

Matthew 27:27-66

Aim of Lesson

To describe the events of the crucifixion in order to evoke the children's sympathetic response. (At this stage one can but sow the seed, hoping that it will grow into fuller understanding later). To show that Jesus allowed himself to die, because he understood God's purpose.

Background study

Isaiah 53. John 19:19-42.

Suggested outline of lesson

It is not easy to convey the significance of Christ's sacrifice to children of this age group. However, your personal conviction regarding the importance of the account will be transferred in some measure to the class. While the story should provide a moving experience, it should not cause distress. A good teacher will be sensitive and adaptable to the response of the children.

It is important for you to be fully conversant with the sequence of events, so that the narration is accurate and fluent. Brief notes will aid the memory and leave you free to concentrate on bringing the story to life with colourful description. Paint a mental picture of the actions of Jesus' tormentors. Children will be able to identify, to some extent, with the distress and humiliation Jesus felt.

Explain that when a person was crucified, the cause of death was asphyxia; children require simple facts. Strike a careful balance throughout the lesson between the disturbing elements and the interesting details. Note, for instance, the part played by Simon of Cyrene, the fulfilment of prophecy (Psalm 22:18) regarding the robe, the irony of the inscription above the cross, the darkness in the middle of the day, the veil of the temple being torn in two, the earthquake, and the confession of the centurion.

It will be appreciated that further details appear in the other gospel accounts. Although one should not attempt to present a fully comprehensive picture, some of the other incidents may be used at your discretion to supplement the material in Matthew. In particular, refer to the words of Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) and "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Use these verses to demonstrate the love of Jesus for man and for God.

Point out that it was customary for caves to be used as burial places, and for a stone to be used to seal the entrance. It is particularly interesting that the chief priests and Pharisees, who had refused to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, were unable to forget his words: "After three days I will rise again" and they persuaded Pilate to set a guard.

Relevance to the children's lives

The story today is a very sad one. We feel sorry that Jesus, who brought such happiness to others, was so cruelly treated. Why do you think Jesus did not use his power to save himself? Why is the crucifixion of Jesus such an important event for us? (Having found out, by questions of this kind, the stage of understanding the children have reached, you should be content to lead just one step further and avoid the temptation to go beyond the limits of their understanding.)

Worksheets

Year 2: These should be self-explanatory.

Year 4: The letters in circles read 'After three days I will rise again'. The answers to the questions are 'Joseph', 'Simon', 'Mary Magdalene', 'Pilate'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we are sad that Jesus had to die, but we know that it was part of your plan for the world. Help us to want to obey you, as Jesus always did, and help our understanding to grow. Amen.

Memory verse

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).