

SERMONS & BIBLE STUDIES

FOR ALL AGES

Book 1



These things happened as examples and
were written down for us.” 1 Corinthians
10:11

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

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He has been married to Nancy, a nurse, since 1979. They enjoy their very large family and many grandchildren.

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SERMONS AND BIBLE STUDIES

FOR ALL AGES

Book 1

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I. SERMON OUTLINES

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Sharing the truth of God's Word is a privilege and honor. We are responsible to "do our best" and to "correctly handle the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. There is no greater honor, nor higher accountability, than proclaiming God's truth to others. "Feed my sheep" Jesus told Peter three times (John 21). The purpose of this book is to enable you to be better communicators of the Word of God.

My book "Studying the Bible" teaches how to analyze Bible verses to understand what God is saying. The follow-up book, "Preaching and Teaching the Bible," explains how to develop sermons and messages from Bible passages. That book includes 22 short sermon outlines for pastors. The sermon outlines in this book are longer and more fully developed. You can find these books along with all my others at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org>. Go to India, then Download Books.

These are just outlines. They are to help you learn to better develop your own sermons. These aren't to provide ready-made sermons so you don't have to prepare. They are to help you in your preparation, so you can learn how to better prepare your own sermons.

These are frameworks for sermons and must be added to, changed or altered to become your own message to your people. You can divide a sermon into 2 or 3, if you find there is too much information for one sermon. You can delete parts or replace other parts. Please change them and adapt them to your own needs. Many things I have included may need to be explained in greater detail. You definitely need to add illustrations and applications that apply to your audience.

Illustrations are stories or examples to help explain truth so your people understand it. Using a story at the start of a sermon gets everyone's attention and lets people know what your main idea will be. At the end of a sermon a good illustration can help summarize what you are teaching and help your people apply your message.

Each sermon begins with a short summary of what you want the people to KNOW and what you want them to DO because of what they know. It is important to know this for every sermon or message you present. There needs to be one main idea at the heart of each message. Unless you know exactly what you want them to learn from you and how you want them to apply it before speaking, the message won't effectively change lives. It can be entertaining, interesting and even Biblical, but it won't impact your listeners as it should. There is more about this in the introduction to the second section to this book, the part about Bible studies for children, teens and adults. For most of these sermons I have my own complete notes available and for a few I have PowerPoint slides. I will gladly send these to you if you email me and tell me which sermon you are interested in.

In the sermons you will find the following directions:

TO KNOW, TO DO: this is for you to know exactly what you are focusing on in the sermon. It is your target towards which everything in the sermon points.

ILLUSTRATION: story or example to help explain and apply the truth taught. You can skip them or add more wherever you want in the sermon

(APPLICATION) explain the way the truth applies to the lives of your listeners, make it specific

READ: read the passage from your Bible or ask someone else to read it.

TRANSITION Help you change from talking about one subject to the next subject so people can follow along and understand the connection

1. JOSHUA: THE BATTLE BELONGS TO THE LORD

Joshua 1:1-9

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

(This can be used as one or two sermons or a Bible study)

TO KNOW: The Christian life is a battle. It can only be won by knowing and believing God's promises in the Bible. Joshua was given God's promises before entering the land.

TO DO: Know some of the promises God has for us and how to apply them so we can have victory in our spiritual battles today.

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: A young man thought it would be great to be a soldier. People would honor him, he would travel the world, his clothing and food would be provided and everything would be fine. He joined the army but soon found out there was another army of soldiers doing everything they could to kill him. It wasn't as easy as he thought it would be.

That is true of God's people, too

We accept Jesus as our Savior and have salvation

We expect life to be easy now that we are in God's army

But we find ourselves in battles with sin, Satan and the world around us

Salvation doesn't mean our battle has ended

It often means it has just begun

Before salvation we were dead in sin, now we have new life but we still have a sin nature

We have an enemy trying to destroy us

We have deserted Satan's army and joined God's army, and Satan is angry at us

We are in a battle and we must learn how to fight and have victory

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The book of Joshua is a book about warfare

Joshua and the Jews fought the Canaanites who attacked with swords and spears

We fight our sin nature and Satan's demons who attack with fear, anger, greed, pride and other sins

From Joshua we can learn how to have victory in our spiritual battles today

THE NAME JOSHUA

Joshua means "God is salvation" in Hebrew (the Old Testament is written in Hebrew)

His parents in bondage as slaves in Egypt gave him this name because they had faith in God

(APPLICATION: no matter how hard times are we must always keep our faith in God)

Jesus means "God is salvation" in Greek (the New Testament is written in Greek)

Both Jesus and Joshua mean the same thing, "God is salvation"

Joshua is a picture of Jesus, for there are many similarities

Joshua led to victory over the Canaanites like Jesus gives victory over Satan

The Jews had to follow Joshua to have victory like we must follow Jesus

Both lead their followers to the place of God's victory and blessing for them

Both lead against enemies trying to defeat and destroy God's people

God gave promises of victory to Joshua and Jesus gives promises of victory to us

What the Jews went through physically is a picture of what we go through spiritually

Physical battles in the Old Testament teach us how to win spiritual battles today

READ 1 Corinthians 10:11-12; Romans 15:4

THE START OF THE WAR

The battle with sin and Satan started in Eden when Adam and Eve sinned

READ Genesis 3:15

God said there would be warfare between Satan and Jesus until Jesus defeated Satan

Satan will wound Jesus, but Jesus totally defeats Satan on the cross

Satan can't attack God so he attacks and persecutes His people: the Jews and Christians

(APPLICATION: When we become a Christian, we fight sin and Satan to follow Jesus)

He gives us the weapons we need to have victory, but we must learn how to use them

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine joining the army and being sent to fight an enemy, but not being given any weapons to use. You could not defeat your enemy. Or imagine being given a weapon but not trained in how to use it. You would still be defeated.

(APPLICATION: Many Christians are defeated by sin and Satan because they never learn to use the weapons God provides. His weapons are His Word, prayer, worship, fellowship, etc.)

TRANSITION: From the book of Joshua, we will learn about the weapons God has given us and how to use them

I. GENERATION OF JEWS # 1

JOSHUA THE SLAVE

Joshua was the oldest son of Nun, from the tribe of Ephraim

He was born a slave in Egypt to slave parents who had faith in God (named him "God is salvation")

His father put innocent lamb's blood on the door of their house the night of Passover

If he wouldn't have done that Joshua would have died that night

(APPLICATION: Being a godly parent who obeys God is very important)

Joshua walked through the Red Sea on dry ground with the other Jews

He saw God's miracles in Egypt and on the way to Mt. Sinai – manna, clothes not wear out, etc.

JOSHUA THE SOLDIER

Joshua may have served in Pharaoh's army in Egypt

That is where he learned to lead soldiers and may have first met Moses

2 months after crossing the Red Sea the Jews were attacked by the Amalekites

Moses stood on the mountain and prayed while Joshua led the soldiers to victory

(APPLICATION: It takes both prayer and action to have victory over our enemies of sin

and Satan. We pray as if everything depends on God and work as if all depends on us.)

ILLUSTRATION: give an example of both praying and working for God

JOSHUA THE SERVANT

Joshua became Moses' helper, his assistant

Before he can lead, Joshua must learn to be a faithful follower

(APPLICATION: Leaders must be able to follow others before they can be a good leader)

JOSHUA THE SPY

A year after leaving Egypt the Jews came to where they would enter the Promised Land

They sent in 12 spies, one from each tribe, to prepare for entrance

10 of the spies were afraid of the Canaanites and giants in the land

Only Joshua and Caleb trusted God to give them victory

The people refused to go in because they feared the giants in the land

The giants seemed too power for them to overcome

ILLUSTRATION: Tell the story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)

(APPLICATION: when we face giants we must trust in God's power, not our own strength)

The people wanted to kill Moses, Joshua and Caleb and return to Egypt

Because of their unbelief God said they must wander in the desert for 40 years

(APPLICATION: fear is one of Satan's most effective weapons. It keeps us from enjoying the blessings God has for us)

By then the older generation who didn't trust God would be dead

The next generation could decide if they would follow God and enter the land

JOSHUA THE WANDERER

Joshua and Caleb had to wait 40 years to enter the promised land with the rest of the Jews

Even though it wasn't their fault, they had to suffer the consequences of the others' sins

(APPLICATION: we, too, suffer the consequences of the sins of others)

(our sin hurts others, our family and our church, so keep from sin)

God promises Joshua and Caleb would enter the land and they did

(APPLICATION: they trusted God's promise and waited 40 years to enter, never give up praying and patiently trusting God)

TRANSITION: When all the Jews who were afraid to enter died, God gave the next generation their chance

II. GENERATION OF JEWS # 2

Now it is up to the Jews to trust God when their parents failed

(APPLICATION: each generation must pick up where the last generation failed)

(APPLICATION: we are responsibility to be even better servants of God than our parents)

God, like a loving parent, is giving His children a second chance

(APPLICATION: God gives us second chances, as many chances as we need)

The land was occupied by strong Canaanite soldiers, some who were giants

(APPLICATION: Obeying God means warfare with those who would oppose us)

TRANSITION: Before the Jews can enter the land, God must prepare Joshua as their leader

(APPLICATION: God prepares us before giving us responsibility, so listen and learn)

III. GOD SPEAKS TO JOSHUA Joshua 1:1-9

READ Joshua 1:1-9

Let's look at this special passage one verse at a time

A. GOD SPEAKS TO JOSHUA – READ Joshua 1:1

Moses is dead but God's work must carry on

(APPLICATION: God's work doesn't end when God's servant dies, others carry on)

Moses was an excellent, skilled leader and it was very hard for Joshua to follow him

God was the one who used Moses and He will use Joshua as well if Joshua trusts and obeys

(APPLICATION: it can be hard for us to replace a special person but God will be with us)

(APPLICATION: we face responsibilities that seem too hard for us but God will be with us)

ILLUSTRATION: tell about a time God helped someone do something they thought was too hard

Joshua was at least 80 years old at this time

(APPLICATION: God uses elderly people; we are never too old to be used by God)

TRANSITION: God, the master, gives Joshua, the servant His directions

B. GET READY TO CROSS THE JORDAN – READ Joshua 1:2

God spoke to Joshua like He had to Moses to assure Joshua of God's presence with Him

(APPLICATION: when God calls us to do something He always directs us how to do it)

Joshua recognized God's voice and obeyed

(APPLICATION: we must recognize when God speaks to us and then obey Him)

God tells Joshua to do something He can't do

The Jordan River is in flood stage and can't be crossed at that time and place

(APPLICATION: God gives us things that seem humanly impossible without His help)

TRANSITION: God assures Joshua they will conquer the land He has for them

C. GOD PROMISES HE WILL GIVE THEM THE LAND – READ Joshua 1:3

"I will give" in Hebrew literally means "I have already given you" – God already did it

God owns the whole world and can give land to anyone He wants

God had promised the land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses

(Genesis 12:1-7; Deuteronomy 11:24)

God always keeps His promises

God tells them that He will give them wherever they set their foot – they need to walk on it

The people must enter the land and possess it

There are people there who will fight to keep them off the land

The Jews can't just sit back and wait for God to do it all for them

(APPLICATION: we can't sit back and "name it and claim it," we have to face enemies)

(APPLICATION: the blessings God has promised us are already ours but we must fight sin)

TRANSITION: To make sure he understands, God tells Joshua how large the land will be

D. BOUNDARIES OF THE LAND GIVEN – READ Joshua 1:4

The land promised is much larger than the Jews at any time possessed

For them to possess it they will have to walk there which means fighting by faith

They will possess all of it when He returns

(APPLICATION: there are many blessings God has for us that we won't get in this life)

TRANSITION: God promises Joshua he will have victory with God's help

E. NO ONE CAN STAND AGAINST THEM - READ Joshua 1:5

When God gives a command ("set your foot") He always gives a promise of His help with it

God promises many things in this verse:

1. No one will be able to stand against them – even giants in fortified cities

The land will be theirs but they must fight to get it

(APPLICATION: God has promised many spiritual blessings for us but we must fight sin and Satan to get them. They don't come without winning battles against sin, temptation, fear, discouragement, etc.)

