

Aim of lesson

The aim of this lesson is that the young people should be able to understand and explain why it was that God sent his son, and why his death is so important. This is a difficult subject for us to understand, and it is important to keep it as straightforward as possible. The lesson should identify two main reasons for the life and death of Christ:

1. To make a way for us to be saved.
2. To show us what God is like and to set us an example for our behaviour.

The last lesson in this group concentrates on the second of these. This one centres on the first

Bible background

Romans 6

Preparation required

How you present this lesson will depend very much on the young people you are teaching: how much they know already, and how willing they are to talk. Nevertheless, it should follow the outline suggested below.

If the young people are relatively familiar with this subject, get them to answer the questions in their notes as you go along. Otherwise, go through the lesson and then use it as recapitulation.

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduction

Ask the young people why they think it was necessary for Christ to live and die: how would our situation have been any different without him? Make a list of the points they make, so that they can see it (a whiteboard may help). It is likely that their answers will, initially at least, be a bit simplistic or vague, and you may have to push them to say what they mean - often they may not know, but don't worry. The points on the list should at least include, in some form, the following

- to show us what God is like
- to die as a sacrifice for our sins
- to set us an example of how we should live
- to overcome sin
- to save people who believe in him

Mention that some of the points they have made relate directly to our lives; these are covered in two weeks' time. Others are to do with the process by which we are saved, and these form the subject of this week's lesson.

The problem, and how Jesus came to solve it

Ask the young people what God wants of the world; what stands in the way of his purpose?

God wants the world to be full of people who serve and worship him and who live for ever in peace and happiness. Now imagine the situation at the end of Genesis 3, when Adam has sinned and they and their descendants are expelled from the garden and condemned to death.

What was God to do to recover the situation?

Get the young people to think of possible alternatives to the sacrifice of Christ.

- Pretend that sin does not matter and let everyone live for ever anyway? This would not work because sin make us unhappy and brings evil in the world, so God's purpose would not be achieved.
- Wait for people to come who would live perfect lives? In a sense that is what God did with the law of Moses; he gave us a set of commandments to obey, and everyone broke them. So the law demonstrated to us all that this plan would not work (as God knew before)

At some point in the lesson we need to take a step back and consider the following question:

Why do we die?

It should be mentioned at this point that there are two reasons why we deserve to die.

1. Because we sin

2. Because we are sinful. We have human nature, and are always tempted to sin, even when we don't. And even when we are not sinning directly, in breaking a commandment, our lives are so mediocre that we can never do anything that is wholly good. Even Jesus said "Why do you call me good? No-one is good - except God alone" (Mark 10:17-18, NIV). Refer to Romans 5:12-14 and point out that after Adam, everyone died: even those who had not broken a commandment.

We come from the ground; of ourselves we can never rise above it, and so we return to the ground.

So God sent his son.

What did Jesus achieve in his life and death?

Ask the young people what it was that Jesus achieved for us? The answers should boil down to the fact that he overcame the things that make us deserve to die:

1. He did not sin
2. He overcame human nature. It was not just that Jesus always resisted the temptation to sin, but that by the end of his life his humanity no longer held any power over him.

This latter point is perhaps a bit hard to understand in the abstract. But we know from experience that when we sin it is easier for us next time to make the same mistake. Similarly, when we resist temptation, it is a little easier for us to resist it again - to the point at which we may no longer be tempted in that way. If we can imagine this latter pattern of life extended to the ultimate it becomes easier to understand what it was that Christ did.

You may find these passages useful:

- 'For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man' (Romans 8:3, NIV)
- 'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil' (Hebrews 2:14, NIV).
- 'I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me' (John 14:30, NIV)

Emphasise the point that for these reasons it was essential that Jesus should be born human, just like us.

So he had overcome, for himself, the causes of death, and God raised him from the dead. 'But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him'. (Acts 2:24, NIV)

How does this save us?

We are no more able to live perfect lives after the death of Christ than we were before. But God in his grace has allowed that if we acknowledge our sins, and confess that we deserve to die, we too can be saved from death.

The pattern in our case is exactly the same as for the Lord Jesus Christ. But in our case baptism stands in place of his death on the cross.

Use Romans 6:3-11 to reinforce this message.

v3 When we are baptised it is like entering Christ's grave (buried with him)

v4 We emerge to a new life

v5 If this is the case, then when Christ returns we (if we have died) will be raised from the dead to immortality

v6-11 Although we are still human, and we still sin, these things no longer condemn us to death. But we should live our lives as men and women who are no longer ruled by sin, but by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Relevance to our lives

It is worth thinking through the point that Paul had to answer at the start of Romans 6. We are by the grace of God saved from the effects of our sins, and no longer condemned to death. Does this mean that we can now live our lives exactly as we want and 'continue in sin, that grace may abound'?

A few minutes thought and discussion will lead to the obvious conclusion that if we really want to be saved from our sins we will do everything in our power to avoid disobeying God. But it is important to have the discussion, and to make it clear that the teaching of scripture about salvation by grace does not remove our obligation to resist sin and dedicate our lives to God.

Prayer

Get the young people to write a prayer thanking God for what Jesus has done for them

Other suggestions for activities

1. Get the young people to write a short essay about the future of the world, if God were to leave it as it is, and Jesus did not return.
2. The young people could choose a hymn, hymns or songs to finish Sunday School which show our gratitude for what Jesus has done. This is a useful exercise as it encourages them to think about the words of our hymns.
3. 1 Peter 1:18-21. Ask the young people to read this several times and then to write in their own words what they think Peter was saying.