

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: LUKE 23:32-43



God's forgiveness is available even to the worst sinners.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

Jesus spoke forgiveness in the midst of His suffering – Jesus was crucified with a criminal on his left and another on his right. Isaiah prophesied about this when he wrote that the suffering servant would be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). In Matthew 18:21-22 Jesus told Peter that forgiveness should extend to those who have sinned against us seventy times seven times! Jesus demonstrated here that His forgiveness extends to criminals and even to the men who put Him on the cross.

Jesus was mocked. Even while the people stood and watched Jesus ask the Father to forgive them, they mocked Him. The people, the soldiers and even the rulers mocked Him. They saw the man who had made great claims about being God now suffering and bleeding like any man. What they didn't know is that Jesus was fully God while also being fully man. Even the sign above Jesus, meant to mock His claims, testified of His true position: Jesus was the King of the Jews.

Two very different criminals – One criminal joined the mocking of the crowd but the other criminal rebuked him. This criminal realized Jesus had done nothing wrong. Then in a remarkable demonstration of grace, the criminal defending Jesus placed His faith in Christ. Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” The arm of the Lord is not too short to save even a man who repents at the very last moment. In the midst of so much unbelief, we see here one man's newfound faith. And he was rewarded for that faith with assurance from Christ and life in paradise.

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WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

Mark tells us of the terrible insults hurled at Jesus during the Crucifixion. But Luke records that in the midst of the mocking and jeering, grace came to one man. Luke tells us the story of the repentant robber. Even a man on the verge of death, having lived a life of crime, can trust in Jesus. So effective is the work of Christ that it can carry the worst of sinners directly from the executioner's hand into paradise. The robber didn't know the full measure of truth behind the death of an innocent Savior, but he knew this: he was a sinner deserving of punishment and in need of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit gave this man the gift of faith to believe.

One day, we and all who trust in Christ will get the opportunity to talk with the man who hung upon a cross next to Christ. The question is, who will we be like: the repentant robber or the mocker?

ON THE ROAD TO EMMANUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

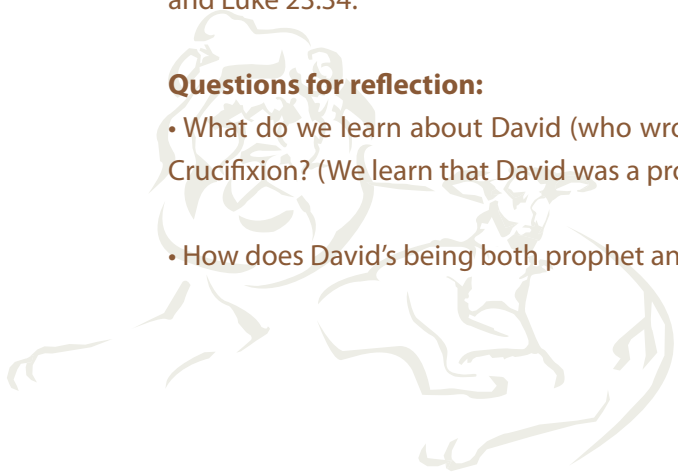
Bible Passage: Psalm 22:17,18

Connecting the passage to Christ:

The whole of Psalm 22, like Isaiah 53, is a prophetic picture of the Crucifixion. Psalm 22:18 accurately predicts the dividing up of Jesus' clothing by casting lots. This is found in Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, and Luke 23:34.

Questions for reflection:

- What do we learn about David (who wrote Psalm 22) by comparing it to the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion? (We learn that David was a prophet as well as a king.)
- How does David's being both prophet and king point to Jesus? (Jesus was both a prophet and a king.)



