

Matthew 27:1-26

Aim of lesson

To show how Jesus was falsely accused by the Jewish leaders, and how he maintained dignity and courage throughout his trial.

Background study

Isaiah 53:3-7. Find out about the status of Jews under the Roman occupation.

Suggested outline of lesson

Trial by a cruel occupying force

Link this lesson with the previous one by reminding the children that Jesus had been arrested and taken to the house of Caiaphas. Establish that Jesus was now in the hands of a foreign authority, accused by his own people and deserted by his friends.

This is a lesson of sharp contrasts - between the behaviour of Pilate and the humility of the Lord Jesus; and between the hatred and envy of the Jewish leaders and Jesus' loving submission to his Father's will.

Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, had appointed Pontius Pilate to be Governor of Judaea. Pilate controlled the occupying forces, whose presence would have been all too evident in the streets of Jerusalem. As Governor, he could endorse or reverse death sentences passed by the Sanhedrin, which had to be submitted to him. Historians tell us that Pilate disliked the Jews and that he was responsible for acts of brutality, which provoked them to riot on a number of occasions.

Relevance to the children's lives

In this account we have a very challenging lesson for ourselves. We will probably never have to face such a terrible ordeal as Jesus endured, but his faith and courage are an inspiration to us all. He remained calm and unprotesting, even though he was innocent, because he knew that God was in control. Can we think of occasions when we have strongly protested, even when we were guilty?

Pilate confronted by Jesus and crowd hysteria

Jesus was led in chains to stand before this man. What a visual contrast the two presented: the one bruised and in fetters, the other, richly attired, regal and forbidding. And yet, in the gospel account, there is an overwhelming impression that the one in command of the situation, with his quiet dignity, was the prisoner, Jesus Christ. It is clear that Pilate was both impressed and affected by the prisoner's bearing. Furthermore, he was disturbed by his wife's urgent message (Matthew 27:19). Pilate's doubt about the prisoner's guilt gave rise to the Jews' anger and frustration. They had to persist in pressing the case since they were powerless to implement the death sentence. Pilate's apparent confidence began

to crumble when he sensed the beginnings of a riot. The leaders of the Jews had lost all sense of right and justice, and even resorted to inciting the crowd to shout for the release of a robber and murderer, in order to secure the crucifixion of the man whose death they sought. It was imperative for Pilate to avert a breakdown of law and order (having already been in trouble with Caesar for mishandling Jewish affairs). Faced with a dilemma - to condemn an innocent man or to risk a violent disturbance - he demonstrated visually that he had abdicated his responsibility.

With the self-convicting words - "His blood be on us and on our children!" - the Jews sent the Son of God to his death.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, whenever we are tempted to get our own back on people who hurt us, we will try to remember to follow the example of your son, Jesus. Amen.

Memory verse

"Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).