2. God will be with Joshua as He was with Moses – God brought victory, not Moses

3. He will never leave or forsake them – Joshua will never fight alone

Moses was given this promise as well (Deuteronomy 31:8)

(APPLICATION: It is given to us as well. READ Hebrews 13:5)

Verses that say God is always with us Genesis 28:15; Romans 8:38-39; Exodus 33:14)

TRANSITION: God has more commands and promises

F. BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS – READ Joshua 1:6

The command: be strong and courageous, don't be afraid

(APPLICATION: Fear was a big enemy of Joshua and can be of us as well)

Bible verses to use to fight fear Genesis 15:1; 26:24; Exodus 14:13; Psalm 118:6; Isaiah 41:10; Deuteronomy 31:6; Matthew 14:27; 2 Chronicles 32:7-8)

The promise 1: they will defeat their enemies and live in the land

The promise 2: God has been promising this all along (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:7-8; 22:16-18; 26:3-5; 28:13; 35:12; Exodus 6:8)

(APPLICATION: God's promises are still true for us today; we must believe and trust)

(APPLICATION: when you read the Bible always look for promises and write them down. They are our best weapons against sin and Satan.

TRANSITION: God repeats His commands and promises

G. GOD TELLS HOW TO HAVE SUCCESS - READ Joshua 1:7

Command 1: be strong and very courageous – repeated because it is very important

Command 2: obey the Bible, it is the key to victory

Command 3: don't turn from God's Word even the smallest bit

Promise: when they do these things, they are guaranteed success

Success is not measured by dollars, possessions or popularity

Success is measured by the amount of our obedience

(APPLICATION: we must know and obey God's commands if we are to have victory)

ILLUSTRATION: example of someone who trusted and obeyed God and was blessed

TRANSITION: God repeats His formula for success

H. OBEY GOD'S WORD TO BE SUCCESSFUL – READ Joshua 1:8

God commands 3 things for Joshua to have success

1. Always talk about God's law so everyone obeys it (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

2. Think about it day and night, keep it foremost in mind (Psalm 1:2; 119:97)

3. Think and talk about God's Word so they will completely obey it

(APPLICATION: we, too, must know God's Word and apply it to our lives)

The promise: they will be prosperous and successful

(APPLICATION: the key to victory over sin and Satan is to trust God's promises and obey His Word)

(APPLICATION: we can't live in sin and disobedience and expect God's promises to apply)

TRANSITION: God concludes His instructions to Joshua

I. DON'T BE AFRAID BECAUSE GOD WILL BE WITH YOU – READ Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? God reminds them that obedience is the only way to victory

Command 1: be strong and courageous repeated for third time because fear always defeats us

Command 2: don't be afraid no matter how strong the enemy or how hard the battle

Command 3: don't be discouraged no matter how hard or long the battle

(APPLICATION: discouragement is a strong weapon of Satan and we fight it by faith)

Promise: God will be with them no matter how hard or long the battle

(APPLICATION: God doesn't remove or reduce obstacles in our lives, we still face them)
(APPLICATION: God does promise His presence to help us persevere against obstacles)

OTHER PROMISES TO LEAN ON *(optional, use only if you want to use this)*

All our needs met: Psalm 84:11; Psalm 23:1-3; Matthew 6:33; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 13:5

Security in Christ: John 10:9

Guidance when needed: Psalm 48:14; 23:1-3; 32:8; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 42:16

Strength for whatever comes: Philippians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Deuteronomy 33:25; Isaiah 40:29

Victory over temptation: 1 Corinthians 10:13

God's love and acceptance: Psalm 103:8

Truth sets us free: John 8:32

God is greater than Satan: 1 John 4:4

Resist Satan and he will flee: James 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:8-9

God answers prayer: James 5:16

Jesus gives us authority over demons: Luke 10:18-19

God's grace is sufficient: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

CONCLUSION

READ Joshua 1:1-9

SUMMARIZE Joshua 1:1-9

APPLICATION:

Trust God for salvation if you haven't already (explain plan of salvation)

Trust and obey God for what you are facing in your Christian life

Rely on God's promises for victory

CLOSING PRAYER

2. FORGIVEN

Luke 7:36-50; John 8:1-11
By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

(This can be one sermon or broken up into two shorter sermons.)

TO KNOW: Jesus accepts each person as they are, no matter their sin, and He will forgive everyone who humbly admits their sin and asks Him for forgiveness.

TO DO: If anyone has any sin they haven't confessed to Jesus, do so now and He will completely and totally forgive and restore you.

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: One day a little boy was throwing rocks. He started throwing rocks at birds. Then he saw his grandmother's pet bird and thought he'd throw a stone and scare the bird, but the stone hit the bird and killed it. The boy felt terrible for what he had done. His sister saw him kill the bird and said she would tell their grandmother unless he did everything she told him. For several days he had to do all her work for her. He had to do everything she told him to do and he was miserable. Finally, he felt so bad he told his grandmother that he had killed her pet bird. She said she knew he had because she had seen him do it. She forgave him but was waiting for him to confess his sin to her. Then the boy felt much better. When we sin, we must tell God so we aren't in bondage to fear and guilt. He will forgive us right away as well.

Confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness can be hard to do
Our pride keeps from asking God for forgiveness because we don't want to admit we sinned
Our fear keeps from asking God for forgiveness because we fear He may be angry with us
Jesus came to earth to show us that He will forgive us when we confess our sins
He forgave many people, more people than He healed

I. RECEIVING FORGIVENESS – Luke 7:36-50 A SINFUL WOMAN

Jesus is in Galilee

Jesus just healed Centurion's servant who was close to death (Luke 7:1-10)

The next day He stopped a funeral procession and brought a widow's dead son to life (Luke 7:11-17)

Everyone was talking about Jesus and the miracles He performed

The last time He was there He preached in a synagogue and the religious leaders criticized Him

He forgave many sinful people, but the religious rulers said they were too bad to be forgiven

A religious leader named Simon invited Jesus to a meal at his home so he could get to know Jesus

READ Luke 7:36-50

LUKE 7:36-37 READ 36-37

The meal was served in an open courtyard so people walking in the street could see THEM

It was the religious leaders' way of showing off and impressing everyone

At the start of the meal an uninvited guest, a woman who was a prostitute, came up to Jesus

She was not welcome because she was a woman and because of her sin

The Jews would have nothing to do with her, wouldn't talk to her or even look at her

Jesus and the other guests were lying on their sides to eat which was the custom

The woman came and stood behind Jesus

LUKE 7:38 READ 38

It was the custom for servants to wash the feet of the guests

Feet got very dirty walking in the street where there was dirt and garbage

It was very rude of Simon not to have a servant wash Jesus' feet

The woman was standing by His feet and saw this, so she started washing His feet for Him
She knew she was rejected and unwelcome but she touched Him anyway
Her love for Jesus was stronger than her fear of disapproval from the others
She knew about Jesus and trusted He would accept her and not reject her (Psalm 103:8-14)
Her tears were from guilt, shame and fear, but also love for Jesus
Letting her hair down was immodest and she would be criticized for that as well
Women invested their money in perfume and carried it with them so it would be safe
Her perfume was very expensive, it was all she owned in the world

LUKE 7:39 READ 39

Because Jesus didn't send her away, Simon thought Jesus didn't know she was a prostitute
Therefore, he thought Jesus wasn't a prophet, and certainly not the Messiah
Simon believed that if He were the Messiah, He wouldn't let the unclean woman touch Him

LUKE 7:40-44 READ 40-44

Jesus says they both were debtors and couldn't pay their debt
The woman had a large debt and Simon had a small debt, but both were still debtors
Jesus would forgive both their debts if they asked Him to
Only the woman asked, not Simon so his debt wasn't forgiven

LUKE 7:44-47 READ 44-47

Simon was self-righteous and didn't see his sin as God saw it
The woman knew she was a terrible sinner but humbled herself and asked for forgiveness
Very few self-righteous people came to Jesus, most of His followers were the ones living in sin
Jesus said she did what Simon should have done
Simon thought he was better than the woman, but Jesus says the woman was better than him

LUKE 7:48 READ 48

The Bible doesn't say when she asked to have her sins forgiven
The Greek language makes it clear that she asked awhile ago and the results still continue
She wasn't forgiven because she washed and anointed His feet
She washed and anointed His feet because she was forgiven – and wanted to thank Him
God forgives and forgets all our sin (1 John 2:1-2, 12)

LUKE 7:49 READ 49

They all knew that Jesus, by saying her sins had been forgiven, was doing what only God can do

LUKE 7:50 READ 50

It wasn't washing Jesus' feet that saved her, but by putting her faith in Him before she came to Him
Others may never accept her, but Jesus loves and totally accepts her
To Jesus it is as if she never sinned

LESSON FOR US

Salvation and forgiveness are freely given to us, no matter how terrible sin, if we put our faith in Jesus
ILLUSTRATION: tell a story about or show examples of someone who Jesus forgave for their sin and about the results in their life since

TRANSITION: Jesus always offers forgiveness
Another similar example happened shortly before His crucifixion:

II. RESPONDING TO FORGIVENESS - John 8:1-11 WOMAN IN ADULTERY

Jesus is in Jerusalem shortly before He was crucified

The religious rulers are looking for a way to kill Him because they are jealous of His popularity

It is the time of the Feast of Tabernacles when Jews from around the world come to Jerusalem

Jesus was teaching in the temple when the religious leaders tried to trap Him

READ John 8:1-11

JOHN 8:1-6a *READ 8:1-6a*

The Old Testament law said anyone caught in adultery was to be stoned to death

They wanted to use this as a trap for Jesus so they brought her to Him

The fact they only brought the woman and not the man shows they didn't want fairness, just a trap

If He said to kill her, He would contradict His own teachings about love and forgiveness

If He said to kill her, He would get in trouble with the Roman government and they would arrest Him

If He said to let her go, He would be breaking God's law and couldn't be the Messiah

The woman felt very shameful and embarrassed as all the religious rulers and Jesus saw her

What will Jesus do?

