

*Matthew 26:14-56*

## Aim of Lesson

To show the significance of the memorial meal. To show how Christ submitted himself to God's will, and was strengthened through prayer.

## Background study

Genesis 37:2-8; Exodus 12:1-20; Psalm 41:9; Hebrews 5:7-10.

## Suggested outline of lesson

Talk to the children about the attitude of the high priest and other Jewish leaders towards Jesus, and of their determination to have him killed. They had been looking for an opportunity to apprehend him but, for a number of reasons, they had failed. Wherever Jesus went he was surrounded by people, many of whom were his followers. It would have been difficult, therefore, for his enemies to take him in public. A riot would probably have ensued, arousing the anger of the Roman authorities. When the Jewish leaders tried to trap Jesus by their artful questions, Jesus confounded them with his wise answers. Another reason for their lack of success was simply that the time was not yet right (John 8:20). The solution to their problem presented itself unexpectedly, in the form of Judas Iscariot who offered to assist them by leading them to Jesus at an opportune moment. The children will be shocked to learn that Jesus was to be betrayed by one of his disciples, and that it was to be done for a sum of money. The similarity to the selling of Joseph by his brothers is obvious.

At this point, explain that Jesus was aware of Judas' intentions and yet, as preparation was made for Jesus and the disciples to share the passover meal, Judas was nevertheless included. The children will need to be reminded that the passover was a special religious feast which the Jews observed annually, to remind them of the way in which God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. All Jews regarded this feast as fundamental to their faith, and a vitally necessary part of their worship. The meal that Jesus and his disciples shared that night was a moving and solemn occasion. Describe the scene in the upper room, with the group spread out around a low table, lit by flickering oil lamps. Try to convey the atmosphere of intimacy, and the tension that the disciples felt; they sensed that this was a special occasion and that Jesus was greatly moved. When Jesus spoke of being betrayed by one of them, they were disturbed and incredulous. Only Judas was unmoved by the talk of betrayal; rather, his resolve was strengthened as he left them in order to carry out his evil plan.

If possible, demonstrate the simplicity of the sharing of the bread and wine by showing the class a plate of bread and a cup of wine used in the breaking of bread service. Explain that Jesus attached great importance to this simple ceremony, and describe simply the symbolism of the bread and the wine. Thereafter this memorial meal was to be repeated regularly, to remind the followers that he had died to save them. The children may begin to appreciate the parallel with the death of the lamb that had saved the Israelites so many years before. Draw the simplest kind of parallels between the two sacrifices - the spotless lamb and the sinless saviour, the blood shed, the salvation which was accomplished, and the need for the regular commemoration of the event. For the children who may not already be aware of the fact, point out that every Sunday the command of Jesus to keep the memorial feast is obeyed.

In spite of all that Jesus had told his disciples, they did not fully appreciate the significance of what had taken place in that upper room although they felt troubled and apprehensive. On the way to the Mount of Olives, every word that Jesus spoke added to their sense of foreboding. Peter was moved to declare his determination to support his master to the utmost, no matter what might happen, and he reacted indignantly to the prediction that this would not be the case, vowing that he was ready to die if necessary.

Describe the walk out of the city and up the hill to the cool and quiet place that Jesus often visited. In the darkness Jesus knelt to pray. Only Peter, James and John were near enough to hear what he said and to feel something of the anguish that he expressed. Emphasize that Jesus felt a very great need to talk to his Father about the awful suffering that he was shortly to endure. In his prayer he expressed his complete trust in God's love, and prayed not that he should be spared, but for strength to accomplish his Father's will. In this we have the perfect example of prayer. For a long time Jesus struggled to express his innermost feelings, and to concentrate his mind upon the will and purpose of God. His desire for communion with his Father was so compelling that it transcended his need for sleep. Suggest the loneliness and disappointment he felt at finding his closest friends asleep when he needed their prayers, and their support.

Contrast the serenity of this scene with the violent commotion that followed. Jesus and his companions were suddenly aware of the noisy approach of many people, and the sight of flaring torches. The disciples were panic-stricken when they saw the armed soldiers, but Jesus stood calmly as Judas approached him. Convey the heartless treachery of Judas, who used a sign of affection to betray Jesus to his enemies. Describe the expressions on the faces of Jesus' captors, as the guards secured him. Desperately Peter lashed out in defence of his Lord and was rebuked for it. Describe how composed Jesus was; he accepted his arrest without resistance but, as he had predicted, his friends felt so helpless and afraid that they deserted him.

## Relevance to the children's lives

Jesus is an example to all his followers. Did you notice, in today's lesson, the ways in which Jesus showed us how to behave - in caring for his friends, in his attitude towards his enemies, in prayer, and in doing what he knew God wanted him to do? How can we follow his example in our lives?

## Worksheets

Year 2: The code reads: 'This has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled'.

Year 4: Jesus prayed: 'My father, if it is possible may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'.

## Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for sending Jesus to be an example to us. Help us to think of him every day and to follow his ways. Amen.

## **Memory verse**

“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).