

# JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

Matthew 27:31-66; Mark 15:20-47; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:17-42

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Jesus

**Key-location:** Calvary

### **Key-repetitions:**

- Jesus spoke seven times while on the cross.
- Different reactions to the crucifixion were recorded: women (Lk 23:26-33); mockers (Mat 27:38, 39, 41); criminals (Lk 23:40-43); soldiers (Mat 27:54; Lk 23:46-47); witnesses returned home distressed (Lk 23:48); Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (Jn 19:38-40).
- Supernatural phenomena: three hours of darkness (Mat 27:45); the curtain of the temple was torn into two pieces from top to bottom; an earthquake; and dead people were raised to life (Mat 27:51-53; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45).

### **Key-attitudes:**

- Jesus' self-control when he experienced intense pain on the cross.
- Forgiveness that Jesus manifested.
- Mockery of those who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion.
- One of the criminal's repentance.
- After the crucifixion: crowd's fear; soldiers' admiration; Joseph and Nicodemus' courage; priests and Pharisees' fear when they wanted guards at Jesus' grave.

### **Initial-situation:**

Two legal systems condemned Jesus: the religious Jewish Sanhedrin Council and the Roman Civil Court. In Palestine, the Roman government allowed the Sanhedrin Council to judge religious cases. If the sentence by the Sanhedrin resulted in the death penalty, execution could only occur if the case was approved by the government in a civil judgment. After the Jewish Sanhedrin Council gave Jesus the death penalty, they took him to the Roman governor, Pilate.

Pilate wanted to free Jesus. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and that the Jewish leaders condemned him out of envy. But the people screamed, "Crucify him!" Pilate saw that a riot was starting. He washed his hands and said he was innocent of Jesus' blood. Pilate tried again to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." Pilate heard this and he handed Jesus over to the Jewish leaders to be crucified.

### **Initial-problem:**

Soldiers led Jesus away to be crucified.

**Final-situation:**

Jesus' tomb was sealed, and soldiers were posted to guard it.

**BIBLE STORY****Crucifixion**

Soldiers took Jesus and two criminals to the place called the Skull, a hill outside of Jerusalem. It was about 9:00 a.m. They crucified Jesus with one criminal on his right, and another on his left. Jesus prayed for those responsible for his crucifixion, "Father, forgive these people! They don't know what they're doing" (Lk 23:33-34).

People passed by and hurled insults at Jesus, shouting, "You were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. If you're God's Son, save yourself and come down from the cross."

Religious leaders mocked Jesus saying, "He saved others, but he can't save himself! If he's the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we'll believe in him. He trusts God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him" (Mat 27:39-44).

One of the criminals on a cross next to Jesus cursed Jesus and said, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

The criminal on the other cross rebuked him, "Don't you fear God? Aren't you under the same sentence? We deserve our punishment, but this man has done nothing wrong."

Then the criminal continued and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will join me in paradise" (Lk 23:39-43).

Jesus saw his mother and the disciple John, whom he loved, standing nearby. Jesus told his mother, "Dear woman, this man is your son," and to the disciple, "She is now your mother." From that time on, John took Mary to live in his home (Jn 19:25-27).

From the noon hour until three o'clock, darkness covered the land. About three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Mat 27:45-49).

**Death and Burial of Jesus**

Jesus knew that he had finished his work. Jesus said, "I'm thirsty." Someone soaked a sponge in a jar of wine vinegar, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. Jesus drank the wine and said, "It is finished" (Jn 19:28-30).

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, I put my spirit into your hands." Then Jesus breathed his last breath (Lk 23:46).

At that moment, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. An earthquake hit and rocks split apart. Graves broke open and the bodies of many of God's people were raised to life, came out of their tombs, and were seen by many people.

Soldiers who were guarding Jesus felt the earthquake and saw all that had happened. They were terrified, and one soldier exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Mat 27:51-54).

People who had gathered to witness the crucifixion beat their breasts in anguish and went away. But those who knew Jesus stood at a distance and watched (Lk 23:48-49).