JOHN 8:6b *READ 8:6b*

We don't know what Jesus was writing

Perhaps He was writing the names and sins of the men who were present

They were also guilty of sin and deserved to die as well

JOHN 8:7-9 *READ 8:7-9*

They knew they were guilty of sin; they just hadn't been caught in it

The tenth commandment said to not covet, and they knew they all had been greedy and coveted

Maybe they didn't commit adultery, but they lusted in their hearts and that is just as sinful

The older, more mature ones knew when they sinned in their past so they walked away first

When the others thought of their lives, they knew they deserved to die as well so they also left

JOHN 8:10-11 *READ 8:10-11*

Jesus did not approve of her sin or overlook it

But He did not reject her or shame her for her sin

Jesus hated her sin but didn't hate her

We must learn to hate sin but not the person committing the sin

Jesus gave her a choice: she could turn from her sin or she could keep living in sin

There was nothing she could do to earn or deserve it

If she repented and asked for forgiveness she would be forgiven (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Bible doesn't tell us what she did

I hope we will see her in heaven and can hear the rest of her story

JOHN 8:12 *READ 8:12*

Jesus used this event to tell everyone they could be forgiven if they came to Him

LESSON FOR US

No matter what we have done, if we come to Jesus, He will show mercy and offer forgiveness

If we admit to our sin and ask God to forgive us, He always will (Psalm 32:5; 1 John 1:9)

CONCLUSION

In these stories we see Simon and the religious rulers who thought they didn't need Jesus

They never humbled themselves before Him and were forgiven

APPLICATION: No one is so good that they don't need Jesus' forgiveness

In these stories we also see the prostitute and the woman taken in adultery who both came to Jesus

APPLICATION: No sin is too bad to be forgiven if we admit our sin and ask Jesus for forgiveness

ILLUSTRATION: Fires can start in fields of dry grass and weeds. They burn quickly and spread everywhere, killing everything and everyone in their path. The only way to be safe is to start a fire where you are standing when you see a big fire coming. Let the fire burn out the area near you then go stand in the burnt-out part. When the big fire comes you will be safe because it won't burn there. Once the fire has burnt a place, it cannot burn it again. That is how it is for us when we come to the cross. God sent His fire of judgment on Jesus who paid for our sins. When we go to the cross there is no more judgment, for Jesus has taken it all.

3. ABRAHAM & THE LAMB

LAMB OF GOD SERMONS – 1

Genesis 22

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

TO KNOW: Jesus came to earth and went to the cross to be the substitute for our sin. He died so we can live forever with God.

TO DO: Accept Jesus as your substitute for sin. Worship Him by trusting and obeying Him

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION; Auschwitz was the first German concentration camp to become an extermination camp to kill thousands of Jews. The gas chambers were in constant use. But because of the great influx of new prisoners daily, the Germans began to use firing squads as well. One day, the commandant selected ten men from one barracks to be executed by the firing squad. One of those selected was the father of a large family. When he was pulled from his place in line, he fell to the ground, begging the commandant to spare his life. The commandant was unresponsive until the man standing next to the fallen one, a Christian, stepped forward to offer his life in exchange for the man on his knees. Surprisingly, the commandant agreed to such an arrangement. But, instead of being led away to the firing squad, the Christian man was thrown into a tiny damp cell where he suffered an agonizing death by starvation. He is honored because he died in the place of one man.

He was a SUBSTITUTE when one was needed

Substitutes needed: teacher gets sick

Athlete gets hurt

an ingredient in a recipe is missing

Dictionary: substitute: 'to take the place of another'

TRANSITION: Each of us needs a substitute as well

I. THE PROBLEM

God is holy, perfect – but we are not

Our sin demands judgment

We cannot please God

We cannot remove our sin

We are lost

II. THE NEED

The great need of mankind is to be acceptable in the eyes of God.

The need is worldwide, spans every generation, every race, every creed, every religion.

We need someone to make us acceptable for we can't make ourselves acceptable

Without a substitute we are condemned to hell forever

Trying harder won't do it

Doing better won't do it

Giving more money won't do it

We need a substitute - Someone to take our place

TRANSITION: That's what Abraham needed as well – as shown in offering up own son Isaac

III. THE PROVISION

A. OLD TESTAMENT

ABRAHAM BACKGROUND

(Tell the story of Abraham leaving Ur and following God – Genesis 12:1-9)

God had promised Abraham as many children as stars in the sky and sand on the earth

But he and Sarah were too old to have any children

God gave them a son, Isaac, when Abraham was 100 years old (Genesis 21:1-7)

Abraham and Sarah were very, very happy

When Isaac was a teenager God told Abraham to give Isaac back to Him

READ 22:1-14

GENESIS 22:1-2 READ 1-2

Region of Moriah: It means “Where the Lord Provides”

It refers to the mountains around Jerusalem, the same mountains where Jesus was crucified

It would have taken Abraham two or three days to get there, plenty of time to think about it

God has an important lesson to teach Abraham – faith and obedience

God doesn't give His reasons; He never tells us why He is doing what He does either

Abraham loved Isaac. This is the first time the word “love” is used in the Bible.

The first time “love” is in the New Testament is about God's love for Jesus (Matthew 3:17)

Both God and Abraham loved their only son who were to die as sacrifices

- As Abraham had only one son, so God has only one Son.
- As Abraham loved Isaac deeply, so God loved Jesus immensely.
- As Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, so God was willing to sacrifice Jesus.
- As Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain in Moriah (the future site of Jerusalem), so God would later sacrifice Jesus on a mountain just outside Jerusalem — Calvary.
- As Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, so God placed the cross upon the shoulders of Jesus.
- As Abraham rose up early to go to Moriah, so God predetermined the cross of Calvary even before the creation of the world.
- However, there is one obvious difference between the two stories. The difference is seen in the endings. Isaac was saved from death, but Jesus wasn't

Abraham must have been very hurt and confused when God told him to kill his son

“Why would God do this?”

“What about God's promise for me to have many descendants?”

“How can I go home with the stains of Isaac's blood on my clothes?”

“How will I tell Sarah what I did?”

GENESIS 22:3 READ 3

Abraham probably didn't sleep the night before, he wrestled with God in his spirit

-what would the neighbors say when find out he killed the son he waited for so long?

-what about God's promises to bless him with many descendants???

-what was God doing here anyway?

-how would this affect Sarah? Would she hate him forever?

Sarah didn't know about this

If she knew she would have made it very hard for him to go and obey God

It was a test just for Abraham

GENESIS 22:4-5 READ 4-5

Abraham spent 3 days thinking, watching Isaac in the prime of youth, full of excitement

He had plenty of time to think and look for an excuse to disobey

Worship: how is this worship? Because it honors God by his obedience, he does it out of love

We will come back: Abraham believed God would bring Isaac back to life (Hebrews 11:17-19)

How awful to have to kill your own son!

God the Father did that to His Son Jesus

GENESIS 22:6 READ 6

This pictures Jesus going to the cross on the same mountain where His Father would take His life

Each was the specially loved only son of their father (John 3:16)

Wood: a picture of the cross Jesus died on (Philippians 2:8)

Fire: a picture of judgment for sin coming on Jesus on the cross

Knife: a picture of the nails driven into Jesus' body on the cross, sword put into His side

GENESIS 6:7-8 READ 7-8

Isaac didn't know he was going to be the sacrificed, but Jesus knew His whole life He would die

He volunteered in heaven before the creation of the world to die for sin (Ephesians 1:4)

God Himself: God provided the ram for Isaac just like He provided Jesus for us

GENESIS 6:9 READ 9

Isaac was about 16 years old and Abraham 116

Abraham was not strong enough to force Isaac to become the sacrifice

Isaac agreed because he had great faith in God and his father, he was very obedient

APPLICATION: Parents must teach their children to obey God by setting an example themselves

GENESIS 6:10-11 READ 10-11

Angel of the Lord: this was the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus before He was born

He provided a substitute for Isaac just as He provided a substitute for us - Himself

GENESIS 22:12 READ 12

Abraham did not have to kill his son, but he had to be willing to do so if God wanted him to

APPLICATION: We must always be willing to do everything God asks

GENESIS 22:13-14 READ 13-14

Ram: the substitute was a male sheep. Later Jesus would be called the "Lamb of God"

The Lord will Provide: In Hebrew this important name for God is "Jehovah Jireh"

Isaac needed a physical substitute of he would have had to die and God provided one

APPLICATION: We need a substitute of we will spiritually die and spend eternity away from God

ILLUSTRATION: In Dickens's novel A Tale of Two Cities, a young French aristocrat was condemned to die by the guillotine during the bloody French Revolution. His punishment was based solely on his forefathers' crimes against the peasantry. The hour before his execution he was visited by a young English friend who could have passed for his twin. After the guard had left, the friend overpowered the doomed man with an anesthetic and exchanged clothes with him. Then, pretending to be the one condemned to die, he called the jailor and asked that his unconscious "visitor," supposedly overcome with grief, be removed and returned to his home. The nobleman was thus saved from death. On his way to the guillotine, the young Englishman spoke these final words: "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done. . . ." Jesus died for us as our substitute for sin.

B. NEW TESTAMENT

APPLICATION: We need a substitute

Because Jesus was sinless man as well as God Himself, He could take our place

He is our substitute (1 Peter 3:18)

Sin must be paid for, it cannot be ignored or forgotten

If God did not punish sin, He would not be holy Himself

But there can be a substitute who will pay the price for us

Jesus was our substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21)

ILLUSTRATION: A wise and just ruler established a series of laws for his people to follow. One day his mother broke one of the laws and was brought to the ruler after being caught. The penalty was twenty lashes. How could the ruler remain just and still fulfill the demands of his love for his mother? He took the lashes on his own back. Justice was satisfied, while love was revealed in full measure.

CONCLUSION

LESSONS FROM THE LAMB

1. WE NEED A SUBSTITUTE

We are all under penalty of death (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

2. GOD HAS PROVIDED A SUBSTITUTE

There is only one substitute for sin and that is Jesus (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:22; Acts 4:12)

ILLUSTRATION: During a war between Britain and France, men were drafted into the French Army. When someone's name was drawn, he had to go off to battle. On one occasion, the authorities came to a certain man and told him he was among those who had been chosen. He refused to go, saying, "I was shot and killed two years ago." At first the officials questioned his sanity, but he insisted that was indeed the case. He claimed that the military records would show that he had been killed in action. "How can that be?" they questioned. "You are alive now!" He explained that when his name first came up, a close friend said to him, "You have a large family, but I am not married and nobody is dependent upon me. I'll take your name and address and go in your place." And that is indeed what the record showed. He was free. He had died in the person of another!