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SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

SAVED IN THE NICK OF TIME

Supplies:

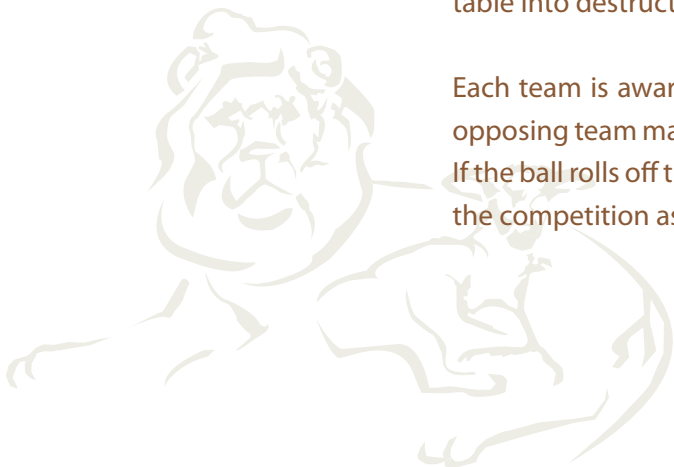
- rubber bouncing ball
- long eight foot table
- masking tape
- salad tongs

The object of this lesson is to show that Jesus can save someone from eternal death in the last moment of their lives.

Divide the class up into teams. Place a piece of masking tape down the middle of the table. Draw twelve one inch marks along the line like a ruler and label them from 12 down to 1. Twelve should be at the left end of the table counting down to one closer to the center of the table. Prop up the other end with several books or adjust the legs so the table slants downward. The object is for you to release the ball on the high side and have it roll down towards the numbers on the low side of the table.

One team stands in line to roll the ball down the table. The other team tries to snatch the ball up with the salad tongs. The object is to try to wait until the ball gets to the higher numbers to grab it, but if you miss, it will fall off the end of the table into destruction.

Each team is awarded points according to the number the ball crossed last. The opposing team may roll the ball fast but it must run along the tape and not bounce. If the ball rolls off the tape line or bounces, the opposing team loses 5 points. After the competition ask the class the following questions:



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- Was it easier to grab the ball right away rather than try to wait until the very last second? (Yes, it was easier to grab it and get a lower score rather than trying to wait until the last moment.)
- Was it harder to grab a ball that was moving fast toward the end of the table? (Yes, the faster the ball was moving the harder it was to save it from going off the edge.)

Explain to the class the ball represents a person's life and the end of the table represents destruction. We are all headed toward destruction and must be saved (represented by the tongs). The difference between the game and life is that God is holding the tongs and it doesn't matter how fast we are running toward hell or how close we are to death, God is able to save us.

Read the account of the robber on the cross and draw the kids out regarding where He would be if he were the ball on the table. What does the way God saved the thief say about God's forgiveness?

A MODERN TESTIMONY

If you are aware of a person who lead a life of crime prior to becoming a Christian or a person who was saved later in life, invite them to come and share their testimony with your class.



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CASTING LOTS

Supplies:

- one pack of straws
- one large candy bar and a bag of smaller chocolate kisses for the whole class

This exercise is meant to demonstrate God's sovereign control over all things, even the death of Jesus.

Prior to class choose a volunteer to help you. Instruct them that they should take the straw nearest your thumb, which will be the shortest straw. (You will need a bit of luck that the first two people don't take that straw.)

Write the name of your volunteer on the back of the candy bar and place it in a sealed envelope. Explain how lots work: one straw is shorter than the rest and when each person picks a straw the person with that shorter straw is the one picked by the lot.

Tell the children you are going to demonstrate the picking of a lot for a candy bar that is sealed in the envelope.

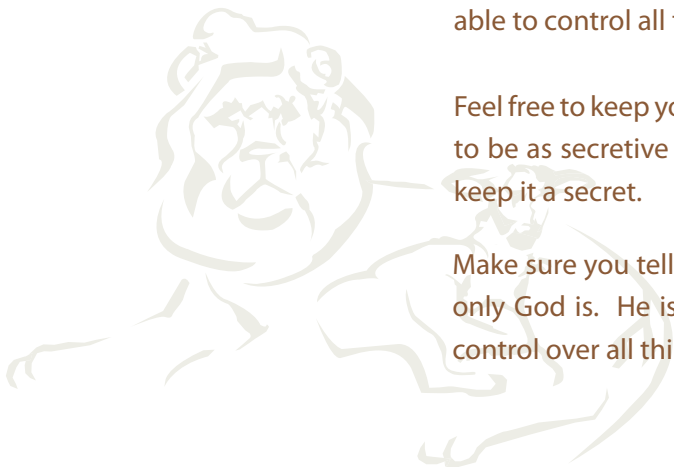
First, read the account from the crucifixion where the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing. Tell them how David prophesied they would do that in Psalm 22. Explain that this demonstrates the power of God to be in control of all things. Then read Proverbs 16:33 and share how God is in sovereign control of the lot.

