

LIFE OF CHRIST, PART 2

by Christine Walton

**Grades 5-6
Year 1
Quarter 3**

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Bible Baseball

Singles

What did the Syrophenician woman want Jesus to do?
Who said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"?
Jesus compared Peter to what object?
Name one of the disciples who saw Jesus transfigured.
Name a person from the Old Testament who was with Jesus when He was transfigured.
What did the voice from the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration say? [Give single, double, triple, or home run credit depending on the accuracy of the quotation.]
What means did Jesus use to heal the man blind from birth?
Who was Martha's sister?
Who was Martha's brother?
Jesus said, "It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven . . ." than what?
Name one commandment Jesus mentioned to the Rich Young Ruler.
What did the blind man in Jericho ask Jesus to do for him?
What kind of tree did Zacchaeus climb to see Jesus?
What was Zacchaeus' job?
Was Zacchaeus tall or short?
On what did Jesus ride as He triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday?
Name one thing the crowd put in front of Jesus as He rode a donkey.
What did the crowd shout to Jesus as He rode into the city? [May give double or triple credit depending on accuracy.]
Whose head was on the coin Jesus' enemies showed Him?
What disciple betrayed Jesus?
How many times did Peter deny Jesus?
Jesus said that Peter would deny Him before what happened?
Who was crucified with Jesus?
On what day of the week was Jesus raised from the dead?

Doubles

What was in the boy's lunch that fed 5000 people?
What did the crowd of more than 5000 people want to do after Jesus had fed them?
To what did Jesus compare the Syrophenician woman?
Name one Old Testament figure people said Jesus was.
What did Jesus say that caused Peter to rebuke Him, saying, "Never, Lord."
Name two of the disciples who saw Jesus transfigured.
Name one comparison to how Jesus shone when He was transfigured.
Name two people from the Old Testament who were with Jesus when He was transfigured.
What did Peter want to do when Jesus was transfigured?
On what day did Jesus heal the man who had been born blind?
How did the Pharisees punish the man who had been born blind?
Jesus used what word instead of death when talking about Lazarus?
When Jesus first arrived at Lazarus' house, who came out to greet Him?
To Martha, Jesus said, "I am . . ." [what?]

Name two commandments Jesus mentioned to the Rich Young Ruler.
 What commandment did the Rich Young Ruler break?
 What one thing did Jesus say the Rich Young Ruler lacked?
 Jesus said, "What is impossible with men is . . ." [what?]
 Name a blind man whom Jesus healed in Jericho.
 Into what city did Jesus ride on a donkey colt?
 Name two things the crowd put in front of Jesus as He rode a donkey.
 What did the children shout to Jesus in the Temple?
 Name a group that tried to trap Jesus by questioning Him.
 Name a question Jesus' enemies asked when they tried to trap Him.
 What important doctrine did the Sadducees deny?
 How many brothers were married to one woman in the Sadducees' story?
 What did Jesus say the greatest commandment is?
 What did Jesus say the second greatest commandment is?
 Jesus celebrated what Jewish feast at the Last Supper?
 What unusual thing did Peter and John see as they entered the city to prepare for the Passover?
 About what did the disciples get into a dispute at the Last Supper?
 To what parts of the Passover meal did Jesus attach special significance, and what did He say they represented? [single for partial answers]
 To whom did Jesus say, "Satan has desired to sift you as wheat."
 Where was Jesus crucified?
 What was offered Jesus to drink when He hung on the cross?
 What happened to Jesus' clothes when He was crucified?
 What happened in the Temple as soon as Jesus died?
 Name one woman to whom an angel appeared after Christ had been raised from the dead.
 What did the angel at Jesus' tomb look like?
 How did the guards react to the angel at Jesus' tomb?

Triples

The Sea of Tiberias is also called what?
 How many baskets full of leftovers were gathered after the feeding of the 5000?
 What answer did the Syrophenician woman give Jesus?
 What Greek word means *Messiah*?
 Name two Old Testament figures people said Jesus was.
 Whom did Jesus call a stumbling block?
 What was the name of Peter's father?
 What will not overcome/prove stronger than the church?
 Name a gift *or* power Jesus gave to Peter.
 Finish this verse: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and . . ."
 Name three of the disciples who saw Jesus transfigured.
 What did the disciples do when they heard the voice from the cloud?
 What did Jesus tell the disciples after they heard the voice from the cloud?
 Whom did Jesus compare to Elijah?
 What question did the disciples ask Jesus about a man who had been blind from birth?
 What answer did Jesus give to the disciples' question about the man blind from birth?
 To what pool did Jesus send the man who had been born blind?
 For whom did the Pharisees send to discuss the case of the man born blind?
 Where did Mary and Martha live?
 What special act of love did Mary do for Jesus?

What did Jesus say was the reason for Lazarus' sickness?
After He heard about Lazarus being sick, how long did Jesus stay where He was?
What disciple was willing to go with Jesus to Mary and Martha's house even if he might die?
What was Thomas also called?
Name three commandments Jesus mentioned to the Rich Young Ruler.
Who said to Jesus, "We have left all we had to follow you."
Name one (for a home run name two) things Zacchaeus promised to do.
What did Bartimaeus shout when he heard that Jesus was passing by?
Name the city from which Jesus sent two disciples to get a donkey colt.
Name an animal mentioned as being sold in the Temple.
Finish this verse Jesus quoted: "My house shall be called ____, but you are making it ____." [Give credit for a double for filling in only one blank.]
Name two groups who tried to trap Jesus by questioning Him.
Name two questions Jesus' enemies asked when they tried to trap Him.
When talking to the Sadducees, whom did Jesus say people would be like in heaven?
Name a person Jesus sent to make preparation for the Last Supper.
Who was forced to carry Jesus' cross?
What did the sign above Jesus' cross say?
About the ninth hour, what did Jesus cry out from the cross?
Name one amazing thing that happened when Jesus died.
Name one woman who watched the crucifixion from a distance.
Jesus told the disciples that forgiveness would be preached in His name to all nations beginning where?
Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. What was this?

Home Runs

Near what holiday time did Jesus feed the 5000?
Before Jesus fed the 5000, who told Jesus they did not have the resources to do so?
Who suggested using a boy's lunch to feed 5000 people?
What did Jesus do after feeding 5000 people?
Where did Jesus meet the Syrophenician woman?
Name three Old Testament figures people said Jesus was.
Where did one of the disciples confess that Jesus is the Christ?
Name a gift *and* power Jesus gave to Peter.
How many days after Peter's confession of Christ did the Transfiguration occur?
What was Thomas also called and what does this mean?
Name four commandments Jesus mentioned to the Rich Young Ruler.
In what city did Zacchaeus live?
Name or quote the Old Testament Scripture that was fulfilled by Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem.
Name or quote an Old Testament Scripture Jesus quoted when He cleansed the Temple.
Where did Jesus spend the night after cleansing the Temple?
Name three questions Jesus' enemies asked when they tried to trap Him.
Name two people Jesus sent to make preparation for the Last Supper.
For what hours was it dark during the crucifixion?
Name two amazing things that happened when Jesus died.
Name two women who watched the crucifixion from a distance.
Name two women to whom an angel appeared after Christ had been raised from the dead.

FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND MEN

John 6:1-14

Lesson Aim

To recognize that Jesus is the Bread of Life Who can meet our physical and spiritual needs.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:33 - “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:12-17.**] Few incidents in Scripture contain as many varied lessons as the feeding of the five thousand, a story that is found in all four Gospels. The miracle occurred in a desert place outside Bethsaida. Jesus and His disciples had been so busy that they had not even had time to eat, so He urged them to come rest with Him in a solitary place. However, a large number of people found out about this and followed them. Even though many were seeking Him only in hope of receiving physical benefit, Jesus did not turn the people away, but taught and healed them.

When the disciples, seeing that it was getting late, suggested He send the multitude away to get food, Jesus told them to feed them themselves. Philip realistically assessed the situation: “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” (The NIV translation “eight months’ wages” is literally 200 denarii. A denarius was a working man’s average daily wage.) Jesus wanted to involve His disciples in ministry, challenging them to see their own inadequate resources and turn to Him. Philip saw only the hopelessness of the circumstances, but Andrew was willing to make a suggestion, even if it seemed

silly. “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will that go among so many?” The answer, of course, was more than far enough. Jesus can take our inadequate gifts and make them sufficient. The boy was willing to give away his whole lunch with no thought of any return, and the Lord blessed abundantly. The disciples demonstrated trust and obedience as well. They had the more than 5000 people (5000 men plus women and children) recline on the grass in groups of fifty (the Lord did things in an orderly manner), presumably before they knew what Jesus was going to do. The Lord gave thanks (do we?) and, like Moses, provided food in the desert for His people in such abundance that twelve baskets full were left over. (Note, nothing was wasted; the environment was cared for.) The crowd was ecstatic. At last, here was Someone who would supply what they wanted. Perhaps He was the coming Prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15. Surely someone who could do such a miracle could free Israel from Roman tyranny!

But Jesus came to transform lives, not just fill bellies. He is the Creator and Sustainer of life Who meets all our needs, spiritual as well as physical (Matthew 6:25-34; Psalm 37:25). He is the Bread of Life (John 6:25-29; I Corinthians 11; Luke 22:19; the mention of the Passover in John 6:4 hardly seems accidental) - broken for us, He nourishes us. Thanks be to God.

Lesson Procedure

Bring in five small rolls and start the lesson by asking your students how many hungry people they would feed. The barley loaves in the Bible passage (barley was a cheap grain) were probably small, coarse, flat, and round, with the fish eaten as a condiment on top of the bread (sandwiches hadn't been invented yet). They probably won't even be enough for your class, but they may divide them as best they can. Explain that today's Bible passage relates how Jesus once fed 5000 men, plus women and children, with five small flat barley loaves and two fish. You may wish to have your class draw a mural of this incident (this may be done after the **DIG IN**), or at least draw 5000 (or even 1000) X's or circles to give them some idea of the large number of people present.

Activity

If possible, later in the week, take your students to a rescue mission soup kitchen to help prepare or serve meals.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

John 6:1-14



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verses 1-2 - Why did a great crowd of people follow Jesus?

verses 3-4 - What holiday was near? After you read the rest of the story, write why you think John may have mentioned this (What was this holiday about? What did it involve?).

verses 5-7 - Why do you think Jesus asked Philip this question? Eight months' wages (NIV) is literally 200 denarii. A denarius was how much a person would earn in one day. How much money would an average person earn in 200 days (about eight months) today? How much would it cost to feed 5000 men (plus an unknown number of women and children) a meal today?

verses 8-9 - Compare Andrew's suggestion with Philip's answer. How do you think Philip's and Andrew's personalities may have been the same and different? The boy was willing to give up his lunch to the Lord for others with no thought of getting anything for it. Are we willing to give up all we have to God? Do you ever feel your gifts and abilities are too small to be used in God's kingdom? What did the Lord do with this small gift?

verse 10 - The disciples obeyed Jesus. Jesus did things in an organized way (do we?). The people actually lay down on their sides to eat instead of sitting.

verse 11 - What did Jesus do before He gave out the bread (do we?). Jesus provided for the people's needs (was He stingy?). How specifically has He provided for your needs physically and in other ways?

verses 12-13 - What do these verses say about the way we take care of the environment. Do you waste food or other gifts of God? Think of specific ways in which you can conserve resources and begin doing at least one this week. Encourage your friends to do so as well.

verse 14 - Moses said a Prophet would come like himself (Deuteronomy 18:15). How is Jesus the same as and different from Moses?

verse 15 - What did the people want to do with Jesus? Do you think Jesus was tempted by this? What did Jesus do instead?

verses 1-15 - Read John 6:25-29 and Luke 22:19. Why does Jesus call Himself the Bread of Life? How is He like bread?

Personal application: Think about what this passage teaches about Who Jesus is and His ability to provide for all our needs. What difference does this make in your life? Are you willing to give all you have to the Lord, as the small boy did?

THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

Mark 7:24-30

Lesson Aim

That your students may learn the importance of humility and persistent faith.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:34-35 - “But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passage: **Matthew 15:21-28**]. A mother’s love for her children can be very powerful. The Syrophenician woman was willing, it seems, to do whatever she could so that her daughter could be delivered from Satan’s power. Jesus had gone to the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, presumably to rest. Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities on the Mediterranean coast about thirty and fifty miles from Galilee. The woman also was a Gentile, a Greek coming from Syrian Phoenicia (as opposed to Libyan Phoenicia in North Africa), a region northwest of Galilee in what is now Lebanon. She had no claim on the God of the Covenant, but boldly approached the Messiah, falling at His feet and begging Him to drive the evil spirit from her daughter.