3. WE MUST REACH OUT AND TAKE THE SUBSTITUTE

The ram in the bushes did no good unless they took it as a substitute

Substitution is available for us as well, but we must accept God's free gift of salvation

PRAY

Thank Him

Praise Him

Worship Him

Serve Him

4. THE BLOOF OF THE LAMB

LAMB OF GOD SERMONS – 2

Hebrews 9:22; Leviticus 17:11

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

TO KNOW: Understand the reason for animal sacrifices as a picture of innocent blood being shed, and the importance of Jesus death on the cross for us.

TO DO: Accept Jesus' gift of salvation and live in obedience to Him.

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: A woman went to a sale and saw a beautiful antique copper kettle for only \$1. It was badly tarnished, so she asked the woman running the sale if the dirt would come off. She cheerfully offered to try some copper cleaner on it and took it into the house. Reappearing with the shining clean kettle, she handed it to the buyer for inspection. It was indeed a more attractive item, plus it also had a new tag attached. It read: "Like new-\$10."

We aren't worth much because of our sin, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us and makes us valuable.

Talk about blood and the importance of it in our body. Tell a story about a time when you were bleeding and how you felt.

I. BLOOD AS A CLEANSING AGENT

Hebrews 9:22 "...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Blood cleanses us PHYSICALLY: takes oxygen and healthy cells to the body and removes waste and impurities

Blood cleanses us SPIRITUALLY: Blood sacrifices throughout Old Testament are a picture of Jesus' blood shed for us. Like BLEACH to sin

II. BLOOD AS A LIFE-GIVING AGENT

Jesus' blood is no different than our blood, nothing magical about it

Blood stood for life. Jesus shedding His blood refers to Jesus giving His life.

We don't worship Jesus' blood; we worship Jesus who gave His life

Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

Sin brings death - ***the wages of sin is death Romans 6:23***

But God gives us life by shedding His blood and dying. His death gives us life - ***but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23***

III. BLOOD AS THE PAYMENT FOR SIN

A blood sacrifice meant someone had to die

This showed people the awfulness of sin and the terrible price that had to be paid to remove sin

Every time a Jew sinned, they had to kill an animal to shed innocent blood

The blood of the animal didn't remove their sin - Hebrews 10:4

It pointed to Jesus' whose death would – 1 John 1:7

Old Testament sacrifices were like putting a rug over a stain on the floor to hide it
Jesus' death on the cross removed the stain by washing it out

IV. THE BLOOD OF JESUS

READ Hebrews 9:11-28 Explain in your own words that sin has to be paid for. It can't be ignored or forgotten. God is righteous and holy. Because He is perfect, He cannot overlook sin. It has to be paid for, like when someone breaks a law of their government. The reason Jesus' blood had the power to remove sin is because it stood for His life which was given for us. When Jesus died, God put on Him the eternal punishment for every sin of every person who would ever live. Jesus went through the same pain as we would go through spending eternity in hell. Jesus was sinless so He didn't have any sin of His own to be paid for. Because He was a man like us Jesus could take our place and be our substitute. As God He could suffer much pain than a person could.

God provided a ram as a substitute so Isaac didn't have to die (Genesis 22:12-14). That happened on the same mountain where Jesus was crucified. A person can only die for one other person, but because Jesus was God as well as man, He could suffer the eternal pain for every person during his hours on the cross. It was concentrated and poured out on Him. Animal sacrifices had to be offered over and over again, but Jesus only had to die once for sin (Hebrews 10:11-14).

APPLICATION

1. **SALVATION** – give plan of salvation, explain it so each one understands
2. **DISCIPLESHIP** – after salvation we should commit to live for Jesus each day, obey and serve Him
3. **CONFESS SIN** – those who are Christians must admit their sin to God – 1 John 1:9
4. **WORSHIP, PRAISE GOD** – for giving His life for us

CLOSE IN PRAYER

5. THE LAMB OF GOD

LAMB OF GOD SERMONS – 3

Exodus 12

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

TO KNOW: Animals sacrifices and the Passover Lamb pictured what Jesus would do for us as the Lamb of God who took away all our sin.

TO DO: Accept Jesus as Savior, live for Him as our Lord and worship and praise Him for all He has done for us.

INTRODUCTION

List some names for Jesus. Why so many names? Which is your favorite? Why?

First name for Jesus when He stated His ministry was LAMB OF GOD

John the Baptist called Him this for an important reason

I. OLD TESTAMENT - PASSOVER

A. START OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES - EDEN

When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to cover their shame with leaves but couldn't

God killed an innocent animal and covered them with the skin

God is showing that sin brings death, innocent blood must be shed to cover sin

From then on blood was shed when someone sinned or wanted to worship God

Man can only approach God through innocent blood shed to cover sin

Animal blood didn't cover sin, that's why they had to keep killing animals

It was a picture of Jesus' life blood which was the final payment for sin

Adam, Able, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and more all sacrificed animals

The animal's death was a substitute for the death of the person themselves

Isaac deserved to die for sin, but before Abraham could kill Him God provided a substitute (Genesis 22:1-19)

It happened on the same mountain where Jesus was crucified.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES - PASSOVER

READ Exodus 12:1-13

God is teaching more about what Jesus will do when He comes to earth

A lamb is used as a picture of Jesus

LAMB CHOSEN (Exodus 12:3,5)

Lambs are innocent, gentle and meek just like Jesus

It had to be unblemished, like Jesus was sinless and perfect

It had to be a male in the prime of life, like Jesus when He died for us

LAMB KILLED (Exodus 12:6)

The lamb alive didn't help them, it had to die, just like Jesus had to die for us

The head of the family would represent everyone in the family

He would place his hands on the animal and confess his sins, picturing his sin going on the lamb

Because the lamb then had this sin he had to die, showing sin brings death – James 1:15

It was done the exact same day and time as Jesus died on the cross

LAMB'S BLOOD (Exodus 12:7)

The lamb was killed by having its neck slit and bleeding to death

This pictures the blood as being the life of the animal – Leviticus 17:11

It pictures Jesus' blood shed for us – Hebrews 9:22

The cup of grape juice and the matzo pictured this in the Passover

When Jesus had the last Supper (Passover) with His disciples He changed the meaning

The drink wasn't a picture of the lamb's blood

It was a picture of His blood shed for us

The bread wasn't a picture of unleavened bread

It was a picture of His sinless body broken for us

The Jews who killed the lamb had to put the blood on the doorpost of their house

Then they had to go inside to be safely covered by the blood so no one would die

When the death angel came, he would "pass over" them – that's why it is called Passover

We must apply Jesus' blood to our lives by entering into His love and grace through salvation

Then we will be safe from spiritual death and judgment – Romans 8:1

Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" Hebrews 9:27

Remission means to remove a debt

Our sin puts us in debt to God who is sinless and can't have sin in His Presence

Our good works will never remove our sin

God says our good works are like filthy rags and rubbish - Isaiah 64:6, Philippians 3:8

If our good works are that bad, how awful our sins must be to God!

Read and talk about some of these verses about salvation through Jesus' blood:

Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:12; Romans 5:8-9

LAMB'S BODY (Exodus 12:8-10, 46)

The body of the lamb was to be eaten; each one personally partakes of it for nourishment

It had to be roasted, picturing Jesus facing death and judgment for us

It couldn't be boiled, because there was no water for Jesus when He was thirsty

No bones were to be broken, as Jesus had no bones broken on the cross – Psalm 34:20

Nothing could be left of the lamb, picturing Jesus' body resurrected and didn't decay

It had to be eaten that same night, partaking couldn't be put off, it must be done right away

INSIDE THE HOUSE

The Jews were to dress and be ready to leave quickly, for Egypt was not their home

Unleavened bread was made because there wasn't time to let the yeast rise

Yeast is a fungus that grows and decays, it is a picture of sin – 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

This bread without leaven was a picture of Jesus' sinless body – 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

At His Last Supper (Passover) Jesus said this bread now pictured His sinless body

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

God was bringing judgment on Egypt and its false gods by killing all firstborn males

It didn't matter how rich or poor, good or bad, educated or not, only the blood mattered

II. NEW TESTAMENT - JESUS

JOHN THE BAPTIST

When Jesus first came to John to be baptized, John called Him the “Lamb of God” 2 times
John 1:29, 36

It was the first name Jesus was called when He began His ministry

It identified Jesus as a sacrificial offering for sin – Leviticus 4:32; 5:6

Jesus was prophesied to be sacrificed like a lamb – Isaiah 53:7

OTHERS CALL JESUS THE LAMB

PHILIP: The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7-8 and Philip told him this was Jesus – Acts 8:32

PAUL calls Jesus our Passover Lamb – 1 Corinthians 5:7

PETER says Jesus was a perfect lamb – 1 Peter 1:19

CONCLUSION

What do YOU call Him?

Do you see Him as your sacrificial Lamb of God? – if so thank Him

If you haven't accepted Him as your substitute for eternal judgment, do so now.

PRAY

6. WORTHY IS THE LAMB

LAMB OF GOD SERMONS – 4

Revelation 5

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

TO KNOW: The angels and all creation will worship and praise Jesus because, like the Passover lamb, he died so we could live.

TO DO: Praise and worship Jesus now just like we will be doing in heaven for all eternity.

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: Tell the story about a lamb that disobeyed its mother and went into a dangerous jungle. A tiger attacked but the mother jumped between them and the tiger ate the mother so the lamb could escape. Compare that to what Jesus did for us.

REVIEW SERMONS 1, 2, 3

Sin brings death, when man sinned an innocent animal had to die, this started in Eden

Animal sacrifices didn't remove sin, but they pictured Jesus who would

Passover Lamb is a picture of Jesus: innocent, spotless, male in prime of life

We must accept God's free gift of salvation for it to apply to us

We looked at the lamb in the past. Now we will look at the lamb in the present & future.