Now it was Friday, the next day would be both a Sabbath and the Passover. It was a special Sabbath for the Jews, and they did not want the bodies left on the crosses during that Sabbath. One soldier stuck his spear into Jesus' side, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water (Jn 19:31-37).

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish Sanhedrin Council went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate ordered an army officer to verify that Jesus had died. Then Pilate gave Joseph the body (Mk 15:42-45).

Joseph and Nicodemus, another religious leader who had been a secret disciple, took Jesus' body away. They followed the Jewish burial custom. The two men wrapped Jesus' body in linen cloth together with spices. They put Jesus' body into a new tomb in a nearby garden (Jn 19:38-42).

The women who had traveled with Jesus saw how Jesus' body was laid in the tomb. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes (Lk 23:55-56).

### **Guards at the Tomb**

The next day was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that liar announced while he was still alive, 'After three days I'll rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be guarded until the third day. If you don't, his disciples may steal the body and tell the people that he has risen from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

Pilate answered, "Post guards. Make the tomb as secure as you know how." The Jewish religious leaders went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone that covered the tomb, and posting guards (Mat 27:62-66).

### **GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### **SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Who was Jesus willing to forgive when he was put on the cross?
2. How did the criminals who were on the cross react to Jesus?
3. What did Jesus mean when he said, "It is finished"?
4. What supernatural phenomena happened while Jesus was on the cross?

5. What was the significance of the tearing of the temple curtain when Jesus died?
6. How did Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus express that they believed in Jesus?
7. How do people today express that they believe in Jesus?
8. What is the significance of the crucifixion for you?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **God is merciful and desires to forgive sinners.** Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were crucifying him—Jewish leaders, Roman politicians, soldiers, and ridiculing passersby (Lk 23:34). Because all people are sinners, all helped to put Jesus to death.
2. **It is never too late to repent of sins and turn to Jesus.** The criminal on the cross turned to Jesus, confessed he deserved to die for his sins, and Jesus accepted him (Lk 23:39-43).
3. **Jesus died after completing the work he came to do.** When Jesus said, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30), he meant that he had completed the work that the Father had given him to do. On the cross, he paid the debt that people have with God because of their sins. He offered himself as the sacrifice to remove the sins of the world (He 9:28).
4. **Supernatural phenomena reveal that something significant was happening when Jesus was being crucified.** Four miraculous events happened during the time Jesus was on the cross: darkness, the tearing of the temple curtain into two pieces from top to bottom, an earthquake, and dead people raised from their tombs (Mat 27:52-53).
5. **Jesus’ death on the cross opened the way for sinful people to enter into God’s presence.** God tore the curtain of the temple in two from top to bottom (Mat 27:51; Mk 15:38). The temple had three main parts: (1) *the courts* where the crowds gathered; (2) *the Holy Place* where only the priest could enter; (3) *the Holy of Holies* where no one could go through the curtain from the Holy Place to the Holy of Holies except the high priest. He could only enter it one day out of the year, on the Day of the Atonement (Ex 26:31-37; Lev 16:1-30). God tore the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Symbolically, the curtain separated the Holy God from sinful people. The curtain was torn from top to bottom, showing that God opened the way for sinful people to enter into his presence. No longer is there a separation between the worshiper and his God (Jn 14:6). Christians can enter into the presence of God without depending upon sacrifices or priests. They only depend upon Christ’s sacrifice. (See Hebrew 9:1-8; 10:19-22.)
6. **Openly following Jesus may place a person at risk of public ridicule or danger.** Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were among the Jewish leaders who

had faith in Jesus, but they didn't speak openly in favor of him. They were afraid of other leaders' opinions. They wanted men's approval more than God's approval (Jn 12:42). The reality of Jesus' death gave them courage to openly manifest that they were disciples of Jesus (Lk 23:50-53; Jn 19:38-40).

## **LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

### **Interactive Sharing:**

Invite listeners to share how Jesus' crucifixion affects them.

### **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in "twitter" length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about Jesus' crucifixion.
- Decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.
- How the story helps them to know Jesus better.