Jews considered Gentiles to be unclean dogs, unworthy of their time or notice, but one would not think Jesus would consider them so. His reply seems terribly cruel. We can only guess the reasons for His statement, but some considerations may help our understanding. There were limitations on Jesus’ earthly ministry. Although God clearly told the church to preach the Gospel to the whole world (Acts 1:8; 10:1-

11:18), Jesus' work focused on the Jews, although occasionally He helped Gentiles such as the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). Was Jesus' remark meant, not to discourage the woman, but to draw out her faith? The word He used for "dogs" was not the usual one for Gentiles, the scavenging street dogs feeding on refuse, but the one for a household pet, a puppy (κυνάρια - *kunariois*). Whatever the reason, Jesus' statement must have been a crushing blow to the woman. But she did not allow this to deter her. Rather than arguing with the Lord and claiming that she had as much right to blessing as anyone, she accepted Jesus' assessment. In humility, she accepted her status, but in faith went on from there to present her case. She did not question Christ, but pled on the basis of what He Himself had said. The Lord responded and delivered her daughter from the evil spirit (this was done from afar, as was the case with the centurion's servant). Like the Syrophenician woman, may we approach the Lord with submissive humility, but also with a persistent faith (see Luke 18:1-8).

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by presenting the following scenario to your students: "Imagine that your coach has just given your championship ball team tickets to a professional game, and now your little brother wants to go, too. How do you feel? Or imagine that your father has arranged a special family vacation, and the spoiled kid down the block asks if he can go along. These are very rough analogies, but they may give you some understanding of today's story, in which a Gentile woman asks Jesus, who at the time was ministering almost solely to Jews, to help her."

DIG IN - Mark 7:24-30.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Mark 7:24-30



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verse 24 - Use your Bible dictionary to find out about Tyre and Sidon. Why do you think Jesus would want His presence kept secret?

verses 25-26 - Describe how the woman felt about her daughter. What was her attitude toward Jesus? How is where the woman was from important to the story?

verse 27 - What did Jesus mean by this? Do you think Jesus was being unkind? Why or why not? Why do you think He gave this answer?

verse 28 - How do you think the woman would have felt after Jesus' statement? How did the woman's reply show her faith?

verses 29-30 - What was the result of the woman's faith?

Personal application: What can we learn from the way in which the Syrophenician woman approached Jesus? She went to the Lord in humility and faith. How do we act when we want something from other people (such as our parents) or the Lord? Do we demand our rights or consider their evaluation of the situation? On the other hand, do we give up too easily instead of calmly explaining our desires? We must be submissive to authority, but also have faith that God can work situations out for the best. Read Luke 18:1-8 for a story Jesus told about persistent prayer.

PETER'S CONFESSION

Matthew 16:13-28

Lesson Aim

That your students will know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who died to pay the penalty for the sins of His people, who rose the third day and demands that His followers take up their cross as well.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:36-37 - “And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Mark 8:27-9:1; Luke 9:18-27.**] Some biblical passages are difficult to understand but also contain profound truth. Allow your students to wrestle with the perplexing verses, but bring them back to the foundational truths that Jesus is the Messiah Who died for His people and expects them to die to themselves in service to Him.

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the son of Man is?’” Caesarea Philippi was built by Herod Philip the tetrarch at the foot of Mount Hermon, twenty-five miles from the Sea of Galilee. Jesus commonly referred to Himself as the Son of Man, a term that could refer to any human being or, as He used it, to the Messiah (see Daniel 7:13-14). The disciples answered John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah, godly men of prayer to whom God had given extraordinary gifts. But the Lord was interested in more than common opinion. “Who do *you* (emphasized you plural -

‘ὕμεις - *humeis*) say that I am?” Jesus wanted the disciples to be sure of Who He was. This is the bottom-line question. How we honestly answer it will make all the difference in how we live our lives. If Jesus is just a good man, a teacher, an historical figure, it matters little. But if He is truly the Son of the Living God Who came to earth, died, and rose again, we owe Him our total allegiance and absolute obedience.

Simon Peter knew Who Jesus was. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” he confessed. Christ, (ὁ Χριστός - *ho Christos*) is Greek for Messiah, the Anointed One chosen by God, endowed with power to deliver God’s people. As the Jews longed for freedom from Roman oppression, the idea of the Messiah had become political and the disciples may have had difficulty in reconciling their growing knowledge of Jesus with the popular conception of the Messiah. Jesus was pleased with Simon’s response. He replied, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah [cf. Christ, Son of God], for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it [or prove stronger than it].” The English translation misses the Greek pun. “You are πέτρος (*petros* - a stone, a piece of a rock) and on this πέτρα (*petra* - a large rock) I will build my church.” But what is “this rock”? Is it Peter (an interpretation which can but needn’t lead to the Roman Catholic doctrines of apostolic succession and papal infallibility), or is it Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, or Peter in his role of confessing the Christ? The passage gets no easier as the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” are given to Peter. Is Peter being compared to a steward? Is his authority for him alone, or in some way passed on to the church at large? To bind and to loose has to do with forbidding and permitting, and this may refer to church discipline (cf. Matthew 18:15-20).

Once the disciples had confessed Jesus as Messiah, the Lord told them what this meant: He would not be the expected political revolutionary, but would have to suffer and die. “Never, Lord,” said Peter (the Greek construction is particularly strong - “Never! Not! No Way!”). Jesus turned to Peter. “Out of my sight, Satan” [literally “Go behind me, Satan,” meaning “out of my way,” not just “out of my sight”]. Peter thought he knew more than the Lord and was now not addressed as “blessed,” but as “Satan,” an adversary. Peter was tempting Jesus to avoid the cross, as Satan had tempted Christ in the wilderness. Do we ever unthinkingly try to dissuade people from God’s will for them, perhaps because the way seems too difficult? Peter, the Rock, had become σκανδαλον (*skandalon*), a stumblingblock. He was no longer a rock in its proper place as a foundation, but a stone lying in the path Jesus must travel to trip Him.

If it were not enough of a shock to the disciples to hear that their Master, to Whom they’d given their lives and upon Whom they’d pinned their hopes, was going to die, Jesus then told them that they, too, were to partake in suffering. To bear one’s cross has become such a cliché (one often used inappropriately) that it is hard for us to imagine the force with which Jesus’ statement must have impacted His followers. The words translated *soul* and *life* in verses 25-26 are actually the same word in Greek (ψυχή - *psyche*). The passage ends with another puzzling verse: “. . . some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” The verse certainly seems eschatological, especially when coupled with the preceding verse, which talks about the Son of Man coming in His Father’s glory with His holy angels. If so, it must be seen as the beginning of the establishment of His eternal kingdom, for Christ has not yet returned to claim the full rights of His kingship. Some see this verse as a pointed reference to the Transfiguration (see also II Peter 1:16-18), which follows these verses in all three Synoptics, in which Christ’s glory is revealed to the disciples, a foretaste of what one day will be.

Whatever the exact meaning of the enigmatic verses in this passage, three things stand out clearly. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah. He did not fill the role of the Messiah of popular imagination, but came to die for His people. He also expects His disciples to take up their crosses and follow Him. May we do so in deep gratitude for what He has done for us.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by warning your students that they are about to tackle an unusually difficult passage. It contains a number of verses the interpretation of which has caused much debate. Tell them to do the best they can, but not to feel discouraged if some things remain unclear. Some truths, however, almost “jump out” of the passage. Be sure they write down these important points at the end of the study, along with an assessment of what difference they make in their lives.

DIG IN - Matthew 16:13-28.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Matthew 16:13-28



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verse 13 - The term "Son of Man" could mean any human being, but particularly indicated the coming Messiah (see Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus often referred to Himself in this way.

verse 14 - Why do you think it was thought that Jesus might be these people come back from the dead?

verse 15 - How would you answer Jesus' question? You might also like to tell your friends and classmates about today's lesson and ask how *they* would answer this question.

verse 16 - Christ ('ο Χριστος - *ho Christos*) was the Greek word for the Hebrew *Messiah*, the Anointed One Who would deliver God's people. Many Jews thought the Messiah would rescue them from Roman oppression. Did Jesus fulfill this idea of what the Messiah would do? What kind of freedom did Jesus offer?

verse 17 - Whose son was Simon? Whose son was Jesus? (16)

verse 18 - There is a pun here in Greek. "You are (πετρος - *petros*, Peter, a stone, a little piece of a rock) and on this (πετρα - *petra*, a big rock), I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (or "not prove stronger than it"). Look up *Hades* in your Bible dictionary if you do not know what it is. This verse and the next are tough. What do you think the rock is? Peter? His confession that Jesus is the Christ? What do you think the second part of the verse means?

verse 19 - What do you think is meant by the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Binding and loosing have to do with forbidding and permitting, but what do you think this verse means? Read Matthew 18:15-20 where part of this verse is repeated for further insight,

verses 21-22 - Why do you think Peter felt this way (the Greek is very strong: “Not! Never! No way, Lord!”)?

verses 22-23 - Jesus calls Peter not “blessed” here but “Satan,” an adversary like Satan in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to disobey God. Peter was no longer acting like a Rock, a strong foundation, but like a stumblingblock, a stone thrown in the way of the road God wanted Jesus to travel on. How might Peter’s response have been a temptation to Jesus? Do you ever discourage your friends from following God and doing what is right, even when it is hard?

verse 24 - What does Jesus mean by “take up his cross”? Why might that image have been even more vivid to Jesus’ disciples than it is to us? Think of a time when someone you know has denied himself, in big or small ways, to follow God.

verses 25-26 - The word translated *life* and the word translated *soul* are the same in Greek (*ψυχη* - *psyche*). What do these verses mean? How do they apply to your life (you may answer this as part of the last question on this sheet)?

verses 27-28 - These are more hard verses. Some people think they refer to Jesus coming to earth again (which causes a problem with verse 28, unless they mean the start of His reign which ends with His Second Coming). Others say these verses refer to the Transfiguration, the incident following these verses (which is next week’s lesson).

Personal application: Write down three important truths in this passage, and what difference they make in your life.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17:1-13

Lesson Aim

That your students will know that Jesus is God, Who deserves our worship.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:38-39 - “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36.**] We often live our lives without a consciousness of God and His purposes, but sometimes the “curtain” is drawn back, as it was for Elisha’s servant at Dothan (II Kings 6:17) and for James, Peter and John as Jesus was transfigured before them. Gradually Jesus had been revealing His identity to His disciples. Six days previously, Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, and the Lord had revealed His immanent suffering and death. But these concepts were difficult for His followers to grasp. Why would the Messiah who was to deliver His people have to suffer and die? How could the infinite God, so holy that close proximity to Him meant death (II Samuel 6:6-7; Exodus 19:22-23; 33:20) come to dwell in a human body? There on the mountain, many doubts were silenced as God gave Peter, James, and John an unforgettable glimpse of the glory of Jesus as it will be revealed at the end of the age.

The identity of the Mount of Transfiguration remains in question. Scholars have variously suggested Mount Hermon (9000 feet in altitude, close to Caesarea Philippi, but in Gentile territory), Mount Tabor

(1843 feet, but a roundabout way to Capernaum, Jesus' next destination), and Mount Miron (3926 feet, the highest mountain in what was then Israel) as the proper site. Whatever the location, the Lord led His closest companions there to pray, and there He was transfigured before them. The Greek word μεταμορφωθη (*metamorphothe* from *meta* - change and *morphe* - form, essence) indicates more than just a change in outward appearance. Rather, it is a deep, inward change which may have outward manifestations. The disciples were awed, not only because Jesus' clothes and face shone (cf. Moses in Exodus 34:29-35), but because His deity was revealed.

Then Moses and Elijah appeared (possibly as representatives of the Law and the Prophets; also see Malachi 4:4-5), and Peter, overwhelmed, suggested he build three shelters. Peter was probably thinking of shelters such as were built for the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:33-43). This feast will have its ultimate fulfillment when the Lord returns to set up His Kingdom (Zechariah 14:16-19), which was just what Peter presumably thought was occurring. Yet Peter was mistaken in his assessment of the situation. One can imagine his joy, awestruck excitement, and desire to be a part of it all, to do something to usher in the Kingdom. Sometimes, however, the best response is not work, but worship.

Jesus had told the disciples only six days earlier that He would have to die, but in the midst of such an experience, it would have been easy for Peter and his friends to ignore Jesus' words and hope His earthly reign was about to commence. After all, Moses and Elijah had left the earth under abnormal circumstances; perhaps the Lord would not have to die either. Foremost, however, not logical thought patterns but a simple desire to remain in the Lord's presence was uppermost in Peter's mind. What a privilege it was for he, James and John to be with Jesus as He was transfigured before them and God spoke out of the cloud, declaring Jesus' Sonship and His pleasure in Him.

