace the world gives?

7. When was this promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit first fulfilled in our lives? In what way does God continue to pour out on us his gift of the Spirit?

**The Counselor promises that we will produce the fruits of faith**

*Read John 15:1-17.*

8. Here Jesus draws on the familiar scene of the rich grape orchards in the Holy Land. Why is it important that there be a solid connection between grapevine and grape branch? Why does a grape branch bear grapes?
9. In what way are we like branches in Jesus, the vine? Why does a Christian bear fruit?

10. In verse 12 Jesus guides our fruit bearing by commanding us, “Love each other as I have loved you.” What are some of the characteristics of the love he is calling us to show one another?

11. Look at verse 8. What is the goal of displaying such Christlike love before the world?

**The Counselor assures us of triumph, even in persecution**

*Read John 15:18 – 16:4.*

12. Why does the world hate Jesus’ disciples?

13. What is the only way we can avoid the world’s rejection? (Look again at verse 19.)

14. Evaluate: Christians really aren’t persecuted today as they were in the days of the disciples.

**The Counselor intercedes for his own**

*Read John 17:1-19.*

15. Again and again during his ministry we see Jesus taking time for prayer. In John chapter 17, we gain a unique glimpse of our Lord’s prayer life. After praying for himself (v. 1-5), Jesus turns his attention to his first disciples. What is his request for them?

16. How would the Father carry out that request? (Look at verse 17.)

17. For whom does Jesus pray in these verses?

18. What does Jesus pray would happen in his church while it is on earth?

19. What does Jesus pray for in verse 24?

The next time you are feeling weak and burdened by temptation and the struggle of living a Christian life in a pagan world, remember what your Counselors have done for you! There is a place in heaven with your name on it, and until you get there, you can “call home” and be heard at any time! You have been sealed with the Spirit ever since your baptism, and through the means of grace the Spirit continues to be poured out on you generously. Through those same means of grace you are closely bound to your vine so that you may be fruitful branches to your Father’s glory. Even when the world frowns on you for your faith in Jesus, the Spirit enables you to be a bold witness to the truth of Christ. And finally, throughout your pilgrimage in life your Savior is constantly interceding for you with your heavenly Father. What a wonderful Counselor your Savior is! How graciously he supplies us with another Counselor in the Holy Spirit!

During the week

Reread John 14–17. Search for other gems of comfort Jesus shares with us that we were not able to cover in this lesson.

Read ahead for next week as we move on to the events in the Garden of Gethsemane. Pay special attention to Christ’s struggles in the garden. Look for evidence that he triumphed in those struggles. Read Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:39-53; and John 18:1-12a.
Lesson Three: The Son Willingly Bows to His Father’s Will

Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:7-8)

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us your Spirit today as we watch Jesus bear the guilt of our sin. Enable us to praise him better and rest in the peace he has given us. Amen.

Background

How dismayed our heavenly Father must have been when in the Garden of Eden his created children, Adam and Eve, voiced their first defiant “no” to his will. They rejected his plan for their lives. With high arrogance and base foolishness, they embarked on the path of sinful self-will. Unfortunately, we can relate to that defiance of God, for it has been played out countless times in the lives of Adam and Eve’s descendants, including us.

Today our lesson takes us to another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane. As we watch our Savior, we will see and hear something far different from sinful self-will. Here we will observe an obedient “yes” to the Father’s will, and we’ll note the eternal implications of that answer for each of us.

The Mount of Olives was well known to Judas, the betrayer. John tells us that Jesus often met there with his disciples. In fact, Jesus and his disciples spent the night there at least twice during Holy Week (Luke 21:37). Judas rightly concluded that he would be successful in betraying Jesus by leading the mob of soldiers and servants to this quiet place outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Appreciate His Agony

Read Matthew 26:36-44.

1. Read Isaiah 53:4. Explain what is behind this astounding comment from Jesus’ lips: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (verse 38).
2. Jesus’ sorrowful struggle is also revealed in the earnestness of his prayers—spoken facedown in the dirt! Does there seem to be an unwillingness to do what the Father was asking of him? How are we to understand why he prays as he does?