I. THE LAMB IN THE PRESENT Rev 5:5-7

READ Revelation 5:5-7

REVELATION 5:5 – Jesus as a lion ruling over all creation

REVELATION 5:6 – what Jesus looks like in heaven

Lamb: first picture of Jesus in heaven in Revelation is as a Lamb, we would expect a Lion

First coming of Jesus as a human man was like a lamb come to be sacrificed

Second time He comes will be to judge His enemies like a lion

As a lamb, He was our meek Savior come to be judged for our sin

As a lion, His majesty and His sovereign role as judge of unbelievers will be seen

Slain: marks of crucifixion seen; Jesus the Lamb slaughtered as a sacrifice

Only signs of suffering in heaven will be the crucifixion marks on Jesus

We'll be able to see them for all eternity and will worship Him for His sacrifice

Standing: not lying as if killed but standing alive and ready to avenge sin

In the center: Jesus is the center of all attention and worship in heaven

Elders: all believers from Adam to the end

Four living creatures: symbols of God's power and sovereign control over everything

Seven horns: picture of total, perfect power and omnipotence – Daniel 7:13-14

Seven eyes: picture of omniscience, seeing everything that happens

REVELATION 5:7 – What Jesus does

Jesus takes back what Adam lost because He died for sin on the cross, now He owns it all again

Jesus undid what Adam did in Eden when he sinned

II. ADORATION BY US Rev 5:8-10

READ Revelation 5:8-10

REVELATION 5:8

Fell down: we will humble ourselves before the Lamb, there is no pride in heaven

Harp: to sing praises to Jesus

Bowls of incense: pictures all the prayers for all believers for all times

Prayer for deliverance, sin and evil to end, etc. soon to be answered

God never forgets one prayer we pray, every one remembered and kept to be answered

REVELATION 5:9-10 – what we'll be doing in heaven, worshipping Jesus

Song: singing praises because Jesus will remove sin, evil and Satan

New: song of redemption, never sung before in heaven

Angels can't sing this song for they haven't experienced redemption from sin as we have

Worthy: worthy is the Lamb will be the theme of our praise for all eternity

Were slain: we will praise Jesus for dying for our sins and redeeming us

With Your blood you purchased men: His blood shed met the payment for sin, the price paid

ILLUSTRATION: Many years ago, a man was sentenced to death by a Spanish court. Because he was an American citizen, the American government decided to intervene. They declared that the authorities of Spain had no right to take his life, but their protests went unheeded. Finally, they deliberately wrapped the prisoner in the flag of the United States. Defying the executioner, they issued this warning: "Fire if you dare! But if you do, you will bring the power of this great nation upon you!" There stood the condemned. But the rifleman would not shoot. Protected by the flag and the government it represented; the man was protected. That is how Jesus' blood covers and keeps us safe from God's judgment and punishment.

Made them to be a kingdom: We are all part of Jesus' coming Kingdom

Priests to serve our God: access to God and represent Him to others

Reign on earth: When Jesus removes sin and restores earth to the Garden of Eden conditions, we will reign with Him and serve Him

III. ADORATION BY THE ANGELS Rev 5:11-12

Not only will we worship Jesus forever, so will the angels

READ Revelation 5:11-12

REVELATION 5:11

Angels are everywhere

They are around us now but we can't see them

They saw Satan cast out of heaven, Jesus crucified and believers persecuted

REVELATION 5:12

Worthy is the Lamb: Only Jesus deserves worship from the angels and people

That is because of what He did for us as the sacrificial Lamb of God

Who was slain: The lamb alive didn't save them, it was only by his death we are saved

The Passover lamb had to die so it's blood could be applied to the door

Then people had to go in through the blood to be safe from judgment

Jesus had to shed His blood and die so we can be safe in Him from judgment

To receive power: the word "dynamite" comes from this word

He has all power and rules the whole universe (Matthew 28:18)

We need His power to accomplish His purposes

Wealth: everything in the universe belongs to Him so He can meet any need we have

He promises to meet all our needs (Philippians 4:219)

Wisdom: Because He is God, Jesus knows everything past, present and future

Therefore, He can always do what is right and best

Strength: Jesus has the strength to do whatever needs to be done to carry out God's will

No one can stand against this strength for there is no limit to it (Ephesians 3:20)

Honor: He deserves the greatest value and respect of anyone ever (Philippians 2:9-11)

Glory: He is the supreme glory in the universe and His glory shines brighter than the sun

Every created being should publicly proclaim His great worth (Psalm 29:2; 57:5)

Praise: Praise should be given to Him because of His wonderful work of redemption

All blessings come from Him so we should thank Him (Psalm 100:4; Isaiah 25:1)

TRANSITION

THIS is what Angels are praising God for

All creation should join in the worship

IV. ADORATION BY ALL CREATION Rev 5:13-14

READ Revelation 5:13-14

REVELATION 5:13

When Adam and Eve disobeyed and sin entered the world, it affected all creation (Gen 3:14-18)

All of nature is still in bondage to sin (Romans 8:18-24)

When Jesus sets all creation free from the curse, even nature itself will sing God's praises

REVELATION 5:14

Elders: this refers to us and all God's people in heaven

Amen: means "So be it." It is saying we agree with everything the angels have been saying in praising Jesus

CONCLUSION

Conclude your service with singing praises, worship, testimonies about Jesus

7. LIFE AFTER DEATH

Various Scriptures

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

TO KNOW: Those who put their faith in Jesus for salvation have no fear of death and will spend eternity in heaven with Jesus

TO DO: Put your faith in Jesus and live faithfully for Jesus today and do not fear death

INTRODUCTION

*ILLUSTRATION: When we go on a trip, we prepare for the trip so are ready when the time comes
We get directions, gather what we need to take, and make plans
The longer the trip the more preparation is made*

There is a big trip in life all people will take but many never prepare
It is when they go from this world to the next
Some aren't sure what happens after they die
They don't make plans because they don't think there is life after death

One of man's biggest questions is if there is life after death – READ Job 14:14
It is important to be sure we know, because if there is no life after death all we believe is wrong (1 Corinthians 15:19)

This life is temporary, we will all die one day – READ Genesis 3:19
God brings death so we won't have to live in sin and sorrow on earth separated from Him forever
Death means we will be reunited with Him
Death also means we know we are accountable to Him
But Jesus came to remove the curse of death for those who believe in Jesus – READ 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

TRANSITION

How can we be sure there is life after death?

I. PROOF OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

A. PROOF FROM REASON

1. God put it into man's hearts to believe there is more than just this life

People everywhere have always sought a way to find eternal life (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

2. God also put into man a desire for a time when justice will prevail and evil will be gone

That doesn't happen in this life so there must be life after this life

3. The last words of some people who are dying speak of seeing heaven open and Jesus waiting for them

Paul was one of them (1 Corinthians 12:2-5)

4. The accounts of some who have died and have been brought back to life speak of life after death

Christians tell of seeing heaven, Jesus and loved ones
Unbelievers cry or scream after seeing the terrors of hell

B. PROOF FROM THE BIBLE

The best source of information is the Bible because it is true and inspired

God can do all things, so can give us a book that is true

If He doesn't, we won't know about Him or His plan for us

Jesus considered the Bible true and inspired (Mark 10:6-9; Matthew 19:4-5; 23:35; etc.)

So did Paul (Romans 9:22-29) and Peter (Isaiah 28:16)

Thousands of books have been written proving it is God's inspired word

Many fulfilled prophecies proves the Bible is inspired for only God knows the future

Let's see what the Bible says about life after death

1. The Old Testament says there is life after death

David knew he would live with God forever – READ Psalm 23:6; 49:15; 16:10

Solomon knew he would live with God forever – READ Ecclesiastes 12:7; Psalms 73:24

Job knew he would live with God forever – READ Job 19:25-27

2. Jesus says there is life after death

He told the people He IS the God of Abraham because Abraham is still alive (Mark 12:26-27)

He brought Lazarus back to life – READ John 11:25-26

He brought the son of the widow of Nain to life (Luke 7:11-17)

He brought the dead daughter of the nobleman back to life (Mark 5:21-43)

Jesus told the thief on cross he would be with Him in heaven that same day – READ Luke 23:43

3. The resurrection of Jesus proves there is life after death

We know Jesus came back to life (John 20; Luke 24)

-He appeared 10 times to over 500 people (1Corinthians 15:3-8)

-His disciples changed, they were no longer afraid (Acts 4:13)

-Paul saw Jesus on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-21; 26:12-18)

-Stephen saw Jesus when He was stoned (Acts 7:54-60)

-Christians changed their day of worship to Sunday because that is when He came back to life
(Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

TRANSITION

There is more than enough proof that there is life after death

Now let's talk about what happens after we die

II. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH

Our body dies and decays but our soul/spirit, the real us inside, lives forever with God in heaven –
READ Ecclesiastes 12:7

A. HELL FOR UNBELIEVERS

Those who don't turn to Jesus for salvation will spend eternity in hell.

They will have a body that will live forever, but will live in hell for all eternity

Their soul/spirit will live in this body forever in hell

(Revelation 20:10, 15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 25:41-42; Luke 16:23-24)

B. HEAVEN FOR BELIEVERS

We will have a resurrection body like Jesus had after His resurrection – READ Philippians 3:21
(2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Isaiah 26:19)

When Jesus comes in the clouds to call us home (the Rapture), the bodies of Christians who are alive will be changed to eternal bodies and the dead bodies in the earth of Christians who have already died will be resurrected as eternal bodies, just like Jesus' resurrection body – READ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

There will never be any judgment or punishment for believers, for Jesus took it all – READ Romans 8:1

B. REWARDS FOR FAITHFUL BELIEVERS

God will reward Christians

- who live their earthly life for Him (1 Corinthians 9:25)
- who lead others to salvation (1 Thessalonians 2:19)
- who live a righteous and holy life (2 Timothy 4:8; 1 John 3:3; 2:29)
- who live a faithful life, even if it leads to a martyr's death (Revelation 2:10; James 1:12)
- who long for His coming back in glory (1 Peter 5:2-4)

C. LIVING CONDITIONS IN HEAVEN

The Bible says heaven is being at home with Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:8; John 14:1-3)

Heaven will be a place of beauty because God will be there (Revelation 4:2-11)

There are **some things that won't be in heaven** for eternity: (Revelation 21 - 22)

- no more sea (Revelation 21:1)
- no more tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain (Revelation 21:4)
- no more sinners (Revelation 21:8)
- no more fear (Revelation 21:12)
- no more sun or moon (Revelation 21:23)
- no more night (Revelation 21:25)
- no more sin or evil (Revelation 21:27)
- no more disease or injuries (Revelation 22:2)
- no more curse (Revelation 22:3)

There are other **things that will be in heaven** for eternity (Revelation 21 - 22)

- unending fellowship with God (Revelation 21:3, 7, 22)
- unending newness (Revelation 21:5)
- unending water of life (Revelation 21:6; 22:1)
- unimaginable beauty (Revelation 21:11, 21)
- uncompromised security (Revelation 21:12)
- unbroken unity between believers (Revelation 21:12, 14)
- unlimited holiness (Revelation 21:16)
- unparalleled size (Revelation 21:16)
- untold wealth (Revelation 21:18-21)
- unending light (Revelation 21:23; 22:5)
- unrestricted access (Revelation 21:25)
- unending fruit from the tree of life (Revelation 22:2)
- unceasing service to God (Revelation 22:3)
- unending reign (Revelation 22:5)

Other passages tell us that **heaven** will be a place of:

- rest (Hebrews 4:1-11; Revelation 14:13)
- full knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:12)
- holiness (Hebrews 12:14; Ephesians 2:21)
- joy (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Jude 1:24)

- glory (2 Corinthians 4:17)
- worship (Revelation 7:9-12; 19:10)

Heaven will last forever, there will be no end (Revelation 1:8; 22:13)

TRANSITION

Now that we know that about life after death and heaven, how should it affect our lives today?