This incident did not occur primarily for the disciples' benefit. Moses and Elijah's fellowship with their Savior was most likely a great reassurance for the trial He would undergo. Luke specifically says they discussed Jesus' departure (an unusual word for death, literally *exodus*). Even more so, how much the Father's presence and comforting words must have encouraged Christ. The disciples were understandably not comforted, but terrified by God's presence. So "Jesus came and touched them . . . when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus."

As they came down the mountain, the disciples tried to make sense of their experience. Their question about Elijah (see Malachi 4:4-6) is not just chronological, but trying to piece together how Jesus' death fit their eschatological framework. Jesus understood their concerns and pointed out that if John the Baptist had to suffer, so did He, the Messiah, before His Kingdom would fully come. Yes, it was time to come down from the mountain and face a time of great trial. We, too, cannot stay on the "mountaintop" with God, as blessed as such times can be, but must meet the challenges of life. We can do this with the help of Jesus Who is truly, as Peter, James, and John came to know, God the Son.

Lesson Procedure

Introduce the lesson by asking your students if they have ever seen a butterfly emerge from a cocoon. Explain that the process of changing from a caterpillar to a butterfly is called *metamorphosis* - a word meaning a change in form or appearance. In the same way that the beauty of a butterfly is hidden behind the ordinary-looking exterior of a caterpillar, so the Son of God hid His glory behind the appearance of a normal human being - except for one brief time in His earthly life. That is the incident we will be studying today.

DIG IN - Matthew 17:1-13.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Matthew 17:1-13



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verse 1 - Six days after what? Why did Jesus go there with His disciples (see Luke 9:28). Do you ever spend time praying with your friends as Jesus did?

verse 2 - Can you imagine what it would be like for your friend to change right before your eyes? Of course, Peter, James, and John knew Jesus was no ordinary human being. Peter had less than a week earlier confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they still had a hard time believing Who He really was. Matthew says Jesus became as shiny as what? How do Mark and Luke describe this brightness (Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29)? If you were to describe the scene, what metaphor would you use (what is the brightest thing you can think of)? The word *transfigured* obviously means changed in some way. The Greek word μεταμορφωθη (*metamorphothe*) means not just an outward change in appearance, but a transformation that includes a person's whole identity. When Superman goes into the phone booth, he does more than take off his Clark Kent suit; he reveals himself as the superhero he is. This can help us understand what the word *metamorphothe* means, but of course we don't want to be silly about Jesus; He is not a comic superhero. Who does this passage show Him to be?

verse 3 - Who came to talk with Jesus? Why was it strange that they could do so? Of all the people who could have come to talk to Jesus, why do you think they came? What do you think they talked about (discuss this and then see Luke 9:31). How do you think this talk made Jesus feel, and why?

verse 4 - Why do you think Peter made this suggestion (see Leviticus 23:33-34,42-43; Zechariah 14:16-19)? Think, also, what had the disciples thought Jesus was going to do?

verse 5 - Who was speaking from the cloud? Why was the fact that this happened important to the disciples to Jesus?

verse 6 - What did the disciples do when they heard the voice from the cloud? Why was this a more appropriate response than Peter's in verse 4? What should be our response to God?

verses 7-8 - How did Jesus calm the disciples' fears? How would you refute someone who said that Peter, James, and John imagined this experience (Luke does say they were sleepy - Luke 9:32)?

verse 9 - Why do you think Jesus gave the disciples this instruction? Do you think it was easy for them to obey this? Why or why not?

verses 10-13 - Why do you think the disciples asked about Elijah (see Malachi 4:5-6)? To whom did Jesus compare Elijah? What did Jesus say about Elijah and suffering, and why do you think He talked about this with His disciples at this time?

Personal Application: What difference does the fact that Jesus is God make in your life? Have you ever had a "mountaintop experience" (not, of course, quite like Peter had, but a special time where God revealed Himself to you and you grew closer to Him)? If you wish, share something of this with your friends. Peter was thankful for his mountaintop experience, but Peter wanted Christ's Kingdom without suffering; he wanted to "live on the mountaintop." Why was this not possible for Peter, or for us?

This week's challenge: To prepare for next week's lesson, spend some time this week doing daily activities (walking around the house, getting dressed, eating, etc.) blindfolded or with your eyes closed so you can get a small idea of what it would be like to be blind.

THE MAN BORN BLIND

John 9

Lesson Aim

To help students understand that Jesus is the Light of the world who gives sight to the spiritually blind as well as the physically blind.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:40-41 - “And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

Lesson Background

What would it be like to be unable to see? Never to have seen trees, mountains, blue skies and lakes, the paintings of Rembrandt, a dog’s wagging tail, stained-glass cathedral windows, the flight of a hawk, a toddler’s first steps, or the faces of family and friends? Jesus met a man who had looked upon none of these things in his life nor had any hope of doing so, and He healed him. Imagine the man’s joy and thankfulness! The man is not alone in his sightless condition. We all enter the world blind - spiritually blind. Jesus is the Light of the world who can heal not only physical blindness, but give us spiritual sight as well.

The disciples, encountering the blind man, asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The disciples here seemed almost as insensitive as the Pharisees did later in the passage, more interested in an abstract theoretical discussion than in a man’s suffering (could this be said of us as well?). The idea that a parent’s sin would directly affect the health of an unborn child was popular at the time (even today one could contend that a child’s blindness was caused by his parents’ sin, for example as

the result of a sexually transmitted disease, but the ideas prevalent at this time in this culture went much farther than this). God does say that He will punish children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:4; 34:7), but this does not mean that all physical ailments are a result of sin (see Exodus 4:11). In fact, Jesus specifically refutes such an idea in this man's case, saying that this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Jesus, the light of the world (see also John 1:1-9; 8:12; I John 1:5-7; 2:9-11), then brought the man out of physical darkness by putting mud on his eyes and having him wash at the pool of Siloam (a 53x18x20 foot pool at the southern end of the city). It took faith for the man to obey Jesus, but God blessed, giving him sight. This created quite a sensation in the neighborhood, and some people did not even believe it was the same individual they had known (many new Christians have found this same reaction - II Corinthians 5:17). "But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.'"

The Pharisees were not pleased with the miracle (how callous they were!) and tried to use the man's evidence to implicate Jesus in wrongdoing. Actually, the Pharisees were divided, some condemning Jesus as a sinner for healing on the Sabbath and others arguing that a sinner would be incapable of doing such miraculous signs because God would refuse to listen to him (Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 1:15). In an effort to bolster their case, the anti-Jesus group of Pharisees called in the man's parents. Afraid that their testimony would cause them to be put out of the synagogue, the man's parents gave non-committal answers, telling the Jews to let their son answer for himself. To be excommunicated from the synagogue was a powerful threat. M.R. Vincent (*Word Studies in the New Testament*) says that the excommunicated person could not assemble at public prayer and, in fact, had to remain six feet away from other people. If he died, no one was to mourn, but rather people were to throw stones at his coffin. Merrill Tenney (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 19) says, "It implied exclusion from all the fraternal benefits that the Jewish community could provide. Since the Jewish concept of salvation was built on membership in the covenant people, excommunication probably implied the loss of salvation as well."

Unable to get what they wanted from his parents, the Pharisees again brought in the formerly blind man for questioning. "Give glory to God," they said (verse 24 - this was a solemn charge to tell the truth, especially in view of past error; cf. Joshua 7:19; I Samuel 6:5). "We know this man is a sinner." Such a charge appeared ridiculous to the man and, though he could not explain the theological niceties, of one thing he was certain - "I was blind, but now I see." The man courageously stood his ground, giving counter-arguments to the Pharisees' derisive questioning, and eventually they threw him out of the synagogue.

Hearing that he had been excommunicated, Jesus found him and asked him if he believed in the Son of Man, i.e., the Messiah (remember that the man had probably not seen Jesus up to this point because He had sent him away to the pool to be healed). How eager the man was. "Who is he, sir? . . . Tell me so that I may believe in Him." When Jesus told him, he fell down in worship.

The passage ends with Jesus admonishing the Pharisees on the need for spiritual sight. However, they had chosen darkness and blindness in preference to light and sight. May we not walk in darkness, but be lights to those around us who do. Like the blind man, may we bow in worship before our Lord, who has enabled us to say, "once I was blind, but now I see."

Lesson Procedure

Start the lesson by having your students imagine what it would be like to be blind. Have them try to perform a simple activity, such as making and eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, with their eyes closed or blindfolded. They may do this in class or at home (assign this as "homework" the week before this

lesson). Your students may wish to spend a certain length of time one day (such as when they get dressed and eat breakfast) simulating blindness. You may also wish to have a blind person visit and speak with your students. In Lesson #8, Jesus also heals blind men. Jesus cared for people with disabilities. Perhaps in relation to these lessons, your students could do a service project helping the local blind association or other group aiding the handicapped.

DIG IN - John 9.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

John 9



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verse 1 - Imagine what it would be like to be blind. How would your life be the same as it is now and how would it be different? How do you think you would feel about your condition? How would you want others to treat you?

verse 2 - Can sin ever cause physical problems (read Exodus 20:4 and 34:7)? Give an example of how this could happen. Are all physical problems caused by sin?

verse 3 - What was the reason for his condition (see also Exodus 4:11)? Did sin cause this man's blindness?

verses 4-5 - What two similes (comparisons) does Jesus make here? What does he mean by them? How do they fit well with the rest of the passage?

verses 6-7 - In order for the man to receive sight, he had to trust and obey Jesus. How do you think he felt, and what thoughts do you suppose were going through the blind man's mind as he traveled to and as he left the pool of Siloam?

verses 8-12 - How did his neighbors react to the man's healing?

verses 13-15 - On what day did Jesus heal the man born blind? Why was this a "problem"?

verse 16 - How were the Pharisees divided in their opinion of Jesus?

verse 17 - Who did the man think Jesus was?

verses 18-23 - Why were the man's parents afraid to acknowledge how their son had been healed? To be put out of the synagogue meant no one would associate with you and you would be cut off from prayer and hearing God's Word (even, they may have thought, from God's salvation). What a terrible punishment! Think how you would feel if no one were willing to be friends with you (or even walk near you!) ever again, and you could not even come to church.

verse 24 - "Give glory to God" was a solemn charge to tell the truth, especially in view of past error (see Joshua 7:19 and I Samuel 6:5).

verse 25 - Could the man answer all the Pharisees' objections? How did he testify to Jesus? Can you witness for Jesus even if you do not know all the answers (of course, we should try to learn as much as we can)?

verse 26 - Why did the Pharisees want to know these things?

verse 27 - In what manner do you think the man said these things?

verses 28-29 - How would you characterize the Pharisees' attitude?

verses 30-34 - Summarize the "concluding arguments" of the man born blind and the Pharisees. Who speaks more logically and who speaks merely from emotion?

verse 35 - What does Jesus mean by the term "Son of Man" (see your Bible dictionary)?

verse 36 - How would you characterize the man's response to Jesus' question?

verses 37-38 - How did the man react when He found out Who Jesus was? What is our reaction to Jesus?

verses 39-41 - Summarize Jesus' talk with the Pharisees.

Activities:

1. Act out the scene between the blind man and the Pharisees.
2. Imagine it is five years later. The man has moved to a different part of the country because of the rejection of the people in his hometown (we do not know this happened; we are just imagining it as a possibility). Write and/or act out a conversation between the man and someone else in which he recounts the events of that momentous day when he encountered Jesus. Remember, Jesus would have died and been raised again by this time, so you may include his thoughts on this as well.
3. Thank Jesus for being the Light of the world and sing and/or listen to songs that make use of this imagery, such as: "Shine, Jesus, Shine" (Graham Kendrick, Make Way Music, Ltd., 1987); "I am the Light of the World"; "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" (Kathleen Thomerson, Celebration Services International, 1970); "First Light/Love in the Light" (Michael W. Smith, Meadowgreen Music, 1981); "Shine Down Your Light."

Personal Application: Do you believe that you are or were blind? How did/does this blindness show itself? Are you still blind, or has Christ washed you so that you now have spiritual sight? This involves change. The man's neighbors hardly recognized him, so great was the difference (verses 8-9); II Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Has God made such a change in you? Would you like Him to?

Personal Application: If you are a Christian, list specific ways you can be a light to the world, and put at least one plan into practice this week.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

John 11:1-46

Lesson Aim

That your students will know that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, the Conqueror of death.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:42 - “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

Lesson Background

Sometimes we feel that Jesus cannot understand our suffering, but in His earthly life the Lord experienced the same sorrows we do, including the death of at least one person He loved deeply. When their brother Lazarus became sick, Mary and Martha turned to Jesus for help. Do we turn as readily to the Lord in our times of sickness and need?. Even though this could put Christ in danger (verse 8, though perhaps Mary and Martha were unaware of this), they trusted that He would want to help.