Then follow through with your little experiment. After each person chooses a straw have them compare their lengths. Hopefully your accomplice will have chosen the shorter straw. Then tell the class that you wrote the name of the person you knew would get the lot on the candy bar. Have someone open it up and read the name. It should be the person you chose.

While they are amazed, point their focus back to God who knew that His Son would be sacrificed for our sins right down to the very last detail. God is all-powerful and able to control all things.

Feel free to keep your trick a secret, but your accomplice may not have the discipline to be as secretive as you are. If you plan to teach this lesson more than once, do keep it a secret.

Make sure you tell the children it was a simple trick and that you are not sovereign, only God is. He is all-powerful and does not need to do tricks. God's power and control over all things is real.



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PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

Supplies:
pencil and paper

Draw a picture of the three crosses on Golgotha.

FOR THE OLDER GRADES

A THANK YOU PRAYER

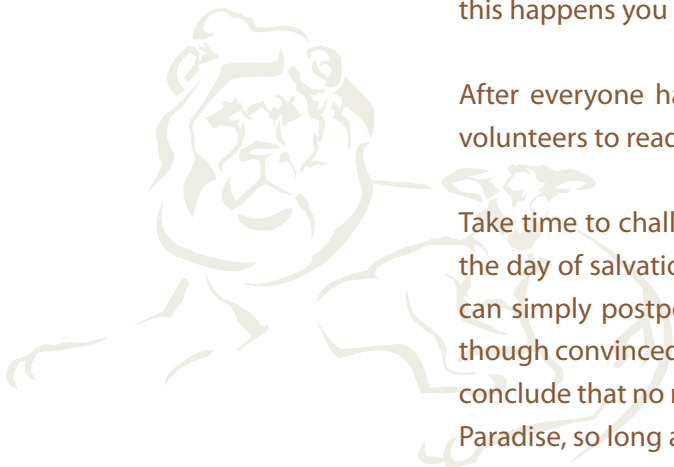
Supplies:
pencil and paper

Use this exercise to help the students in your class reflect upon the crucifixion. After reviewing the passage and talking about it, pass out paper and writing instruments and ask each student to write a thank you note to Jesus for dying on the cross. Imagine that it would be able to go into the mail. Tell them that though you may ask for volunteers, you will not force anyone to read their letter of thanks.

If a student is struggling with this exercise it could be an indication that he or she is not converted. If you become aware of this, feel the freedom to change the assignment for that student to a letter that is a cry for help. Please make sure that if this happens you alert the child's parents; they would want to know.

After everyone has had an opportunity to write for about ten minutes, ask for volunteers to read their thank you letters aloud.

Take time to challenge your class with the Gospel. The Bible tells us that today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Help the children to not falsely think they can simply postpone salvation until later in life. Many raised in Christian homes, though convinced of Christ's claims, postpone salvation and obedience. It's easy to conclude that no matter how badly we sin, or how late we repent, we will end up in Paradise, so long as we squeeze it in before we get old and die.



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

The curse of dying on a tree – God through Moses told Israel that when a man guilty of a capital offense is killed by hanging on a tree, then his body should not be left on the tree overnight because a person who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. This ultimately points to the method of Jesus' death. The religious rulers would understand crucifixion to be an insult to Christ who they thought had blasphemed. In fact, Jesus was cursed by God on our behalf. God poured out His wrath for our sin upon Jesus. In Galatians 3:13 Paul says it this way, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"