III. HOW WE SHOULD LIVE TODAY

A. Make sure you have accepted God's free gift of salvation by believing in Jesus – READ John 3:16-21

B. Live a faithful, holy life of service to God – READ Matthew 16:26

C. Have hope and assurance during your time on earth because there is nothing to fear in death

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION: tell stories of Christians you have known who have died and gone to heaven. Tell about their faithful life and that they had no fear in death. Talk about what life is like for them in heaven now.

One day that will happen for us if we put our faith in Jesus for salvation.

8. SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Various Scriptures
By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer © 2021

(This sermon can be broken into several sermons or used as a Bible study.)

TO KNOW: To understand what changes take place in our lives when we grow spiritually

TO DO: To evaluate ourselves to see if those changes are taking place

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: Children grow up quickly. We can see them growing taller each year. It is natural for them to grow. Something is wrong if they don't. The same is true of Christians. We are to grow each year as well.

READ 2 Peter 3:18

We can see our children growing taller, but how can we know if we are growing spiritually?

TRANSITION

We will look at 10 ways we can tell if we are growing spiritually

1. DO YOU THINK ABOUT HEAVEN MORE THAN YOU USED TO?

READ Philippians 1:21-24 and Titus 2:11-13

Paul wrote these verses after he had been a Christian a long time

Thinking more about heaven showed he was growing in his faith

Are you looking forward to heaven more now than you used to?

As you grow spiritually, you will think more about heaven and look forward to it more and more.

When we are new Christians, heaven is a nice but vague place, but the closer we get to God the more we look forward to being in heaven with Him

As we become more like Jesus, this world and the things of it are less important

Sin and suffering become more and more distasteful to us

The things of this earth fade but our heavenly home becomes more and more real

Do you yearn more for heaven than you used to? That is a sign you are growing spiritually

2. ARE YOU BECOMING MORE LOVING IN HOW YOU TREAT OTHERS?

READ Matthew 22:36-40 and 1 John 4:20-21

Tell the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

When you grow as a Christian you will be more patient with and kinder to others

As we become more like Jesus, we love others as He loves – totally and unconditionally.

It's only natural that as we grow to become more like Him, we find ourselves loving people more .

Do you find you are becoming kinder to people, more patient and compassionate that you were?

Are you more sensitive to the needs and hurts of others?

Do you feel badly for others trials and difficulties?

That is another sign that you are growing spiritually.

3. ARE YOU MORE AWARE OF GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE?

READ Philippians 3:10 and Galatians 2:20

As we grow, we will recognize God's hand in our life more and more.

We become more aware of how much we need God. At first, we see the big things He does, but as we grow closer to Him, we start noticing that everything that happens is under His control

Are you more aware that He is in control of all that happens, the difficulties as well as the good things?

Are you less willing to give credit to God for good things that happen?
Are you becoming more and more aware of God working in all areas of your life?
That is a sign of spiritual growth.

4. DOES GOD'S WORD HAVE A GREATER PLACE IN YOUR LIFE THAN IT USED TO?

READ 1 Peter 2:2-3 and Psalms 119:9-11

A sign of good health is a healthy appetite

The same is true spiritually – growing Christians want to know God's Word

Do you find the Bible is more important to you the longer you are a Christian?

Do you appreciate it and turn to it more than before?

Is the time you spend reading the Bible more and more important to you?

Do you remember God's promises and think of them during the day?

Do you have an increasing number of favorite Scriptures you turn to in difficult times?

As we grow so does our appetite. That is true of children, and it's also true of Christians.

All growing things need a source of nourishment, and the Bible is the food source for our soul.

Do you find your love of the Bible growing?

Is it more influential in your life than it used to be?

If so, that is another sign of spiritual growth.

5. IS YOUR WORSHIP MORE GOD-CENTERED AND FREQUENT THAN IT USED TO BE?

READ Job 1:20-21 and Psalm 100

When you read about Abraham in the Bible, you notice that the older he got the more often he built an altar to worship God,

When we thank God, we focus on what He has done for us, things that we notice and like.

But when we worship God, we focus on God Himself in His majesty and glory, not what He does

Do you find yourself worshipping God more than you used to?

Do you find yourself thinking of God and His greatness more than you used to?

Does worship naturally flow from you throughout the day when you think of His love for you?

Does praise to God naturally come to your mind?

Do you feel closer to God when you worship than you used to feel?

This is a good sign you are growing spiritually.

6. ARE YOU MORE SENSITIVE TO SIN THAN YOU USED TO BE?

READ Romans 12:1-2

When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he ran away.

When David was tempted by Bathsheba, he gave in and sinned

Joseph was younger than David, but he had been growing spiritually and turned from sin

As young Christians we are aware of things that are sin, things we shouldn't think or do

But as we grow closer in our faith, we begin to see sin in more and more areas of our life

We start recognizing that our selfish motives and prideful attitudes are sin

We become more and more aware of how far we fall short of God's perfection.

Are you more sensitive to sin in your life than you were?

Are you more aware of when you sin and more bothered by it?

Do you thank God more and more for His grace in your life?

Are you more appreciative of His free forgiveness than you used to be?

Becoming more sensitive to sin in your life is a sign you are growing spiritually

7. ARE YOU QUICKER TO FORGIVE OTHERS WHO HURT YOU?

READ Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:13

When Jesus was in deep pain and agony on the cross, He forgave those who hung Him there

Growing to become more like Jesus means we will be quicker to forgive others
Do you find that you are quicker to forgive people than you were a few years ago?
Are you less likely to argue or seek revenge against those who hurt you?
Do you forgive people as soon as they hurt you and not wait for them to apologize first?
That's how Jesus forgives us, and we must do the same if we are to become more like Him
Do you find yourself quicker to forgive than you were in the past?
That is a good sign that spiritual growth is taking place.

8. ARE YOU BECOMING MORE AWARE OF HOW GREAT GOD IS?

READ Psalm 19:1 and Philippians 4:13

One thing that should be happening as you grow as a Christian is to realize how great God is
When we grow in our faith, we become more aware of how wonderful and awesome he is
Does God seem greater to you now than He did in the past?
Are you continually seeing more and more ways He controls everything?
When God gets bigger in your life, your faith and trust in Him grow as well
We have big faith in a big God, but only small faith in a small God. Do you see God as big or small?
Is your faith and trust in God growing as well?
That shows that God is becoming greater and greater in your life
If you are more aware than you used to be of how great God is, you are growing spiritually.

9. IS YOUR PRAYER LIFE BECOMING MORE PERSONAL AND MEANINGFUL?

READ James 5:16 and Jeremiah 29:12-13

Daniel was a man of faith because he was a man of prayer
Jesus Himself prayed often, sometimes staying up all night praying
When a relationship grows people learn to communicate better.
Do you find your prayer life becoming more personal and stronger?
Do you find yourself talking to God more than you used to?
Is prayer more natural, something you do throughout the day without even realizing it at times?
Does talking to God about things come naturally to you, something that automatically happens?
Do you find yourself talking to God about many different things, not just asking Him to do things for you?
Is your prayer more centered on God Himself instead of what you want Him to do for you?
Do you feel more comfortable now talking to Him than you did in the past?
If so, you are growing spiritually.

10. ARE YOU BETTER ABLE TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S VOICE WHEN HE SPEAKS TO YOU?

READ John 14:26 and John 10:4, 16, 27

Do you find yourself more interested in listening to God, in wanting to hear from Him, instead of just telling Him what you want Him to do for you?
Do you recognize that what God has to say to you is much more important than what you have to say to Him?
Are you better able to recognize when God is speaking to you?
How do you know when God is communicating guidance, conviction or truth to you?
Do you have a stronger and stronger desire to want to hear from Him and listen to what He says?
If you are better able to recognize when God speaks to you then you are growing spiritually.

CONCLUSION

REVIEW

1. Do you think about heaven more than you used to?
2. Are you becoming more loving in how you treat others?
3. Are you more aware of god's work in your life?
4. Does god's word have a greater place in your life than it used to?
5. Is your worship more God-centered and frequent than it used to be?
6. Are you more sensitive to sin than you used to be?
7. Are you quicker to forgive others who hurt you?
8. Are you becoming more aware of how great god is?
9. Is your prayer life becoming more personal and meaningful?
10. Are you better able to recognize god's voice when he speaks to you?

These 10 standards can help you see how and where you are growing.

Look at each one carefully, pray about where you are at and if you are growing in this area.

If you find one where you haven't been growing as you should than you can focus on that so you can grow in that area.

READ Philippians 1:6

II. BIBLE STUDIES FOR ALL AGES

HOW TO USE THESE AS SERMONS

The following lessons are stories about various events in the life of Jesus. They can be told as part of a sermon or elaborated and used as a full sermon. If so, the lessons in the stories should be applied specifically to the audience. Everyone loves stories and learns from them. When I used these, I dressed in costume of the people I was portraying and told the story as if I was the one experiencing it. You can do that, too. Or you can tell the story in your own words or just read it as it is.

HOW TO USE THESE AS BIBLE LESSONS

God's greatest gift to us, apart from Jesus, is His written Word. In it we have all His truth and all we need to know to live for Him (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is our privilege, and duty, to learn from this Book. It is our guidebook through life. When we learn His Word, we grow spiritually in knowledge and in faith. Without it we would be lost. Pastors, church leaders, parents and all Christians are responsible to teach the Bible to others. It is our joy and honor to do so. There is no greater gift we can give others, including our own children, than knowledge of His Word. But many times, we don't know how best to do that.

We learn the Bible by listening to sermons, but individual or group Bible study is just as important. In Bible study there is interaction, questions and answers, discussion. There is usually more participation and personal application. It is also a way to teach others how to study the Bible. Fellowship and personal encouragement take place, too. Wisdom comes through knowing God's Word (Proverbs 2:9-11). Bible studies can accomplish all this and more.

The purpose of this section of this book is to help you teach Bible studies to children, youth and adults. There are stories about Jesus' life that can be used with any age. The background study is done for you, so are the application questions to use at the end. These lessons can be taught individually or as part of a series.

There are questions at the end of each lesson that can be used to review what they learned, help them learn more, to bring out discussion, to let them ask questions and to apply the contents to their lives. The answers are given after the question to help the teacher, but ask the people you are teaching to answer the questions first.

For more detailed information on how to study the Bible see my book, "Studying the Bible," by Jerry Schmoyer. To help you develop your own Bible study lessons, use my book, "Preaching and Teaching the Bible." They can be found at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/> or email me at Jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org and I'll send you a PDF copy by return email.