Jesus did love Lazarus more than the sisters could even imagine (verse 5 uses a form of the verb *ἀγαπαω*, devoted love regardless of the object’s response; compare with verse 3, *ἰφιλις*, brotherly affection). Yet He stayed where He was two more days. Humanly speaking, this seems cruel, but Lazarus’ death and resurrection brought faith to the disciples (verse 15) among others and great glory to God (verse 4). The Lord “knows what He is doing” even when it might not seem so to us. The disciples thought it was crazy to go back to Judea at all, no matter what the provocation. Jesus had been almost stoned the last time they

had been there, and they saw no reason to return, especially if Lazarus were going to recover from his illness (verse 12). However, the disciples were willing to follow Jesus wherever He said, even to die with Him (verse 16). Are we willing to do so as well?

On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in his tomb four days. When Martha came out to greet the Lord, she said that had He been present, Lazarus would not have died. She stated her belief in Lazarus' future resurrection, and Jesus pointed her to Himself as the source of that resurrection and present source of life. Martha confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. She then went to call Mary, who repeated her sister's statement to Jesus almost word for word. Seeing Mary and the Jews who were with her weeping, Jesus was deeply moved in spirit. The word translated "deeply moved" originally meant to snort like a wild horse and so to fret, be indignant, or even to rebuke. Even though He knew Lazarus would be raised, Jesus was greatly disturbed, probably not just in sympathy for his friends, but by the whole situation, by death itself and the Devil. Jesus wept, not the wild, hopeless cries of the professional mourners (the words are different), but quiet tears of love and compassion. The Lord cares deeply for His people, with strong emotion as well as acts of love.

Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb and ordered the stone covering removed. Martha objected that Lazarus was a "fourth-day man." Jewish belief at the time held that a man's soul lingered over his body for three days, so that while Jesus' raising of Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son (both of which occurred shortly after their deaths) would seem astounding but feasible, to raise Lazarus would be utterly impossible. To believe in a future resurrection was one thing, but to trust Jesus to raise Lazarus then and there was quite another matter.

What a difference this miracle would have made in the lives of Mary, Martha, and those who knew them! It was probably not easy for Lazarus to come back to the trials of earth and someday have to die again. Did he relish being the center of attention (with the attendant temptation to pride), or was he the quiet sort for whom this would be difficult? We can only speculate about such things, but we can be sure that when God manifests His power, people's lives are changed. "Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him" (John 11:45).

Sometimes it's difficult to understand why the Lord allows certain things to come into our lives. Mary and Martha certainly could not comprehend Christ's not being present to prevent the death of one He loved. But Jesus knows the end from the beginning, and wants us to trust Him that what happens is for the glory of God and will work out for our good (Romans 8:28). Lazarus' death led to his resurrection, which in turn precipitated opposition leading to Christ's crucifixion (John 11:47-53). Christ rose from the dead, enabling us to die with Him and be raised to a new life. Mary and Martha could not understand the ramifications of their brother's death any more than we can understand the reasons for our suffering, but our loving Father does all things well.

Our culture avoids the thought of death. Action films and news reports of remote tragedies seem only to numb us to the reality that someday (unless the Lord returns first) we all will die and our bodies undergo corruption. The wages of sin *is* death. Thanks be to God that Romans 6:23 does not end there, but continues, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." As Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus died and rose again so that we would not have to suffer our deserved penalty of death and hell. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by telling your students the story of *The Monkey's Paw*, by W.W. Jacobs. In the story, an elderly couple receives a visit from a man who had served with the British in India, and he shows them a mummified monkey's paw, claiming that it has the power to grant three wishes to its owner. When they press him for details, he refuses, telling them only that the thing is evil and to be avoided. They put little credence in his tale, but insist on keeping the monkey's paw as a curiosity. Later that night, the couple decides to try out the paw for the fun of it, and they wish for the two hundred pounds they need to pay off their mortgage. Early the next morning, they receive a visit from a representative of their son's company. He informs them that their son was killed in an accident, and hands them the insurance payment in the amount of two hundred pounds! Several days later, hysterical with grief, they decide to use the monkey's paw once again - this time, to wish for their son's return. Within minutes, they hear a halting step on the path, then a faint knock that gradually grows louder and more insistent. They realize that their son has indeed returned, but that after a horrible accident and many days in the grave, they really don't want to see what he looks like. In terror, they seize the monkey's paw from the mantelpiece and wish their son dead and in his grave as the door flies open to reveal - nothing.

It is a frightening thought to meet, face to face, a person who has been in the grave for many days. Today, however, we will study a story of just such a meeting, but one that produced joy, not terror, since the one who brought the dead back to life was Jesus Himself!

DIG IN - John 11:1-46.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

John 11:1-46



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verses 1-2 - You probably know the end of the story, but try to imagine the situation as if you were really there with Mary and Martha. In verse 2, John looks ahead to the incident he relates in chapter 12.

verse 3 - Why do you think Mary and Martha sent Jesus this message? Do we turn to Jesus in our troubles or try to solve them all by ourselves without His help?

verses 4-6 - What did Jesus say was the reason for Lazarus' sickness? Did Jesus care about Mary and Martha? Why then did He not go to them immediately?

verses 7-8 - Why were the disciples afraid to return to Judea?

verses 9-10 - What do you think Jesus meant by this saying? How does it relate to the disciples' question?

verses 11-13 - What did the disciples mean by "Lazarus has fallen asleep"? What did Jesus mean by this expression?

verses 14-15 - How would you feel if someone said he was glad his friend was dead? Why was Jesus glad that Lazarus was dead?

verse 16 - How would you characterize Thomas' attitude toward going back to Judea? What was good and what was bad about it ("Didymus," by the way, means "twin")?

verses 17-27 - What did Martha believe about Jesus? Write down and/or discuss different statements that show her trust in Him. Do you think she believed Jesus could make Lazarus come alive again at that time? Do you think she had any doubts? Give reasons for your answers.

verse 24 - To what is Martha referring in this verse?

verses 28-31 - Picture the scene in your mind.

verse 32 - Why does Mary's statement sound familiar?

verses 33-34 - Why do you think Jesus was deeply moved in spirit (the word originally meant to snort like a wild horse; Jesus was upset!)?

verses 35-37 - "Wept" here means to cry quietly. Jesus was not too embarrassed to weep when He felt deeply about something. What did this indicate to those who observed Him?

verses 38-40 - In what way did Martha's and Jesus' reactions differ to the opening of Lazarus' grave (verse 39)? How was this different from the other times Jesus had raised people from the dead (Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son)?

verse 41 - Why did Jesus pray out loud?

verses 43-44 - Imagine the scene. How do you think different people felt at that moment? What effect do you think this miracle had on Mary and Martha? Lazarus? (Remember, he had to die again. Do you think he liked or disliked being the center of attention?) the Jews? Jesus? Read John 11:45-53 or at least verse 53. Lazarus' death led to his resurrection, one result of which was Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection, which enables us to be resurrected to eternal life after our deaths (see I Corinthians 15)!

Personal Application: Do you believe John 11:25-27? What difference does this make in your life? If you do not believe this is true or have some question, please talk with your Sunday School teacher or other mature Christian about it.

Sometimes God's ways are hard to understand. Why did Jesus stay where He was for two days and let His friend Lazarus die? Do God's ways ever seem unfair to you? Discuss this with other Christians and ask how God has helped them through hard times. Discuss your hurts, anger, and lack of understanding with the Lord and ask Him to help you trust Him. Remember, He loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and He loves you too if you are His child.

Activity:

The change Jesus makes in a Christian's life is sometimes compared to a death and resurrection. The old man has died and new life has come (Romans 6-7; Galatians 2:20). If possible, sing "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

Mark 10:17-31

Lesson Aim

That your students will understand that we cannot earn eternal life, but must submit our lives completely to Christ and have no competing idols, such as money.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, review Matthew 5:33-42.

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Matthew 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30.**] “As Jesus started on his way, a man came up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’” This fundamental question has been answered in numerous ways down through the ages, but the general consensus is that heaven is earned through performing good works. The man in today’s Bible passage certainly seemed to think so. Instead of realizing that he was under God’s wrath, deserving His judgment, the young man thought he deserved God’s blessing and could easily perform whatever feat was necessary for him to gain complete acceptance by God.

Rather than answering the man’s question directly, Jesus probed his heart. First he cut through the young man’s flattery. “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” The adjective “good” can be applied to Jesus, but He wanted the man to realize the implications of so doing. Jesus then listed some of the commandments that have to do with people’s behavior toward others. The man readily replied, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” What arrogance! Yet the man, looking only at outward conformity, thought he had done so. In light of this, verse 21 is remarkable: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” The Lord then pinpointed the young ruler’s area of weakness - his love of money and possessions. Christ was not decreeing a universal command in verse 21 when he told the man to sell all he had, but rather He was

showing the man that he had failed to keep the commandments completely. He was covetous (Commandment #10) and had made other things more important than God (Commandment #1). Nothing must compete with God in a man's heart. He demands absolute obedience. Like Naaman (II Kings 5), the Rich Young Ruler had expected a spectacular action to take care of his troubles, but found doing what the Lord required abhorrent. Unwilling to give up his riches, he went away sorrowful. In his possessions the man had found a type of enjoyment, comfort, status and security. Yet how foolish to trade such temporal things, which never truly satisfy, for eternal life and infinite joy. C.S. Lewis compares the situation to a slum child so busy making mud pies that he refuses a holiday by the sea, having no conception of what it would be like. Jesus was not trying to make the man miserable, but to show him his need, which was very great.

For a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven is as difficult as having a camel pass through the eye of a needle. The disciples were flabbergasted at Jesus' statement. Part of their astonishment stems from the popular Jewish conception of riches, which were regarded as a sign of God's blessing. They reasoned that God would bless people with whom He was pleased, so the rich were obviously in His favor. Therefore if a wealthy man, one who obviously pleased God, was unable to gain eternal life, what hope was there for the rest of mankind? That is the point. It is utterly impossible for a man to obtain God's favor. The Rich Young Ruler could never earn his way to heaven, nor can anyone else. But all things are possible with God. By His grace and His grace alone we can be saved (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Peter did not seem to understand this. Looking to the Lord for approval, he said, "We have left all we had to follow you" ("unlike that fellow," he implied). Jesus' gentle rebuke took into account that the sacrifice was real, but He reminded Peter that the rewards, even in this life, are much greater. Neither riches nor anything else in this life can ever bring true happiness. May we seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given us as well (Matthew 6:33).

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by telling the following story: "Many years ago, there lived a young man named Francis whose father was very rich. He had everything he could want in life, but he was bored. He tried helping out in his father's business, but it didn't interest him. He thought the life of a soldier might be exciting, so he enlisted in the army, but soon found that he was sickened by the sight of blood and came home. One day he stopped to listen to a traveling preacher, who was preaching a sermon about the Rich Young Ruler. When he talked about Jesus' conversation with the young man, he told his listeners that, if they wanted to find salvation, they needed to follow Jesus by selling all they had and giving the money to the poor. Francis decided to do just that. He immediately began giving away his father's money. When his father found out what was happening, he hauled Francis into court and insisted that the authorities punish him for what he had done. Francis cried out that he wanted nothing more to do with his father's wealth, and to emphasize the point, stripped off his clothes and stalked out of the courtroom naked!" [This is a true story - the young man was Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order of monks, who believed that God could only be served by absolute poverty.] "Was Francis right? Today we will find out as we study the story of the Rich Young Ruler."

DIG IN - Mark 10:17-31.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Mark 10:17-31



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verse 18 - How would you have answered the ruler's question?

verse 19 - What might Jesus' answer have implied about Himself?

verse 20 - Read Exodus 20:1-16 for a list of all the commandments. Why do you think Jesus might have mentioned these?

verse 21 - What do you think of the ruler's answer? What does it show about him? Can anyone keep all the commandments? Why do you think the ruler thought he did? Think how you would have reacted to the ruler's statement, and then read verse 22 to see how Jesus reacted.

verse 22 - How did Jesus react? Will selling all one's possessions earn a person eternal life? Why or why not? Why do you think Jesus said this to the Rich Young Ruler? Do you think Jesus wants us to sell everything we own (support your answer)?

verses 23-24 - Jews believed that riches were a sign of God's blessing. The more closely a person kept God's commandments, they reasoned, the more wealth God would give him. Therefore, if it was difficult for the rich, who enjoyed God's favor, to enter the kingdom of God, it would be impossible for a poor man to do so.

verse 25 - Picture this in your mind. If you like, draw a cartoon of a camel trying to get through a needle's eye. What was Jesus trying to say by using this illustration?

verse 26 - How would you have answered the disciples' question?

verse 27 - How does what Jesus said here throw light on what He said in verses 24-25?

verse 28 - Why do you think Peter said this? What did he mean by it?

verses 29-30 - What did Jesus mean by this? How does what He said relate to what Peter said in the previous verse? Do you think what He said is true? Can you give an example of this?

verse 31 - What do you think Jesus meant by this statement?