4. Compare how we often react to serious difficulty with how Jesus reacted to it in the garden.

5. How humbling to see the God-man facedown in the dirt under the load of human sin. We who often think of sin “but lightly” here may “see its nature rightly” (Christian Worship 127:3). Contrast how Jesus feels as he bears the burden of our sin with how modern society views the seriousness of sin.

6. What would happen to us if Jesus did not drink this cup of suffering the Father held before him?

**View His Victory**

As the sound of the approaching mixed mob of Jews and Romans (including the Roman commander himself) breaks into the quiet of the garden, we see the glorious beauty of what happened in Gethsemane.

*Read John 18:1-12a.*

7. In these 12 verses, find examples that show Jesus’ complete willingness to drink the cup the Father has given him.
8. Jesus’ work as our Savior involves both his active obedience (keeping the law perfectly, where we have broken it) and his passive obedience (willingly receiving the punishment for the ways we have broken his law). How does this account reveal Jesus as our perfect Savior?

9. Agree or disagree: The greatest lesson we can learn from what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane is to persevere in temptation with prayer just as Jesus did.

We have all rebelled against God’s will, but there is one who did not. The wonderful truth is that Jesus’ obedience counts for us all, giving us the status before God of perfectly obedient sons and daughters. Because of Christ, God is well pleased with us. He drinks the cup of suffering so that we might drink the cup of salvation!

**During the week**

Reread the following references from the four gospels that describe the events in the garden. Look for even more details of the depth of Jesus’ suffering and more evidence of his willingness to do the saving will of the Father.

- *Matthew 26:36-56*
- *Mark 14:32-52*
- *John 18:1-12a*

**Read ahead for next week** as we follow Jesus into the Jewish courts to see him condemned. Notice again how John gives us details that fill out the picture given to us by the other evangelists. Read:

- *Matthew 26:57–27:10*
- *Mark 14:53–15:1*
- *John 18:12-27*
Lesson Four: Christ is Rejected by His Own

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. (Isaiah 53:3)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we watch you being despised and rejected by your own people and denied by one of your dearest disciples, may we recognize also our own natural inclinations to despise you in pride and deny you from fear. Help us see your willingness to face the condemnation that should rightly have fallen on us, that we may marvel forever at the wonder of your grace and boldly declare you before the world. Amen.

Background

Information about the Jewish Sanhedrin, before whom Jesus stood, is at the end of this Bible study. As high priest, Caiaphas was presiding over this proud body at this time. He was the son-in-law of Annas, a powerful man who himself had been a high priest.

Jesus was first taken to Annas. This served as an opportunity to put together a good case against Jesus (a pretrial hearing, as we would call it) while the Sanhedrin was being quickly gathered for its emergency, late-night meeting.

Following this was a middle-of-the-night trial before Caiaphas and the whole Sanhedrin, in which Jesus was condemned. However, because Jewish law seems to indicate that a death sentence trial had to extend over two days and that it needed to take place during the day, there was a second meeting at dawn before Caiaphas. Jesus was again put under oath and again formally condemned as worthy of death.

Rejected by the Sanhedrin, which Rejects the Truth

Read Matthew 26:57-68.

1. As he stood on trial, Jesus looked defeated, but it is really Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who will soon be defeated! Describe how the case against Jesus was falling apart.
2. Why did Jesus answer when Caiaphas put him under oath although he remained silent to Caiaphas’ other questions?

3. How were Jesus’ words a final, loving warning to those who were about to sentence him?

4. Use the following passages to explain why the leaders rejected Jesus in such bitterness and anger.
   - “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)
   - “The sinful mind is hostile to God.” (Romans 8:7a)
   - “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” (John 3:19,20)

5. Consider the words of Isaiah 29:13: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” How did these words apply to the Jewish Sanhedrin? Is there a temptation for us to act like this?

What awesome majesty can be seen in the suffering Savior. He boldly states the truth that he is the promised Christ, the eternal Son of God, knowing full well that such a confession will seal his doom!