TEACHING THE BIBLE TO VERY YOUNG CHILDREN (ages 2-5)

God commands us to teach His Word to our children (Psalm 78:1-6). This is to be done throughout the day as occasions arise (Deuteronomy 6:5-7; 11:18-19). It is also to be done in planned Bible studies, either one-on-one or with a group.

Jesus focused a large part of His ministry on children. He cared about them (Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:13-16). He used them as examples (Matthew 8:1-6; Mark 9:33-37) and did miracles for them (Mark 5:21-42; Matthew 15:21-28; 17:14-22; Luke 7:11-16). He taught them as He taught the adults.

Children are eager to learn and quick to learn. They are often easier to teach than adults, who might not be as open to new truth. The following Bible studies can be used for children. Each one is a firsthand account of someone in the Bible. The teacher can read the lesson as a story. They can dress in costume and pretend to be the person, or just learn the material and present it as a lecture.

For children 3 years old or younger, focus on Jesus' love for them. Remember they have a very short attention span and limited vocabulary. They don't understand symbolism or Christian terminology, so make things clear and simple. Use repetition, teach songs and have a variety of activity to keep them interested.

LESSONS ESPECIALLY SUITED FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (ages 6-8)

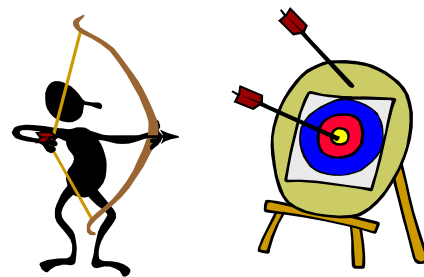
When children get a little older, their learning and vocabulary improve. They still love songs and crafts, so use these when possible. Make sure you don't expect too much, just keep it simple and make sure they have fun. Use simple words to teach simple stories. They learn from stories better than any other way. They don't understand symbolism, so make the Bible truth clear. Use examples and stories to explain it. Let them draw a picture of what they are learning, that will help them understand and remember and will keep their attention for longer. Teach them to pray so they can thank Jesus themselves. Love them and enjoy them, and they will respond very well.

LESSONS ESPECIALLY SUITED FOR OLDER CHILDREN (ages 9-12)

Older children are better able to learn, but still learn best when there are activity, visuals and stories involved. Ask them questions to see if they are understanding what you say. Questions also get them to think about what you are teaching. Give them lots of opportunities to ask questions for this is a great way to help them learn. Make sure you keep the lessons simple and on the age level of the children. Talk about things that they understand and that are important in their lives: family, friends, school, obedience, etc. They face the same problems we face: fear, anger, greed, laziness, discouragement and self-centeredness. Apply your lessons to what they are facing at their age level.

TEACHING THE BIBLE TO YOUTH AND ADULTS

When teaching youth and adults, remember to focus on the needs of the ones you are teaching. Make the study applies to their lives so they keep interest, remember what is taught, and use it in their daily lives. Think of yourself as an archer sending your arrow to your target. Your target is meeting the needs of those you are teaching. Focus on one need for each study. Trying to cover too many subjects at once just brings confusion and nothing really sticks in. Know those you teach and make your Bible study focus on them and their needs.



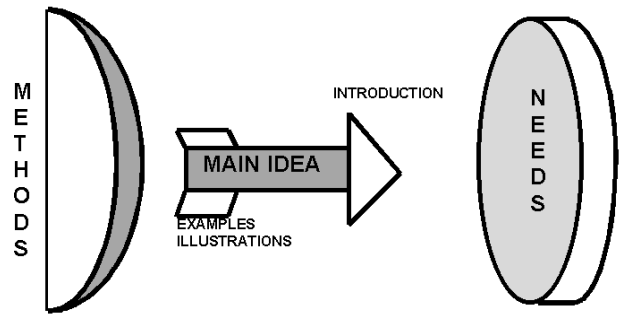
The arrow is your Bible study, the truth you want them to know and remember. Ask yourself, "If Jesus were leading this Bible study, what would He say?" "What needs in their lives would He address?" "How would He teach?" He would never scold, get angry or impatient. He would always encourage them and complement them for what they learn.

It is the bow that propels the arrow to the target. The bow stands for the methods you use to teach the Bible study. The rest of this book consists of lessons you can use. I have done the research; all you have to do is communicate it. I wrote the lessons as if the person being studied is telling the story, so you can read it to your students just as I have written it. You can add to it wherever you wish. You can even dress in a Bible costume and pretend you are the person talking. That can really help the lesson come alive for the listeners. Make the study interesting. Keep it moving along. Give eye contact to your pupils as you lead the study.

The main points in the lessons can be explained by illustrations, or stories. Jesus used parables to help the people learn. Nathan told David about a man whose only sheep was taken (2 Samuel 12:1-12). Using objects to explain important truths is also important. The Old Testament prophets used clay, pottery, a belt and other objects to visually show a spiritual truth. We should do the same in our teaching.

One other thing to remember is that not everyone learns the same. Some people remember what they hear. If something is said out loud, they can grasp it. Others, however, need to see something to really get ahold of it. Visuals, object lessons, pictures or maps can help them a lot. Then there are still others who learn best when they do something for themselves. Asking pupils to act out a person or event can help them. Singing a song, explaining something out loud, reading out loud, taking notes, drawing a picture or coloring a picture or making a craft can help reinforce learning.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org



LIFE OF JESUS		
EVENT	TOPIC	SCRIPTURE
1. JOHN IS BORN	Trust in God	Zacharias Luke 1:5-25 Elizabeth Luke 1:57-80
2. JESUS' BIRTH ANNOUNCED	Obey God	Mary Luke 1:26-38 Joseph Matthew 1:18-25
3. JESUS IS BORN	God became man	Luke 2:1-20
4. MAGI GIVE GIFTS	Worship Jesus with our gifts	Matthew 2:1-18
5. JOHN THE BAPTIST	Stand up for Jesus	Matthew 3:1-12; 4:1-12 Mark 1:1-8,14; 6:14-29 Luke 3:1-18; 9:7-9
6. BAPTISM OF JESUS	Baptism shows we love Jesus	Matthew 3:13-17 Mark 1:9-11 Luke 3:21-23
7. TEMPTATION OF JESUS	Temptation	Matthew 4:1-11 Mark 1:12-13 Luke 4:1-13
8. NICODEMUS	Born Again	John 2:23 – 3:21
9. JESUS' DISCIPLES	Discipleship	Mt 4:18-22; 9:9-13; 10:24-42; 16:24-28 Mark 1:16-20; 3:13-19 Luke 5:10-11; 6:12-16 John 1:19-51
10. MIRACLES AT THE SEA	Miracles - Jesus cares about people	Mark 4:35 – 5:43 Luke 8:22-48
11. FEEDING PEOPLE	Jesus uses little children	5000 Mt 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17 4000 Mt 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9
12. JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION	Jesus is God	Matthew 17:1-8 Mark 9:2-8 Luke 9:28-36

13. MARY, MARTHA & LAZARUS	Listen to Jesus	Luke 10:38-42 John 11:1-44 John 12:1-11
14. TEARFUL ENTRY	Jesus is King	Matthew 21:1-17 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 12:12-19
15. JESUS' LAST MEAL	Jesus knows He will die for us	Matthew 26:17-30 Mark 14:12-26 Luke 22:7-38 John 13:1 – 14:31
16. ARREST & TRIALS	When unfair things happen	Matthew 26:47 – 27:26 Mark 14:43 – 15:15 Luke 22:47 – 23:25 John 18:2 – 19:16
17. CRUCIFIXION	Jesus died for our sins	Matthew 27:31-66 Mark 15:20-47 Luke 23:26-56 John 19:16-42
18. RESURRECTION	Jesus & our eternal life	Matthew 28:1-10 Mark 16:1-14 Luke 24:1-49 John 20:1-20
19. ASCENSION	We will go to heaven one day	Mark 16:19-20 Luke 24:50-53 Acts 1:3-14

1. JOHN IS BORN

(Luke 1:5-25, 57-80)

Read Out Loud: Luke 1:57-66

By Zacharias

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6)

With these words the Old Testament closed. For 400 years there was nothing but silence. Many thought God had forgotten His promises to Israel, but not everyone. My parents still believed. They named me Zacharias, which means "God remembers." My wife, Elizabeth, was named "God's promise." Her parents believed, too. They passed their faith on to us. We needed all the faith we could get, for it wasn't easy to trust God when we were childless. Others thought that was proof of God's displeasure with us. How was I to minister to them as a priest and rabbi if I had God's stamp of rejection? Oh, sure, we prayed and prayed for a child for years but nothing changed. Then the most incredible thing happened (Luke 1:5-10).

THE GROUP OF PRIESTS which I was part of served in the Temple in Jerusalem during the 8th month of the year. The rest of the year we served in our local communities. The high point of the day was when one priest was chosen to go into the Holy Place to trim the wicks on the lampstand and sprinkle incense on the golden altar. One of us was chosen by lot to go in at dawn and another in midafternoon, which was the more special of the two. Being chosen was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Many priests never ever got the chance. I had never been privileged to do it in all my years of service.

Then one day the lot fell to me! I was ecstatic with pleasure. I was sobered, too, as I remembered that if it weren't for God's grace and mercy, I could be struck dead for approaching His presence. All went well at first, but then as I was offering up the prayers of the nation at the altar of incense all of a sudden there was this great, marvelous being standing there talking to me! I was terrified, thinking this meant my death. It turns out it was Gabriel (Luke 1:11-17).

"Your prayer has been heard" I was told. At first, I didn't realize what he was talking about. Then it hit me: the baby! I had stopped praying for that 20 years ago when Elizabeth got too old to have children. I don't think she stopped praying for a child until just a few years ago, though.

Now I was hearing that we were to have a child, a son none the less. I thought God's answer to my many prayers was "No" but it turns out it was really just "Wait." What's more, this son was to be the one who went before the Messiah, telling everyone to get ready for His coming. Yet, despite all this good news, there was a lot of unresolved bitterness and self-pity inside me because of how long God had delayed in answering our prayers. NOW God is going to do this marvelous thing, when we are old. Why not earlier? If He couldn't give us a son when we were younger, how could He do it now that our bodies were too old to have children? Because I used my speech to question God, He took away my ability to talk (Luke 1:18-20).

BY THE TIME this exchange was over and I went back outside, people were wondering what was happening (Luke 1:21-22). I couldn't even speak the blessing to dismiss them. I just had to wave them away. When my time of service in Jerusalem was over, I went back home (Luke 1:23).

I was full of emotion when I got home: joy and excitement, but also guilt and remorse because of my doubt. Elizabeth only felt joy (Luke 1:24-25).