Personal Application: On what are you depending to get you into heaven? How important are riches to you? What in your life are you tempted to make more important than God?

MINISTRY IN JERICHO

Mark 10:46-52; Luke 19:1-10

Lesson Aim

That your students will recognize the importance of spiritual sight, which results in changed behavior.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:43-44 - “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages to Mark 10:46-52 - **Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43.**] Jesus ministered to people from all different social and economic strata. In Jericho, He healed two blind beggars and then ate with a wealthy chief tax collector. These men saw their need, turned to Jesus, and He worked powerfully in their lives.

Jericho, a major customs center on an important trade route, was five miles west of the Jordan, fifteen miles southeast of Jerusalem, and lay seven hundred feet below sea level. It consisted of an old city, mostly in ruins during Jesus’ day, and a new city a mile away where Herod had built a winter palace. These “two cities” may be the explanation for Jesus leaving Jericho in Matthew’s account and coming to Jericho in Mark and Luke. Matthew also indicates that there were two blind men, but Mark and Luke focus on only one.

Blindness was a common malady in the area at the time, and in previous lessons we have seen how Jesus healed other blind men. Spiritual blindness is even more common, then and now, and Jesus is the only

answer to this condition. Physically blind people have the same needs and desires as other people and are capable of remarkable achievements, but there are still limitations that cannot be overcome. Like the physically sightless, spiritually blind people (II Corinthians 4:3-4) cannot see the universe as it really is, but can only guess what some things are like. They miss out on whole realms of beauty, have more difficulty in choosing the right path, and are sometimes unaware of dangers that are obvious to those who can see. There are situations in which a blind person is helpless without the aid of someone who can see. All these things and more are true for both the physically and spiritually blind. Some will continue to remain in darkness, but Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12) Who came to give sight to the blind. He wants us to walk in the light and to love our brothers (I John 1:5-7; 2:9-11). Bartimaeus (his name means “son of Timaeus”) knew where to turn for help, and he was persistent despite the crowd’s remonstrance to be quiet. He, at least in some sense, realized Who Jesus was, for he called Him “Son of David,” a Messianic title (Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23-24).

Like Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus and would not let what others might say stop him (It would be considered disgraceful for a grown Israelite man to run and climb a tree). Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus were at opposite ends of the scale economically, but not socially. Tax collectors were hated by the Jewish people. Jews themselves, they collected taxes for the Roman government, taking for their salary whatever extra they could extort from the people. Sometimes they would lend money at exorbitant interest rates to the people so they could pay their taxes. But Jesus cares for people no matter how dark their sin. Not only was Zacchaeus looking for Jesus, but the Lord sought him out and said He must stay at his house that day. Zacchaeus responded gladly. The people murmured that Jesus would eat with such a sinner (do we look down on those who are “rough around the edges” but are genuinely seeking Christ?), but Zacchaeus had obviously changed. He stood up (as if to make a formal declaration) and promised to give half his goods to the poor and, as required by the Law (Exodus 22:1; Leviticus 6:1-5; Numbers 5:5-7), to pay back four times those he had defrauded. How different a response from the Rich Young Ruler, who went away sorrowful because he had much wealth. Giving away his money did not, of course, gain Zacchaeus acceptance with God, but it was evidence of a changed heart. Truly salvation had come to that house, and he had gained genuine riches.

Poverty/wealth, darkness/light, blindness/sight: Scripture abounds in opposites and paradoxes that are pictures of the Christian life. The incidents in Jericho present some of these and show how men’s lives change when they meet Jesus. May we point others to the One Who is the Light of the world (John 8:12).

Lesson Procedure

If you did not use them in connection with Lesson #5, you may wish to use one of the introductory suggestions from that lesson here. Also, Zacchaeus’ conversion resulted in action. Perhaps there is some way your students can help a local blind or handicapped association. Zacchaeus also gave half of his money to help the poor. After the **DIG IN**, if you did not do this last week, discuss with your students the fact that their money really belongs to God and is to be used for His glory. How can they best do this? Include an explanation of the tithe (Malachi 5:6-12) and offerings (II Corinthians 8:1-15) and explain that their time also belongs to God.

DIG IN - Mark 10:46-52; Luke 19:1-10.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Mark 10:46-52; Luke 19:1-10



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

Mark 10:46-52

verse 46 - “Bar” is a prefix meaning “son of,” so Bartimaeus was the son of Timaeus (compare with English; originally “Edward Johnson” was “Edward, John’s son”). Why is the fact that the blind man was a beggar no surprise? Matthew says Jesus healed two blind men. Mark does not contradict this, but only focuses on the one, Bartimaeus.

verse 47 - Why does Bartimaeus call Jesus the “Son of David”?

verse 48 - What does this verse show about Bartimaeus’ faith?

verses 49-50 - Note how the crowd’s attitude seemed to change when they realized Jesus wanted to see Bartimaeus.

verse 51 - Wasn’t it obvious what Bartimaeus wanted? Why do you think Jesus asked this question?

Personal Application: The blind man could not see physically, but was also in spiritual darkness. Who is spiritually blind (see II Corinthians 4:3-4)? How can they come to see (John 8:12)? A physically blind person is in many ways the same as a sighted person, with the same thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires. He or she can do most of the things a sighted person can, but there are some things he just cannot do, and his understanding of God’s world has limitations. How is this like a person who is spiritually blind (list several ways)? If a sighted person were dropped in the middle of a jungle, it would be highly unlikely he could find his way to civilization alive, but for a blind person, this would be impossible without help. How is this situation like someone who is spiritually blind? Read I John 1:5-7; 2:9-11 and discuss what this says about spiritual blindness.

Jesus cared about people with disabilities. Do you? Think of specific ways in which you can show love to handicapped people. How can you show love to people who are in spiritual blindness?

Luke 19:1-10

verses 1-2 - The Romans hired Jews to collect taxes for them. These tax collectors often cheated the people by demanding far more money than the actual tax and keeping the extra for themselves.

verses 3-4 - Can you imagine your parents or teacher running ahead of a crowd and climbing a tree to see better? This would have been even more odd in the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus' day, but Zacchaeus didn't let what others might say keep him from seeing Jesus. Do you let what others might say keep you from seeking the Lord? A "sycamore" tree was a fig-mulberry with large low branches that would have been easy for Zacchaeus to climb.

verses 5-6 - Zacchaeus was just hoping to get a glimpse of Jesus. How excited he must have been when Jesus sought him out by the tree, called him by name, and said He must stay at his house!

verse 7 - Why were the people annoyed that Jesus was going to stay at Zacchaeus' house?

verse 8 - Zacchaeus was willing to give back the required four times the amount to those he cheated (Exodus 22:1; Leviticus 6:1-5; Numbers 5:5-7) and half his possessions to the poor. What does this show about him?

verses 9-10 - What did Jesus mean here? Was Zacchaeus saved because of the good works he promised to do in verse 8? Why or why not?

Personal Application: Compare Zacchaeus' response to Jesus with that of the Rich Young Ruler. The Rich Young Ruler said he had kept all the commandments, but he really hadn't. He did not love the Lord with all his heart, but had made his money and possessions an idol. Is there something keeping you from giving your life completely to the Lord? How can you use your money and possessions for God?

Activity: Sing the children's song *Zacchaeus*, or songs about light from Lesson #5.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY; CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Matthew 21:1-17

Lesson Aim

To teach students that Jesus, our King and Judge, deserves our loyalty, holiness, and praise.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:44-45 - “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Mark 11:1-10, 15-19; Luke 19:28-40, 45-48; John 12:12-19.**] Jesus is our King and Judge. Someday He will make His power clearly known, but for now His rule is of a different sort. This was not understood by Jesus’ associates. Tension had been building as Jesus’ actions and growing popularity led to the expectation by His followers and the Jewish authorities that Christ would make some move to set up His kingdom. Jesus did proclaim Himself to be king, but not the type they anticipated.

Whereas a conqueror would ride into a capital city on a stallion, Jesus came on a humble donkey colt, an animal of peace, not war. His very manner of arrival did, however, proclaim His holiness (the animal had never been ridden, as prescribed in Numbers 19:2) and His kingship (since it fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9). The excited crowd lauded Him as a victorious ruler, shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David” and spreading palm branches on the road in front of Him. Both actions had messianic significance. Palm branches were used both at Passover, which celebrated God’s deliverance of His people from their enemies (and it was then Passover time), and during the Feast of Tabernacles, which anticipated the Messiah’s return to set up His earthly kingdom. Palm branches were also used by the Romans, the rulers of the Israelites, as symbols of victory. *Hosanna* literally means *save now*, and had come to be an expression of praise; *Son of*

David was a Messianic appellation. “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” comes from Psalm 118:26. This psalm is one of the messianic *Hallel* psalms (113-118) sung during Passover time. No wonder the Pharisees were indignant and wanted Jesus to rebuke His disciples, but He replied, “I tell you, if they keep quiet the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40).

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple, where He overturned the tables and benches of those who had made the Temple a place of business rather than worship. He quoted Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 in explanation. This was no temper tantrum, but the righteous wrath of a holy God at what had become of His house. All male Israelites had to pay a half shekel annually for the support of the Temple. The moneychangers would change foreign currency into the Tyrian shekel (the nearest thing available to the old Hebrew shekel) and make a lucrative profit on the exchange. The menagerie dealers provided the beasts and birds required for sacrifice. It was far easier, if more expensive, for a person to purchase an animal in Jerusalem than to drag it many miles from his hometown in the provinces, only to be told it was unsuitable because it had some deformity (Exodus 12:5), real or imagined. Jesus knew that this profiteering, even when outright larceny was not involved, perverted the true purpose of the sacrificial system.

If Jesus was so concerned about the use of the Temple, a structure that would be destroyed in a few years (A.D. 70), is He not even more concerned about the temples of our bodies, in which dwells the Holy Spirit of God Himself (I Corinthians 6:19-20) and the temple of the Church (I Corinthians 3:16-17)? Are our hearts right before God? The Lord wants the “temple” cleansed of anything that does not belong there, and He wants it restored to its true function - the worship of God.

In the Jerusalem Temple, Christ destroyed but also restored. The blind and lame were excluded from fellowship with God’s people, not allowed to offer sacrifice, and cut off from worship. By healing them, Jesus not only took away their physical disabilities, but also enabled them to have access to God. Children, following Jesus into the Temple, echoed their parents’ praise, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” The chief priests and teachers of the law again evidenced the almost unbelievable hardness of their hearts, indignantly asking Jesus if He heard what they were saying about Him. The Lord boldly quoted Psalm 8:2, not only affirming His Messiahship, but making Himself equal with God (note also the sarcastic “have you never read,” questioning the priests’ knowledge of the Bible). Jesus is God and deserves our worship. May our “temple” be clean and may we offer right sacrifices, praising God. “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Lesson Procedure

Before your students arrive, make your Sunday School room appear messy by, for example, upturning chairs and putting trash and clothes on the floor (you want something that seems dirty and cluttered but is actually easy to clean). Have your students bring the room back into order and then discuss how they felt about the mess. What if a special guest were to have come when the room looked that way? Tell them that today they will learn what Jesus did when He went to a place that was not only physically dirty but spiritually dirty as well. First, however, they will learn how people praised Jesus the Messiah (as we should, too).

DIG IN - Matthew 21:1-17.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Matthew 21:1-17



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

Matthew 21:1-11

verses 1-3 - If we knew the Lord needed something, would we give it to Him right away as the owner of the donkey colt did?

verses 4-5 - How would you expect a conquering king to arrive in a capital city? Why, then, did Jesus arrive on a donkey's colt? What did this show about the type of king He is? Was He going to establish the type of kingdom people expected? *Daughter of Zion* refers to Jerusalem. Read Zechariah 9:9. What additional information do you learn about the king that was not mentioned in the part of the verse quoted in Matthew 21?

verse 6 - The disciples might (we don't know) have felt reluctant to take the donkey and colt from someone they did not know (would someone think they were stealing them?), but they did what Jesus said. Do we?

verse 7 - Notice the disciples' respect and care for Jesus (would you like your jacket used for a saddle on a smelly donkey?).

verse 9 - Why do you think the crowd threw down cloaks and branches (John says they were palm branches - John 12:13) in front of Jesus? *Hosanna* means *save now* and was used as an exclamation of praise. What does *Son of David* mean? "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" is from Psalm 118:26. Read Psalm 118:26-27 and note how verse 27 relates. Psalm 118 is part of a group of psalms about the coming Messiah that were sung at Passover time (it was Passover time then). What did Passover celebrate? How does this relate to Jesus coming as a king into Jerusalem?

verses 10-11 - How would you answer the question in verse 10? Five days later, crowds in Jerusalem would shout “Crucify Him!” Do you think many were the same people? Jesus did not meet their expectations, and so the people turned against Him.