**Rejected by Peter, who is Ashamed of the Truth**

*Read Matthew 26:69-75.*

6. In a sense Jesus and Peter are both on trial at the same time. What is different about Jesus’ and Peter’s reactions?
7. Luke 22:61 adds the detail that just after the second rooster crow (only one is mentioned by Matthew, Luke, and John), Jesus turned to look straight at Peter. As you picture this taking place, how would you describe the look Jesus gave Peter?

8. What is good about Peter’s bitter weeping?

9. Evaluate this statement: Unless our sin brings tears to our eyes as Peter’s sin did to Peter’s eyes, we aren’t really repentant.

10. When can we know that we have been repentant enough to be forgiven? These words from 1 John can help with the answer: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8,9).

Rejoice, Christians! Our Savior’s beautiful “I am” has covered over all the times we have given the impression that we are not one of this man’s disciples.

**Rejected by Judas, who Fails to Understand the Truth**

*Read Matthew 27:1-10.*

11. What terrifying truth now grips Judas?

12. It is interesting to note that the usual Greek word for “repentance” is not used when Matthew records Judas’ reaction. Rather, it says he was “seized with remorse.” What is different about Judas’ remorse and Peter’s grief?

13. What is so sadly tragic about Judas’ self-inflicted death and eternal condemnation? (See Acts 1:25.)

14. Agree or disagree: Satan doesn’t care whether he drives us to pride or despair. Both serve his purpose equally well.
15. Why is the biblical concept of grace the answer to both pride and despair?

During the week

Reread the following references to the events we studied in this lesson. As you do, pray that God would spare you from falling into the proud hypocrisy of the leaders and the horrible despair of Judas.

- Matthew 26:57 – 27:10
- Mark 14:53 – 15:1
- Luke 22:54-71
- John 18:12-27

Read ahead for next week. As you do, look for reasons to give honor to the King of truth. Read:

- Matthew 27:11-31
- Mark 15:1-20
- John 18:28 – 19:16
About the Sanhedrin

(Excerpts taken from “Sanhedrin,” Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, accessed through Glo Bible)

History
In a.d. 6, when Judaea was made a Rom. province, the Sanhedrin and its president, the high priest, were granted almost exclusive control of the internal affairs of the nation, similar to that which it had under the Hel. kings. The sacred status of Jerusalem and its environs was recognized by the Romans and, so long as public order was maintained and tax revenues were forthcoming, they were content for national matters to be under the control of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. It is during the period of the Rom. procurators (a.d. 6-66) that the Sanhedrin came to possess the greatest power and jurisdiction of its history, although the Jewish authority was always ultimately answerable to the Rom. governor. Josephus can speak of the dominion of the nation as having been entrusted to the high priests of this period (Antiq. XX. 10).

This is the Sanhedrin which we encounter in the NT documents. It is a body composed largely of members of the aristocracy (the chief priests and Sadducees), which under the leadership of the high priest, exercises considerable judicial authority in handling Jesus of Nazareth according to the gospels, and his disciples according to the Book of Acts. Its area of jurisdiction also appears to include the Diaspora to some degree (witness Paul’s request for letters to the synagogue at Damascus from the high priest, Acts 9:1 f.).

Composition
Particularly in the NT, one encounters repeated references to “chief priests” ( ), the pl. of “high priest,”. This group which forms the leading component of the Sanhedrin, consisted of former high priests including members of the most important of the priestly families. Probably next to this group in prestige was the lay nobility, who like the priestly aristocracy were also of Sadducean sympathies, and who are prob. referred to under the title “elders” ( ). Another important group, an element of increasing importance in the Sanhedrin of the 1st cent., is that of the “scribes” ( ), the professional scholars who were experts in matters of Mosaic law (hence, “lawyers”). The scribes, by way of contrast with the other groups, were Pharisees. Although they were a minority in the Sanhedrin, they apparently enjoyed considerable popular support. So much so, that not only could nothing be accomplished without the Pharisees, but as Josephus indicated, the Sadducees often went along with them in order merely to be tolerated by the masses (Antiq. XVIII. 1. 4).