Personal Application: Do you trust God and stand up for Him, even when He does not act the way you think He should, or are you like the fickle crowd? The crowd was not loyal to Jesus, but they were right to praise Him. He deserves our adoration as well. Praise Him (Do so! You may like to sing *Hosanna* from the recording *Hide 'Em in Your Heart*, by Steve Green, Sparrow, 1990).

Matthew 21:12-17

verse 12 - Was Jesus wrong to do this? Why or why not? What gave Him the authority to do this? Every male Israelite had to pay a half-shekel tax annually. The moneychangers exchanged foreign currency for the proper coins but made a profit on each exchange. Israelites also had to bring animals to sacrifice to God that were without any blemishes or defects. Sometimes a person would travel many miles with a lamb or ram, only to have the officials say there was something wrong with it (maybe there really was or maybe there wasn't). Therefore many people bought their sacrifices from the high-priced animal sellers at the Temple.

verse 13 - Jesus here quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

verse 14 - Jesus not only destroyed but restored at the Temple. At this time, disabled people were not allowed to bring sacrifices, to fellowship with God's people, or to worship God. So Jesus not only made their bodies healthy, but now these people could come to God. What joy they must have felt!

verses 15-16 - The chief priests and teachers of the law did not share in the joy of those Jesus had healed. They were indignant at what the children were saying. Why would what the children said anger them so much?

verse 16 - Why would Jesus' phrase, “have you never read,” be a put-down to the priests and teachers? Read Psalm 8:1-2. About whom is the psalm talking? How did this answer the priests' and teachers' question? Why would this anger them?

verse 17 - One would think the priests and teachers would have stopped Jesus, but it was not yet time for Him to die. Jesus may have stayed outside Jerusalem because it was crowded with people who had come to celebrate the Passover. We do not know, but perhaps Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, which was about two miles away.

Personal Application: The Bible talks about the Christian's body (I Corinthians 6:19-20) and the Church (I Corinthians 3:16-17) as temples. Are there things in these temples that Jesus wants to clean out, as He did the Temple in Jerusalem? Is true worship being offered in these temples?

CONFRONTING HIS ENEMIES

Matthew 22:15-46

Lesson Aim

To help students learn the lessons Jesus taught as He wisely and calmly answered those who were trying to entrap Him.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:46 - “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Mark 12:13-37; Luke 20:20-47.**] As opposition to Jesus rose, different groups tried to trap Jesus into speaking blasphemy, treasonous words against the Roman government, or something that would alienate His followers, but the Lord calmly answered His detractors with such wisdom that they were astounded and eventually gave up questioning Him. Matthew 22:15-46 can easily be divided into four sections, the first three in which Jesus’ enemies interrogate Him and the last in which Jesus turns the tables and questions them.

In verses 15-22, the anti-Roman Pharisees and pro-Roman Herodians, normally at odds with one another, joined forces to attack Christ. They began by flattery to pressure Jesus into speaking (but note the things they said about the Lord are true; are they true about us?). The issue under discussion was a census tax. Israelites had to pay over one third of their income to the Roman government. Zealots refused to pay, not only seeing it as an emblem of slavery, but because they regarded it as a form of idolatry. Greek, Tyrian, and Jewish coins were in use in Palestine at this time, but the tax had to be paid in Roman coinage. The

denarius had the goddess of peace on one side and the head of Tiberius Caesar on the other with the inscription *Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Pontifex Maximus* (which could be interpreted “high priest,” or literally “chief bridge-builder”; note that this title, which implies being a mediator between God and man, has been used by the popes for more than 1500 years). Such sentiments were clearly blasphemous. The Pharisee-Herodian coalition reasoned that to maintain integrity and the support of religious-minded supporters, Jesus would have to condemn paying taxes, but such a seditious statement would bring retribution by the Roman government. The Lord’s wise answer avoided the seemingly inevitable pitfalls of their question: “Give [back] to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” Caesar has the right to the payment of a tax for benefits received, but his rights do not extend to worship. Coins are imprinted with Caesar’s image - he thus has claim upon them; but men are made in God’s image, and His authority is supreme and absolute. Hearing this, Christ’s foes went away amazed.

The same day, a group of Sadducees also tried to ensnare Jesus. The Sadducees were conservative materialists, often of a high social position, who placed a high value on the first five books of the Bible (while ignoring most other Scriptures) and who denied the resurrection. Their absurdly extreme story was meant to show the foolishness of this doctrine. The Scripture to which they refer (“Moses told us . . .” verse 24) is Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (also Genesis 38:8-9), where God made provision for a widow’s protection and the continuance of the family line. Jesus pointed out that they were the ones in error, for they did “not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (what a statement to make to religious leaders!). The Old Testament does speak of the resurrection in such passages as Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2 and Job 19:25-27. Resurrection life will be different from earthly life. The Sadducees presupposed that heaven would be like earth, limiting what God can do. In the Resurrection people will not marry, but be like the angels in heaven (Sadducees also denied the existence of angels). To clinch His argument, Jesus gave an example from the Pentateuch (verse 31, cf. Exodus 3:6, along with another stinging rebuke - “have you not read”). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive to God when He spoke to Moses. Speaking of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also underscored the fact that God is a covenant-keeping God faithful to His promises. Again the reaction to Jesus’ answer is one of astonishment.

Probably glad that their rivals the Sadducees had been embarrassed by Jesus, the Pharisees regrouped to ask Him another question. “What is the greatest commandment?” was a hotly-debated issue at the time, with the commandments being ranked as to how “heavy” or “light” they were (as if some of God’s commands were unimportant!). Jesus said all the Law and the Prophets, too (His answer broadened the law experts’ question of verse 36), hang on two commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the *shema* frequently recited, and highly-regarded Scripture - Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:38-41) and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The two commandments stand together. A man cannot love God unless he loves his neighbor made in His image (see also I John 4:7-21). Other commandments stem from these. For example, if a person loves God, he will look forward to the opportunity to have one day especially set apart to spend time with Him. Loving one’s neighbor certainly mitigates against stealing from him, killing him, coveting his possessions, or having sexual relations with his spouse.

While the Pharisees still gathered together, Jesus asked them a question. “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” The Lord was not trying to win a debate, but to show His opponents Who He was. The answers to His enemies’ questions are dependent on a right understanding of this one: Who is the Messiah? He challenged the popular idea of a mere military ruler by pointing out from Psalm 110:1 (as elsewhere, Jesus assumed the divine inspiration of the Old Testament) that Christ is Lord, not just historically the descendant of David. His enemies left speechless. “No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.”

Matthew 22 teaches about our societal obligations, the resurrection, the two greatest commandments, and about who Jesus is. The Lord graciously and wisely answered His interrogators even though they came to Him with evil intent. May we too be always ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us (I Peter 3:15). And may we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves.

Lesson Procedure

To introduce the first section of today's Scripture, bring in coins and stamps upon which are imprinted the heads of rulers or other famous people and a list identifying these individuals. Divide your group into teams and see who can match the most names and faces. You can give all the names and faces to each team to figure out as a group, have individuals draw the coins/stamps "from a hat" or arrange the game in any way you wish.

DIG IN - Matthew 22:15-46.



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Matthew 22:15-46



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

Today's passage can be divided into four sections. In the first three, Jesus' enemies try to trap Him into saying something that would get Him in trouble. In the last, He questions them.

Matthew 22:15-22

verses 15-16 - The Pharisees and Herodians were enemies but here unite in their hatred of Jesus. Do you think they were sincere in what they said about Jesus? Were the things they said about Jesus true? Are these things true about you?

verses 17-19 - If Jesus said it was wrong to pay taxes to the Romans, what might have happened? If He said it was good to pay taxes, who might have been angry with Him? How was this question a trap?

verses 20-21 - Many people objected to paying taxes, not only because it was submitting to their hated Roman masters, but because they saw it as idolatry. A denarius had the Goddess of Peace on one side and the head of Tiberius Caesar on the other with the inscription *Tiberius Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus, Pontifex Maximus* ("high priest," or literally "chief bridge-builder").

verse 21 - What belongs to Caesar? What belongs to God? Rulers often had their images stamped on coins, as Caesar did on the denarius. On what does God stamp His image?

Personal Application: How can Jesus' statement, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" be applied in today's world? Could it apply to anything besides taxes?

Matthew 22:23-33

Mathematician Edwin A. Abbott once wrote a book entitled *Flatland*, in which he imagined what it would be like for there to be creatures who only lived in two dimensions (like what would be drawn on a flat piece of paper). If a sphere were to go through their land (as if a ball could go magically through a piece of paper) they would see it as a circle that grew larger and smaller instead of what it really is. Sometimes people, like the Sadducees in today's story, leave out one of life's dimensions, not height as did the Flatlanders, but that of the supernatural.

verse 23 - The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (see your Bible dictionary for more information on the Sadducees).

verse 24 - Read Deuteronomy 25:5-6 to see what the Sadducees were talking about here. Why do you think God made a rule like that for the Israelites (think about what might have happened if this command had not existed)?

verses 25-28 - Did the Sadducees really want to know the answer to this question? What point did they wish to prove by this extremely absurd example? Their question may seem silly, but the Sadducees took it seriously.

verse 29 - How do you think the Sadducees reacted to Jesus' statement here? They probably felt like your teacher would if you told her she didn't know how to add and subtract or that she couldn't understand the stories in your reading book!

verse 30 - How does this verse show the Sadducees' misunderstanding? By the way, the Sadducees did not believe in angels, either, so Jesus is still challenging them. Note again the rebuke, "Have you not read . . ."

verses 31-32 - Jesus quoted Exodus 3:6, part of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, which were highly regarded by the Sadducees).

verse 33 - Again, people are astonished at Jesus' teaching.

Personal Application: The Sadducees were materialists, people whose lives centered on this world and who did not believe in the supernatural. Do you believe that the universe consists of more than you can see and feel? How does this make a difference in your life?

Matthew 22:34-40

What would you say is the greatest of God's commandments? Write down your idea and see how it compares with Jesus' answer to the Pharisees.

verse 34 - Even though they wanted to trap Jesus, the Pharisees were probably pleased that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, who were the Pharisees' rivals.

verses 35-36 - "Which is the greatest commandment?" was a hot topic of debate among these religious leaders (they would argue their idea with the same enthusiasm you might for who is the greatest basketball player or team!).

verses 37-39 - What does it mean to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind? What does it mean to love your neighbor with all your heart? (Read I John 4:7-21 for more on this). How do these commandments relate to each other? Discuss specific ways you might put these commandments into practice.

verse 40 - How can all the Law and Prophets depend on these two commandments? (In verse 36, the law expert just asked about the Law, but Jesus said the whole Old Testament depends on these two commandments.) Look up the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17) and see how all of these can be summarized in these two.

Personal Application: Will you seek with God's help to obey these commandments? Pray, asking Him to help you do so. Ask Him to show you two specific ways you can put these commandments into practice. Tell a friend about at least one plan you make and ask him to help you in it, and/or to pray that you will obey God in this area.

Matthew 22:41-46

Jesus now asks his opponents a question.

verses 41-42 - Why would Jesus ask this question? Was He just trying to trick the Pharisees?

verses 43-45 - Who are the two “Lords” in Psalm 110:1 quoted here? Explain Jesus’ argument in your own words. What kind of Messiah were the Pharisees expecting? How does what Jesus said counter this concept (note verse 44 - “at my right hand” was a position of power and authority)?

verse 46 - It is all right to tell the Lord humbly when we don’t understand something, but someday no one will dare ask Him any more questions.

Personal Application: What difference does it make in your life that Jesus is Lord? What can you learn from the manner in which Jesus answered His enemies? Are you gentle yet confident with those who would put you down? Are you ready with an answer if someone sincerely questions you about your faith in Christ (if you do know Him; I Peter 3:15)?

THE LAST SUPPER

Luke 22:7-38

Lesson Aim

To teach students that, at the Passover feast before He died, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and told His disciples to be servants.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:47 - "And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that?"

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Matthew 26:17-35; Mark 14:12-31; John 13:1-38.**] "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed" (Luke 22:7). Not only had the time of year arrived when many young sheep were going to be killed as part of the Jewish religious feast, but what the Passover symbolized for hundreds of years was about to reach its fulfillment - the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was going to die for His people (I Corinthians 5:7). First, however, He was to eat one last Passover meal with His disciples, the meal looking forward to His own imminent death. [The Passover will be covered in detail in Year II, Quarter 2, Lesson 6, but your students should be given a quick overview of what the Passover was historically and its fulfillment in Jesus.]

Jesus sent Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover meal, giving them details of what to do and telling them beforehand what would occur. "They left and found things just as Jesus had told them." A man carrying a water jar would be unusual, for it was the woman's job to carry water for the household in a large jar, and any water a man needed he would carry in a leather skin. At the Passover meal,

besides lamb and different condiments, unleavened bread would be eaten and four cups of wine drunk. Jesus endured these elements with new meaning as representative of His body and the New Covenant (see Exodus 24:8 and Jeremiah 31:31-34). We now have the privilege of celebrating the Lord's Supper, proclaiming His death until He comes (I Corinthians 11:11-34).

Jesus greatly desired to eat that Passover feast with His disciples. This was to be the Lord's last opportunity to teach His disciples and have fellowship with them. But even such a blessed occasion as this was marred by sin. There was a traitor in their midst, and the rest of the disciples cared more about their own status than about Jesus. The betrayal was even more horrible in light of the close fellowship of the table (which is taken far more seriously in Eastern cultures than in ours). [For insight into the betrayal and God's love, read *Peace Child* by Don Richardson, Gospel Light, 1974, which tells of Richardson's experience preaching the Gospel to the Sawi of Papua New Guinea, whose culture glorified treachery and regarded Judas as a hero.] It is amazing that no one seems to have suspected Judas (verse 23). The disciples were, however, preoccupied with themselves, arguing about who was the greatest on this, the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. The issue of greatness was one with which Jesus had dealt before (Matthew 18:1-5; 20:20-27), but the lesson had not sunk in. So He not only told, but showed them that the one who would be the greatest among them would be like the youngest (the elderly were given great respect and authority in that culture, unlike ours), and one who serves. John relates in his Gospel (13:1-17) how Jesus then took a towel and washed His disciples' feet. To study that passage in detail would add too much material to this lesson, but it should be mentioned to your students.

How wonderfully characteristic of Jesus that at this time, when His disciples should have been supporting Him, He met their needs and prepared them for what was ahead. Satan was going to sift them as grain would be sifted, separating the good part from the chaff (In the Greek, "you" in verse 31 is plural, while in verse 32 it is singular). Simon Peter, ignorant of his own sinful heart, boldly replied that he would follow the Lord to prison, or even death. But Jesus knew him far better than Peter knew himself. At the time, Peter did not see his need, but Jesus' words in verse 32 must have been a great encouragement to Peter after he had denied the Lord.

Verses 35-38 are rather troublesome. Why would the same person who said, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (see Matthew 5:38-48) advise His disciples to sell their possessions and buy swords? Some commentators have pointed out that the word *sword* is only implied in the Greek in verse 36 ("if you don't have a purse/bag" is also possible) and that by "that is enough" (verse 38), Jesus may have meant "enough of that, cut out that kind of talk." However, verse 37 seems to make more sense with "sword" used; the disciples brought swords to the garden without the Lord stopping them. In the garden, however, He stopped the violence before it got out of hand and told them to stop (Luke 22:47-53). Perhaps Christ wanted the disciples to bring the swords as a deterrent to violence or for self-protection, not as offensive weapons. Such enigmas are unlikely to be solved in a fifth and sixth grade Sunday School class! Allow your students to wrestle with the issues, but focus on the clearer aspects of today's passage. There is certainly much to learn in following the Lord's example of servanthood, and much for which to be thankful and in which to rejoice, for Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for us. May we worship Him as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and in every day of our lives.

Lesson Procedure

Be sure to come early for today's class, before the arrival of any of your students. As they come in, one by one or in groups, offer to take their coats, hang them up for them, and escort them to their chairs, making sure they are seated comfortably. They will undoubtedly think your behavior rather peculiar, but tell them that you want them to know how important they are to you. Then move on to a discussion of today's passage, using the **DIG IN** worksheet.

DIG IN - Luke 22:7-38



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Luke 22:7-38



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

verse 7 - What was the Passover feast (see Exodus 12 and/or your Bible dictionary)? What did it commemorate? What was eaten at the feast? Read I Corinthians 5:7. How is Christ like the Passover Lamb? Did Jesus know He was the Lamb who was going to die as He celebrated this feast?

verses 8-13 - How did Jesus know what things would be like? Were they as He said? Note, the disciples obeyed the Lord. Also note verse 10 - it would be unusual for a man to be carrying water in a jar. It was a woman's job to carry water for the household, and if a man needed to transport water, he would carry it in a leather bottle.

verse 14 - In this culture, people lay down on couches around a table to eat.

verses 15-16 - Why do you think Jesus eagerly desired to eat this Passover?

verses 17-20 - Four cups of wine were drunk at the Passover meal. What did Jesus mean by "this is my body" and "this is the new covenant in my blood"? This was the first Communion service. Read I Corinthians 11:17-34 and your Bible dictionary to learn more about Communion (the Lord's Supper).

verses 21-23 - Who was going to betray Jesus? Isn't it amazing that the disciples did not know which of them it might be? Read John 13:21-30 for a further description of what happened. To eat with someone was very special in that culture. People who ate together were often very close and cared about each other, so the fact that the betrayal took place during a meal makes it seem even worse.

verses 24-25 - The disciples were slow to learn what God wanted them to learn (are we, too?). Jesus had already told them not to argue about this (Matthew 20:20-27; also 18:1-5). Can you imagine? Their best friend is about to die, and all they can do is argue about who is the greatest!

verses 26-27 - Older people were really respected in that culture, and young people were not regarded very highly. John tells us that not only did Jesus tell the disciples about being a servant, but He showed them what He meant. He got up from the meal and washed His disciples' feet! In that culture, people wore sandals or went barefoot, and their feet got very dirty on the dusty roads. Usually when people entered a house, a servant would wash their feet (like when you go to someone's house they might hang up your coat for you or offer you something to drink). This was not a terribly pleasant job, and was done by servants, but Jesus, knowing He was God (see John 13:3), still acted as a servant. For the whole story, see John 13:1-17. See also Philippians 2:3-11.

verses 28-29 - How do these verses relate to the discussion about greatness?

verses 31-34 - What does verse 31 mean ("you" in verse 31 is plural)? Satan asked and God allowed him to tempt Peter (see Luke 22:54-62). Did Peter believe he would deny Jesus? How would you describe Peter's attitude? How might what Jesus said have comforted him later?

verses 35-38 - These are tough verses. Why would the same person who told His disciples to "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:38-48) here tell them to buy swords? (Verse 36 does not say *sword* in Greek, but that seems to make the most sense; "enough" could possibly mean, "enough of that kind of talk.") Although the disciples took swords with them, Jesus kept the violence from getting out of hand. Do your best to figure out these verses, but don't feel badly if these verses remain puzzling to you, as they have to many. God's Word is true and clear, but sometimes there are parts that are hard to understand. Even Peter thought so (II Peter 3:15-16)!

How was Judas' betrayal different from Peter's denial of Christ? What were their motives? Was Peter a better person than Judas?

Personal Application: Do you have a servant's heart? Do you do things for God rather than for the praise of others? In what ways can you "wash people's feet" this week? Pray first that God will bless people through your ministry. Sometimes people tell others in a prideful way about how they are serving God (which of course is not good), so usually it is good to keep such things between you and God. However, such reports can also be encouraging, so tell your classmates how God blessed this week as you served Him. Think of at least two specific ways and carry them out. Ask God to send you "dirty feet." Ask the Lord to make you a willing, cheerful, humble servant and to give you a glad heart, even doing disagreeable jobs as you do them for Him. Jesus taught this right before doing the most servant-like, dirtiest job of all - dying for His people (Luke 22:54-62). Perhaps you could be a "secret pal" to someone. Think of a person, adult or child, who could really use some encouragement (pray about whom to choose), and then for the next two weeks or more, do chores for them, buy them little gifts, write them encouraging notes or do similar acts of kindness, but don't let them know who did these things.

Activities:

1. Sing "Christ Our Passover" and other songs about the Lord's Supper.
2. Many famous artists have painted pictures of the Last Supper. Look at prints of some of these paintings. What do you like or not like about each picture? What different things do you think each artist was trying to express in his painting? How accurate is the picture to the biblical account (you can probably find reproductions of these paintings as prints or in art books in a public library).
3. For good readers - *Peace Child* by Don Richardson (Gospel Light, 1974). When missionary Don Richardson told the Sawi tribe the Gospel story, they thought Judas was a hero because their culture honored traitors! Find out how God changed their ideas and their lives.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Matthew 27:31-56

Lesson Aim

To help students gain a greater appreciation for Jesus' propitiatory death on the cross (I John 4:10).

Memory Verse

This quarter, Matthew 5:33-48; this week, Matthew 5:48 - "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Mark 15:20-41; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:16-37.**] The last two lessons in this quarter cover the cornerstone of our faith - Jesus' death and resurrection. How we could ever become inured to the wonder of God's love seen in Christ's sacrifice is astounding, but our sinful hearts have such little understanding and forget so easily what He has done for us.

Crucifixion was an excruciating punishment reserved for the worst sort of criminal and lowest classes of people. The physical aspects of this form of execution were horrible, but most awful (in both meanings of the word) was the propitiatory nature of the sacrifice, that Christ became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21) and was separated from the other Persons of the Trinity. Should we therefore ignore the physical pain of the cross? Other people have suffered in their bodies as much as the Lord, but He suffered willingly for us. We should not dwell on this, but our ability to comprehend the other aspects of Christ's vicarious atonement is limited; pain we can relate to, and if we realize that pain was just a small part of what Jesus endured because He loved us, we may begin to have more appreciation for what He did. You must be sensitive as to how explicitly you wish to discuss the physical aspects of crucifixion with your students. Verse

31 of the **DIG IN** explains in some detail what crucifixion entailed, and you may summarize it if you feel it is too graphic (many children today, however, are used to terrible violence on television and this may seem tame, but emphasize the reality of it).

Amazingly, Jesus' death by crucifixion was prophesied with great accuracy long before this form of execution had even been invented. Other prophecies about our Lord are also fulfilled in today's passage. Examining them with your students (see today's Lesson Procedure) will reinforce the fact that Jesus' death was no accident, but something the place and manner of which the Trinity had discussed and planned in eternity (Acts 4:27-28). Jesus' death was a terrible thing when one considers the horrible depths of sin that led men to crucify their loving King, but it is wonderful to behold how beautifully God worked out all the details from fulfilled prophecy to symbolic actions. Note, for example, how at the moment of Christ's death, the heavy curtain separating the Holy of Holies (where God's Presence dwelt) from the rest of the Temple was ripped from top to bottom (symbolic of God's initiative). People no longer need to come before God with the blood of bulls and goats because Christ is the perfect Sacrifice and High Priest, and all who trust in that Sacrifice have free access to God (Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:21-10:14).

Jesus Christ died to take our sin upon Himself and to suffer the punishment we deserve. As James Boice points out in his commentary on John, He was shamed that we might live without shame, He suffered that we might be comforted, He was rejected that we might be accepted by God, He was naked so He could clothe us in His righteousness, and He was separated from God that we might live with Him forever. Thanks be to God!

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by having your students look up the following Old Testament verses and reading them aloud. Then, as you go through the **DIG IN** worksheet, they should match the verses from the Old Testament to the verses in Matthew where each prophecy is fulfilled. The following matches should be made: Deuteronomy 21:23 with verse 31; with Psalm 69:21 with verse 34; Psalm 22:18 with verse 35; Isaiah 53:12 with verse 38; Psalm 22:7 and Psalm 107:25 with verses 39-40. [NOTE: these verses are also printed on the back of the last **DIG IN** worksheet.

DIG IN - Matthew 27:31-56



Dig In!

Today's Passage:

Matthew 27:31-56



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

The Old Testament verses included on the back of the last worksheet page were written hundreds of years before Jesus died, before the torture called crucifixion was even invented. After you read the passage, before or after you do the rest of the **DIG IN**, read these passages and see how many prophecies you can find fulfilled. The Scriptures are given here so you can underline, star, or mark them in some way and/or write down the corresponding passage in Matthew.

verse 31 - Crucifixion was a horrible punishment reserved for the worst criminals and lowest class of people. Jews regarded this as a particularly detestable way to die because Deuteronomy says that anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23; see also II Corinthians 5:21). To get a tiny, tiny, tiny idea of the pain of crucifixion, see how long you can stand with your arms out to the side, or think of the worst pain you have ever felt. Compare that with the following description (if you feel the details would upset you too much, skip this part, but hopefully it will give you a better idea of what Jesus did for His people, so read it if you can).