Session.
The Sanhedrin, like other local courts according to the Mishnah, almost certainly was prohibited from meeting on the Sabbath or on feast days. Whether it could in extreme circumstances legally meet on a feast day as it did in the trial of Jesus cannot be known, but seems improbable. In cases involving capital punishment, the sentence could not lawfully be delivered until the day following the trial, and therefore such trials were also prohibited on the eve of either a Sabbath or a feast day (San 4:1). Cases involving potential capital punishment were similarly barred from taking place at night (San 4:1). According to Tosephta (San 7:1), the hours of meeting on regular days were from the time of the morning sacrifice to the evening sacrifice.

Competence
The Sanhedrin certainly had complete control of the religious affairs of the nation as the Mishnah indicates. The high court was the supreme authority in the interpretation of Mosaic law and, when it mediated in questions disputed in the lower courts, its verdict was final. Beyond this, the Sanhedrin also governed civil affairs and tried certain criminal cases under the authority of the Rom. procurator. The Romans were quite content to let subject nations regulate internal affairs, but there were, of course,
always limits. They, for example, would have reserved the right to intervene at will, and while it is probable that they usually went along with the high court's decisions, they were under no compulsion to do so.

The NT data clearly point to the conclusion that the Sanhedrin did not possess the power of capital punishment. Jesus appears to have been turned over to the Romans because the crime of which He was alleged to be guilty was regarded as deserving of capital punishment. At any rate, the assertion of John 18:31 made by the Jews to Pilate is beyond question: “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” Remarkably, there is a piece of Talmudic evidence that supports this assertion. In the Jerusalem Talmud (San 1:1; 7:2), it is said that the right of capital punishment was taken from Israel forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple. The round number forty quite prob. means to convey the period of Rom. procuratorship (precisely, a.d. 6-66). All of this fits with what is known of the Rom. custom in the government of the provinces. Capital punishment was almost always held by the governor as his own personal prerogative. It was on occasion granted to free cities in the empire, but that it would be granted to a city such as Jerusalem, or to a nation so infamously unruly as Judaea is hardly to be expected.

The Sanhedrin in the NT
The action of the Sanhedrin in the NT bears out the picture here presented. The Sanhedrin is perhaps most conspicuous in its role in the trial of Jesus in the gospels. Without getting into the intricacies of the trial itself, the following may be said. The Sanhedrin had every right to prosecute Jesus for alleged crimes whether religious or civil. From what can be pieced together from the Gospel narratives (Matt 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 19) the Sanhedrin rather than being a vehicle for the accomplishment of justice—for which the rabbinic model in the Mishnah is exemplary—here became guilty of a gross travesty of justice. The time and nature of its meetings, the manner in which the “trial” was conducted, its strange outcome—all point to the intent desire of the Jewish authorities to do away with Jesus. Here we have a group of desperate men who, while trying to keep a show of propriety and at least a semblance of “legality,” take what can only be regarded as very desperate measures. Long before His arrest and trial they had determined to have Jesus put to death (Matt 12:14; Mark 3:6; John 11:53). It was only a question of how to do this, and under what charges to hand him over to the Romans for the capital punishment they themselves could not legally administer. Ultimately they found this in the political charge of sedition.

There can be little question that the Sanhedrin in its full complement included some outstanding men. In addition to Gamaliel, already mentioned, the council included Joseph of Arimathea who was a disciple of Jesus secretly (John 19:38), and Nicodemus who was also drawn to Jesus. The latter showed a genuine concern for justice in the high council’s intentions concerning Jesus when he said to his fellow members, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:50). One may only suppose that in the fiasco which served as Jesus’ trial, these more honorable members of the Sanhedrin were not present at the clandestine meetings, or that we have no record of their protestations.
Lesson Five: The King is Condemned for Telling the Truth

Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. (Psalm 22:13)

Prayer: Dear Lord, we come before you today as people who are set free from sin and eternal death. As we watch you unjustly accused and sentenced, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts that you allowed yourself to go into captivity. Thank you for becoming a captive so that we might be set free. Amen.