Usually a person was led naked to the place of execution outside the city wall and flogged along the way, but Jesus was allowed to wear His clothes since He had already been whipped. Such scourging was so severe that it could kill; a leather whip, which split into several thongs to which were often attached pieces of glass or bone, was used. When the clothes were again ripped off His bloody back, the pain would have been horrible. To drag the heavy (30-40 pounds) cross beam of the cross would have been difficult for a healthy man, never mind one who could barely stand because of the shock of His beating (the cross would also cut into His raw wounds). At the site of the crucifixion, Jesus' arms were then spread and nailed with large square iron nails to the crossbeam, and His feet, possibly turned sideways with the left foot pressed against the right, nailed through the ankle. The pain of all this, of course, was excruciating, but death occurred not just because of shock and loss of blood, but because of suffocation. The crucified person could breathe in, but to force the used air out to get a new breath, he had to force himself up straight by pulling with his arms and pushing with his legs, which would push/pull against the nails in his hands and feet. This movement would also scrape His bloody back against the rough wood of the cross. Horrible muscle cramps

in the arms and legs would also hinder movement. This agony could go on for days (and nights of 40°-50°F weather, terribly cold for a naked body) until a person succumbed to shock, loss of blood, suffocation, or cardiac arrest. Often, after a while, soldiers would break the legs of those crucified so they would no longer be able to push up to breathe and would die more quickly (Did they do this for Jesus? Why not?). Has any other person in history suffered physically as much as Jesus? Why, then, was His death special?

verse 32 - Cyrene was an old Greek settlement on the coast of North Africa. Mark says Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus, who may be the men mentioned in Acts 19:33 and Romans 16:13. Roman soldiers often made people do jobs for them, such as carrying their heavy packs, so their command would not have seemed strange to Simon.

verse 33 - There are several theories, but no one knows for sure exactly where Golgotha was.

verses 34-35 - These events were prophesied. Casting lots was a type of gambling like “picking the short straw” or throwing dice.

verse 36 - The soldiers kept watch so that no one would free those being crucified, and probably so the executions would be carried out according to law.

verse 37 - A statement of the person’s crime was usually written on a tablet hung from the top of the cross. Jesus’ crime was high treason, saying He was King rather than Caesar. John says “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” was written in three languages: Aramaic (the common language of the people), Latin (the language of the Roman government), and Greek (the trade language spoken by most travelers in the Empire).

verse 38 - The word for *robber* is not the one for a petty thief such as a pickpocket, but the one for armed robber or rebel guerilla. This was also prophesied.

verses 39-40 - How could these people dare mock the Lord in this way (but would we have done the same)? How do you treat people who make fun of you? Jesus was dying for some who scorned Him. See John 2:18-22 for when Jesus said the Temple would be destroyed. What did He mean by this? Who else said, “If you are the Son of God” (see Matthew 4:3,6)?

verse 41 - Not only the common people, but the religious leaders mocked the Son of God.

verses 42-43 - The word meaning *saved* also means *healed*, so “he saved others” may refer to Jesus’ healing miracles. Is it true that Jesus could not save Himself? Why or why not? Do you think people would have believed had He come down? Why or why not? Note that they blamed their lack of faith on Jesus, not themselves.

verse 44 - The robbers also mocked Jesus, but then one was sorry for his sins (see Luke 23:39-43).

verse 45 - The sixth to the ninth hour was 12:00 noon to 3:00 P.M. This darkness may have been an eclipse or from some other cause, but it was certainly supernatural in its timing.

verse 46 - Why did Jesus say this? Think what it would mean for Jesus to be forsaken by God. Have you ever felt forsaken by God (if you are a Christian you haven't been, but may have felt like you have; see Hebrews 13:5) or others? Jesus knew what it was to have God, the Source of all good, "turn His back on Him." Christ did this for you (if you are a believer). Think about what this means.

verse 47 - There was a tradition that Elijah would come and rescue the righteous in their distress. Why did they think Jesus was calling for Elijah?

verses 48-49 - How was this act of mercy treated by most of the onlookers?

verse 50 - Jesus was in control. He voluntarily gave up His spirit and died.

verse 51 - This curtain was between what two parts of the Temple? What do you think its ripping might symbolize? Why did it rip from top to bottom?

verses 51-53 - Here is more evidence that Jesus' death was not ordinary.

verse 54 - Those guarding Jesus may or may not have realized completely Who Jesus was, but they were certainly impressed by the manner of His death. The way people die (not so much the cause, but the person's reaction to death) often has a profound effect on those around them. God can help us die in a way that honors Him.

verses 55-56 - Imagine what these women might have thought and felt at this time.

Personal Application: What difference does it make that Jesus died and rose again from the dead? Read Romans 5:6-8; I Corinthians 15:3-7, 12-22; I John 4:10. Worship God for what He has done. Pray and sing hymns and songs about Jesus' death, such as "Man of Sorrows" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #246); "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #247); "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #252); "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #253); "Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #257); "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #254). You may also like to listen to a recording of *The Messiah* by Handel.

Scripture verses that prophesy Jesus' death

If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, ²³ you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none. ²¹ They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst (Psalm 69:20-21).

Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ² He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. ⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. ¹¹ After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life, and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:1-12).

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. . . . ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ⁸ "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." . . . ¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. ¹³ Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing (Psalm 22:1-2, 6-8, 12-18).

RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

Matthew 28:1-8; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:9-12

Lesson Aim

That your students will grow in understanding the meaning of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

Memory Verse

Review Matthew 5:33-48.

Lesson Background

[Parallel passages: **Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18.**] The story of the resurrection is so familiar that we can hardly comprehend the magnitude of its effect on first-century Christians. Imagine your shock if a deceased friend or relative suddenly came to life. Yet Jesus was not only a dearly-loved friend, but the Lord and God, the foundation of their (and our) existence. Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (how incomprehensible that God, the Creator, died - and for us!), yet He did not remain in the grave. Despite incontrovertible evidence, some people try to deny or water down the doctrine of the resurrection. Yet if Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile; we are still in our sins (I Corinthians 15:12f.). The resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith.

Belief in the Lord's ascension is likewise vital. Having made sacrifice for sin, Christ sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). He returned to heaven to prepare a place for His children (John 14:1-3), to send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7), to give gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8-11), and to intercede for His people (Hebrews 7:25). Christ will return from heaven in the same manner He went into heaven (Acts 1:11). May we respond to these truths as did the early disciples (Luke 24:52-53) - in worship and continual praise.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking the students how their lives would be different if Jesus had never risen from the grave. The reality of Christ's resurrection is something about which they have heard as long as they've been coming to church, which for many will be all of their lives. But their answers to the question will reveal a great deal about how well they understand the implications of this most central of biblical teachings. After letting them discuss the matter, turn to today's Scripture passages, being careful to respond to any misconceptions or fill in any gaps revealed by your students' answers to your opening question.

DIG IN - Matthew 28:1-8; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:9-12



Dig In!

Today's Passages:

Matthew 28:1-8; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:9-12



WHO?



WHAT?



WHEN?



WHERE?

Matthew 28:1-8

Since we “know the story,” it is very hard to imagine how these events would have affected those involved, but try to do so. What would it be like to have someone you know who has died (think of a specific person) come back to life again? Jesus was not just “any person” to them, either; He was Someone they loved very deeply, the focus of their lives, the Lord.

verse 1 - Why did the two Marys visit the tomb? Why is the fact that these events took place on the first day of the week important? The tomb was probably cut into the hillside, with a low entrance blocked by a heavy round stone that fit into a grooved track. The women would not have expected to move the stone, but only to stay outside the tomb.

verses 2-4 - Think of how powerful God is if the appearance of a mere angel can cause a terrible earthquake. The Roman guards were not “wimps,” but hardened soldiers used to danger and not easily surprised. Yet how did they react (verse 4)?

verses 5-6 - Imagine the women’s reaction to this news. Note, “Just as He said.” Jesus keeps His promises. Why would the angel have told the women to look at the place where Jesus lay?

verse 7 - They would have had to travel more than fifty miles to see Jesus in Galilee.

verse 8 - How did the women feel and act when they heard the angel's words?

verses 9-12 - Again, try to imagine the thoughts and feelings of the women. Jesus showed great love for these women in appearing to them. They were already hurrying to tell the disciples the angel's message, but He came to them anyway, encouraging them in their mission and blessing them by His presence. Perhaps the women would have been unable to accompany the disciples to Galilee to see Jesus, in which case this meeting would have been even more special to them. Note Jesus calls the disciples, not servants or even friends, but His brothers.

Luke 24:44-53

Jesus has again appeared to His disciples after His resurrection and is speaking to them.

verse 44 - The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms are the three parts of the Hebrew Bible. Who Jesus is and what He would do was prophesied many times throughout the whole Old Testament Scriptures.

verse 45 - We can only understand God's Word if He makes it clear to us (see I Corinthians 2:10-16).

verses 46-47 - How would you summarize the Gospel "in a nutshell"? How close is your summary to this one?

verse 48 - What is a witness? Are you a witness? How is your witness the same as and different from that of the disciples? In a court of law, a witness testifies to what he has seen and/or knows. However, his evidence will be inadmissible (it will not be allowed) if his life does not back up his words. [No one, for example, would trust a "firearms expert" who had never shot a gun or a person who claims to have seen a crime from ten blocks away.]

verse 49 - What did the Father promise that Jesus was going to send? What do you think He means by "clothed with power from on high" (see Acts 1:8; Acts 2)? Disciples need the Holy Spirit to witness effectively.

verses 50-51 - Why did Jesus ascend into heaven (for further study: John 14:1-3; 16:7; Acts 1:11; Ephesians 2:6; 4:8-11; Hebrews 7:25; 10:12)?

verses 52-53 - What was the disciples' reaction to Jesus' resurrection and ascension? Do we have a similar response?

Acts 1:9-12

This account of the ascension adds details to Luke 24.

verse 9 - A cloud is often associated with God's presence, but does not necessarily have that significance here. The disciples were eyewitnesses of Christ's ascension.

verse 10 - Have you ever said goodbye to people very close to you whom you were not going to see for a very long time? Perhaps you kept looking and waving until their car or plane became a tiny speck in the distance. This is how the disciples felt. The word for *to look intently* here comes from a word meaning *to stretch*, as if the disciples were standing on their tip-toes trying to get a better look. Who do you think the men in white were?

verse 11 - How do you think this statement affected the disciples? What difference does it make in your life? Discuss the importance and implications of Jesus' Second Coming.

verse 12 - A Sabbath day's walk was about 3/5 of a mile.

Personal Application: What difference does the fact that Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven make in your life?

Activities:

Some people say that Jesus never rose from the dead or ascended into heaven. How would you respond to these people? What proofs would you give that these things are true? Plan and act out a courtroom drama where a disciple is on trial for believing in the resurrection and ascension. The prosecuting lawyer should try to picture these beliefs as foolishness, while the defense attorney must prove the truth of these doctrines. Witnesses from any time period can be called, and you may also have a judge and jury.

Read the Apostle's Creed and/or the Nicene Creed, particularly the parts that talk about who Jesus is. Before you do so perhaps you would as a class like to write down a creed and compare it with these. A creed is a set of beliefs. These creeds were written before 400 A.D. as early Christians together wrote down and agreed upon what they thought were the most important parts of the Christian faith. Why do you think they included what they did?

Read I Corinthians 15 for devotions this week. Paul shows in this passage that if the resurrection is not true, Christianity is foolish.

Early Christians often greeted each other in this way. Upon meeting, instead of saying, "Hi. How are you?" one believer would say, "Christ (or the Lord) is risen!" and the other would respond, "He is risen indeed!" Perhaps you would like to greet Christians in this way this week (you may have to explain to them the proper response).

Sing and listen to songs about Jesus' resurrection and ascension, such as "Easter Song" (Annie Herring, arranged by Bob Kauflin, recorded by Glad, The A Capella Project) or hymns such as: "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #273); "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #277); "Low in the Grave He Lay" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #276); "The Strife is O'er" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #275); "See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #291); "Golden Harps are Sounding" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #293).

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary and was made man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. And I believe one catholic and apostolic church, I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Note: *quick* means *alive*; *catholic* means *universal*; *the Holy Ghost* is *the Holy Spirit*.