Background

Pontius Pilate’s infamous name has been pronounced every time Christians join in the Apostles’ Creed for centuries. No matter what else Pilate may have done in the ten years he was governor of Judea, he will be remembered for his decision to send Jesus to the cross. Pilate could have—should have—set Jesus free. But he didn’t.

Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. He served under Emperor Tiberius. While history does not reveal Pilate to be bumbling or incompetent (his rule over Judea was the second longest of any first-century Roman governor), he did have several unnecessary confrontations with his Jewish subjects.

Herod Antipas, whom we meet briefly here, is the son of the bloodthirsty Herod the Great, who murdered the infants of Bethlehem (not to mention hundreds of other subjects). Herod Antipas had learned well from his father. He was the one who had imprisoned and then beheaded John the Baptist.

The King of Truth Meets the Governor of Skepticism

Read John 18:28-38.

1. The leaders of the Sanhedrin told Pilate that Jesus was “subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2). Why do you think they changed the charges from blasphemy to treason?

2. What did Jesus mean when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world”? 
3. What is “the truth” to which Jesus came to testify? (See John 8:31-36; 10:7-10; 14:6.)

4. How do you understand Pilate’s question: “What is truth?”

5. Why might Pilate be called a spokesman for our society and even for much of modern Christianity?

How wonderful it is to belong in the spiritual kingdom of the King of truth! We don’t have to deny the truth that we are sinners, and we can rejoice in the truth of Jesus’ forgiveness.

At this point Pilate tries another way to get rid of this case by handing it over to Herod, whose jurisdiction included Galilee and who in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The move mended political barriers between them but failed to get Pilate off the hook for this case.

**The Innocent King is Sentenced to Death**

Historical sources reveal little about the origins of the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover. Pilate is looking for a way out, but he underestimates the hatred of Jesus’ enemies. In this event, though, we also see a hint of why Jesus is going to the cross. The sinless Son of God is the captive, while sinful human beings are set free.


6. Why did Pilate have Jesus, whom he knew to be innocent, flogged, beaten, and humiliated? As you answer this question, picture what Jesus must have looked like as Pilate pointed to him and said, “Here is the man!”

7. Some assume that many who shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David!” on Palm Sunday shouted “Crucify him!” on Good Friday. While sinful human nature is certainly fickle, why might this be an assumption we cannot prove?

8. In what way did the charge about Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God almost backfire on the Jews?
9. Finally the Jews said, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar” (John 19:12). Why was the final accusation a stroke of evil genius?

10. Agree or disagree: Since God the Father was using all these events to fulfill his eternal plan of salvation, we really can’t hold accountable any of those involved in Jesus’ trial.

Jesus allows himself to be tried and condemned by the same powers he himself established to maintain justice in the world. In fact, Pilate is willing to let a criminal go free and condemn an innocent man. How clearly Jesus’ willingness to obey his Father’s will is put on display.

**During the week**

Reread the following references to the events we studied in this lesson. Pay special attention to the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since we didn’t focus on the details they give us about Jesus’ trial before Pilate.

- *Matthew 27:11-31*
- *Mark 15:1-20*
- *John 18:28 – 19:16*

**Read ahead for next time** (May 1), when we will study the depths of Jesus’ suffering:

- *Matthew 27:32-66*
- *Mark 15:21-47*
- *Luke 23:26-56*
- *John 19:17-42*

If you want to be amazed by the detail of Old Testament prophecy about Jesus’ crucifixion, read Psalm 22. In this psalm the Messiah himself speaks through the inspired
Lesson Six: Jesus on the Cross

He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for taking our sins on yourself. Today, as we contemplate the cross, help us remember that when you died there, we died too. Our sins accompanied you to the cross, and when you overcame them in your own body, you overcame them in us. Thank you for all you have done for us. Amen.

Background

The cross was one of the worst forms of torture ever devised. Yet it has become for us a symbol of joyous peace and life. For the Son of God, that cross meant immeasurable agony, but for all who believe in his name, the cross means uncountable glories.

Crucifixion was a form of capital punishment the Romans had learned from their mortal enemies, the Carthaginians. Its origins can be traced back at least to the Persians, who used it already in the sixth century B.C. Death on a cross was meant to be slow and agonizing. A crucified man finally died because he was unable to breathe. It was impossible for the person to exhale without pulling himself up on the cross—which he had to do again and again. Agonizing pain and fatigue finally led to asphyxiation. At times, if the condemned was hanging on too long, his captors would break his leg bones. This would make it impossible for the condemned man to maneuver his body so that he could breathe. Death would follow quickly.

For more about how the crucifixion might actually have taken place, you might view this National Geographic Video:

Jesus Walks the Way of Sorrows


1. It was a custom of the Romans to force a condemned man to carry the crossbeam of his cross out to the place of crucifixion, where the upright post was waiting from previous executions. What shows us how weak Jesus was at this time?
2. It was standard policy for the charge against the condemned man to be nailed to the cross with him. What do you think was Pilate’s intent with the words he placed over Jesus’ head?

On the path of sorrow, whose depths none of us can imagine, goes Jesus, willingly carrying what none of us can carry. While Simon could help with the weight of the wood, the weight of the world’s sins was a burden no other could bear!

**Jesus Endures the Most Important Six Hours of the World’s History**

Crucifixions must have been common at The Place of the Skull. But none had ever been like this one, and nothing made that point more forcefully than the words that came from the mouth of this condemned man. It is interesting to note that what are often called the Seven Words of Christ from the Cross are not found in such a grouping in any one of the four gospels. The most (three) are found in John and Luke. Jesus may have said much more than what the Spirit saw fit to record for us. But what is recorded takes us to the heart and core of our salvation!

**Read Luke 23:33-38.**

3. For whom was Jesus praying when he said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”?


4. Using the beautiful words of one of the criminals, define what true repentance is.

5. How does Jesus’ answer to the criminal comfort us in the face of death?

**Read John 19:25-27.**

6. How do these words of Jesus show him to be our Savior?

**Read Matthew 27:45,46.**

7. Why was Jesus utterly forsaken by God the Father? (Read Psalm 22:1-21 for a complete version of Jesus’ words.)
8. What is the importance of the word “my” in Jesus’ cry?

9. In the familiar benediction we hear Sunday after Sunday, these words of blessing are placed upon us: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). Explain how these words were made possible by the events of Good Friday.

**Read John 19:28-30.**

10. The Greek word translated “it is finished” is the same word ancient shopkeepers would write across a patron’s bill when the bill had been paid. What insight does this give us into Jesus’ words?


11. As Jesus just announced, the agonies of hell were past. How does this become even clearer in the words Jesus speaks next?

12. What do these words mean for us when we die?

13. Several miracles occurred at the moment of Jesus’ death. The most significant is the ripping of the temple curtain that hung between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. By Old Testament law, only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and only on the Day of Atonement and only if he was carrying the blood of a sacrifice for the sins of the people. What was the point, then, of this miracle that took place when Jesus died?

In the brief but powerful words Jesus speaks from the cross, we have a summary of our whole salvation. Since God’s judgment on sin has been completely poured out on his own Son, we who trust in him will receive nothing from heaven but grace and peace!
Jesus is Buried and Guarded

Isaiah chapter 53 describes the sufferings and death of the Savior. There must have been many parts of Isaiah chapter 53 that puzzled Old Testament believers. However, no verse would have been more puzzling than verse 9: “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” Now the puzzle is solved.


14. What is so amazing about Joseph’s and Nicodemus’ confessions of faith in Jesus?

15. Why can we be thankful that the Jewish leaders requested a guard at Jesus’ tomb?

**During the week**

Reread the following references to the suffering, death, and burial of your Savior. Ponder each word carefully.

- Matthew 27:32-66
- Mark 15:21-47
- John 19:17-42

Good Friday, for all its agony for our Lord, was a day of tremendous triumph. It didn’t look that way at first. But Easter Sunday soon would declare the victory that Jesus had won. In the next lesson, we will begin to look at Jesus’ resurrection and the appearances he made to his first disciples. **Read ahead to prepare for our discussion:**

- Matthew 28:1-15
- Mark 16:1-11
- John 20:1-18