I spent the next several months sitting and thinking. I couldn't talk, I couldn't minister, I couldn't even tell when had happened to me in the temple. I wrote it out for Elizabeth and she told everyone. I

had plenty of time to think about God's promises to be faithful, such as Isaiah 49:14-15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

THE FIRST MONTHS weren't so bad. Then Mary came to visit and Elizabeth had someone to talk with. Toward the end, though, it got long! Jewish women were secluded in the home for the last five months of a pregnancy, so everyone had to come here to see her. Women were constantly in and out: talking and giggling. I heard a thousand birth stories, each one grislier than the one before it. Every ache and pain was analyzed. All they talked about were swollen ankles, upset stomach, can't bend down -- you'd think it was the first time a woman ever got pregnant! Worse of all, I couldn't do anything but sit there and take it all in! Elizabeth got to tell everyone what God said. I did find lots to do in the garden that year -- in fact it was the best kept garden I ever had.

Inside, though, I was really thrilled, for her and for myself. Just to think -- I would really have a son!!! I thought often of Abraham who, despite his own doubts, had a special son from God in his old age. I realized God answers our prayers but in His own time, not ours. Delay is not denial. I learned God answers in His own way. We are to pray the problem, not the solution. I learned He answers in His own power: that's the only way He gets the glory. The only person I could talk to was God, and I did plenty of that!

THEN CAME THE DAY my son was born (Luke 1:57-58). I never saw a bunch of women so excited! I think I was even more excited than them, though. My son's birth was the only birth recorded in the New Testament besides Jesus. The whole first week after his birth was constant celebration. Every movement, every cough, every coo, every filled diaper was a big event!

Then came the 8th day after John's birth, the day of a boy's circumcision. Contrary to all traditions, I didn't name the baby Zacharias after myself. It was almost like I was disclaiming to be his father. It wasn't that, it's just that he had a Father far above me, One who had already chosen his name (Luke 1:59-66). "His name is John" I wrote. 'John' means 'The Lord is gracious,' and indeed He is! Immediately upon that act of obedience God removed my dumbness and I could talk. My first words were those of praise to God, expressing what has been building in my heart for the last nine months (Luke 1:68-79). I was awed and humbled by the privilege and responsibility of raising the one who would be herald of the Messiah. What a blessing!

That little baby was the center of attention and the main topic of conversation in our home as well as our whole village for some time to come. I don't think there ever was a baby more loved! What a joy it was. We felt like teenagers again! We knew we wouldn't have many years with him because of our age, but God blessed and used every minute we had. God kept us alive long enough to see him grow in faith and love for God, and that is what was most important for us (Luke 1:80).

AS FOR ME, I didn't doubt God again. I knew He knew what He was doing. God used my small faith and helped it grow. I trusted His promises to help raise him despite my age. You, too, can trust God's promises in your own life. You can trust Him for strength (Deuteronomy 33:25; Isaiah 40:29), rest (Matthew 11:28), victory over sin (1 Cor 10:13), forgiveness of sin (Romans 8:1; 1 John 1:9) and peace (Psalms 118:6; 23:4; Isaiah 41:10). God can be trusted. God is worthy to be trusted. Try Him and see!

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Tell the story of John's birth and explain how God creates each baby before it is born. He puts the right baby in the right family to love them and raise them. Tell the children God chose them to be in their family. He gave them parents to love them and train them.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Focus on how God plans each child before they are born. He picks if they will be boy or girl, tall or short, what they will look like and what their skills will be. He puts them in the family He wants to raise and train them, so trust and obey your parents. Or you can talk about the importance of believing and trusting God instead of doubting His Word.

1. JOHN IS BORN

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Where was Zechariah when Gabriel appeared to him? *(Answers are in italics under the question)*
In Jerusalem in the temple in front of the altar of incense in the Holy Place.

Why was he there? What was he doing?
He was offering incense on the golden altar. Incense pictured prayers going up to God.

Why didn't God give Elizabeth and Zechariah any children?
*Perhaps to stretch their faith, to have them trust Him even when times were hard.
It wasn't His time to give them children until later.*

Why doesn't God give us everything we want as soon as we want it?
He wants us to trust Him and patiently wait for His timing.

Why did Zechariah doubt God's promise?
He and Elizabeth were too old to have children and he lost faith that God can do anything.

Name some of God's promises:
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Ps. 23:1-3

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew. 6:33

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:19

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isa. 40:31

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Phil. 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Prov. 3:5-6

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me. Ps. 23:4

Do we always believe them or do we sometimes doubt them, too?
It is best to always believe but sometimes we, too, doubt God.

What are you having a hard time trusting God for right now?
(Health, finances, friends, school, etc.)

What promises of God can help you through this time?
(Answers will differ)

2. JESUS' BIRTH ANNOUNCED

(Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25)
Read Out Loud: Matthew 1:18-25
By Gabriel, By Mary and By Joseph

There are several stories to use with this lesson. You can use all of them or pick which you want to use. You can even use this lesson last more than one week.

By Gabriel

"Don't be afraid!" That's how I start my conversations with humans. Whenever I appear in angel form people fall in fear, so terrified they can hardly speak. They assume I am coming in judgment. Don't they realize that angels only appear to those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior? Don't they remember that those who belong to Jesus will NEVER have to fear judgment from God (Romans 8:1)?

MY NAME IS GABRIEL. I come from the very presence of the Lord. When we manifest ourselves among human beings, we take on the form of a human being ourselves so as to be able to work in privacy so you don't know who we are (Hebrews 13:2; Genesis 18:2-10; 19:1ff). By the way, I've seen some of the pictures you make of us -- babies, feminine, weak and sissy! We are mighty, powerful soldiers who belong to the army of God! We battle demons!

We are messengers - that's what the Greek word 'angel' really means. We come to earth to help and protect God's people, especially from Satan's demons and their attacks. We are always around, watching you -- but you can't see us! Our purpose is to bring glory to God, not to ourselves. Any attention we get without God getting more is wrong. After all, who would glorify their mailman for delivering a million-dollar gift while not acknowledging the one who gave the gift? God gets all the glory, we are just serving Him, as are you.

God created us first, then we watched Him create the universe in 6 days -- since then we haven't been able to stop praising and worshipping Him for Who He is and what He has done (as well as continues to do).

God created millions and millions of us (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:1). We are NOT people who have died. We are like humans in that we have a mind, will and emotions. We can only be one place at a time and don't have all knowledge or power, only what we get from God. Unlike you, though, we are not limited to a physical body. We are all male and don't reproduce and we only had a one-time chance to exercise our free will. That was when Lucifer (now called Satan), the greatest angel God created, rebelled against submitting to God and in his pride and rebellion challenged God's power (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). He was immediately cast out of heaven and about 1/3 of the angels followed him (Revelation 12:4). Now they are called demons -- fallen angels.

They counterfeit us and try to act as angels of light to mislead mankind, and are quite successful! They oppose God's kingdom and, like their leader Satan, seek to have people follow and worship them. Since earth is their kingdom (Adam gave it to Satan when he sinned), they are very successful. When someone is born into God's family, he finds himself living in enemy territory, a source of light among Satan's darkness. That is why we are needed to help and protect you from this unseen enemy who would torture and kill you if God would allow it.

Of course, you know there is no question about who will ultimately rule this earth and the whole universe. Since God Himself came to earth (called Jesus) as a man and took on Satan and all his forces, defeating them on the cross by paying for sin and overcoming all the demons

could throw at Him, their ultimate defeat has been certain. There is no question of Who really is the great ruler of the universe. God is still delaying the final mop-up action, though, until all those who would accept His free gift of salvation do so. Then all hell will break loose!

IN THE MEANTIME, our missions are typically restraining actions related to this ongoing rescue program. We move into an area and secure a perimeter of operations from enemy interference. One-time Dothan, home of Elisha, was surrounded by the Syrian army. Michael's unit was deployed to ensure the safety of Elisha. The Commander notified Elisha we were there but his servant didn't know that and was alarmed. Elisha sent up a special request for us to unveil, so we executed a partial decloaking and the servant was very impressed! (2 Kings 6)

When not fighting on earth we are in heaven at the throne worshipping and praising God (Psalm 103:20-22; 148:1-14; Revelation 5:11-13; 7:11-12). Yes, I guess you could say we are the policemen of the universe, carrying out and executing God's orders and making sure all fallen angels must obey them, too. The only time we were unable to do that was at the crucifixion when we were held back in the darkness so Satan and his forces could do their best to destroy Jesus. They knew their ultimate victory or downfall lay in defeating him -- and we couldn't help! That was a nightmare! Glory to God, though, He was victorious. Because of that victory, Jesus has total authority and uses that power to protect you.

We, as messengers, carry out God's orders (Daniel 10). We bring answers to prayer, prevent accidents and protect believers and children from injury (unless God allows it for a plan and purpose known only to Him). We help you find things when you lose them. We go ahead of you and prepare the path for your daily activities. We watch you to see God's grace at work in your lives and that amazes us! To be quite honest, we angels aren't very impressed with human beings and your selfish sinfulness. We don't understand why God loves you so much, but you can be glad He does or you'd be nothing! Because of how He treats you, we are very impressed with God and His mercy. Since we no longer have a free will, we can't and don't experience His forgiveness and restoration, so seeing it in your lives is most impressive! I hope you realize what a blessing you have, how much you owe to God's love and mercy! I know you will comprehend it when you see it all from our perspective. Until then....

Well, anyway -- back to my story. My name is Gabriel, as I said. My name means "God is Great." Michael and I are God's two highest-ranking angels. God has us all divided as an army with generals, colonels, majors, etc., on down to privates. We are called thrones, dominions (Cherubim and Seraphim), principalities and powers (Romans 8:37-39).

I HAD THE PRIVILEGE of making many special announcements to people. I interpreted God's revelation to Daniel (8:16; 9:21). I appeared to Zechariah in the temple (Luke 1:11-19). I had good news -- he would have a son in his old age and that boy would be the forerunner of the coming Messiah. That contact didn't go so well, though, since he didn't believe me. Six months later, I appeared to a young woman named Mary to tell her she would have a son, the Messiah, while still a virgin (Luke 1:26-29). Shortly afterwards, I went to her husband (before they had started living together or consummated the marriage) with the same news (Matthew 1:20-21).

There is one more scheduled appearance of mine on earth, and its one I look forward to as much as you do. I'll announce it with my trumpet. You call it the rapture. We call it our day of vengeance and justice. After centuries of watching enemy forces harasses and cause all kinds of evil, we'll finally be able to remove them. With God's power there is no doubt who'll win! Then we'll reign together for all eternity. You will have a much higher position than us and will actually rule over us (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 5:2). After all, you are the Bride of Christ and we are but servants, messengers. Still, we'll all praise and worship God forever. We'll proclaim His glory day and night. Why not get started doing that now? Glorify Him for all He has done, is doing and will do for you! He deserves all your praise and much more. See that He gets it!

By Mary

My name is Mary ('Miryam'). It means bitterness. It was the most common girls name in my time because many parents wanted their daughters to grow up to be godly women like Miriam. There was nothing special about me or my family. The only special thing was that God chose to use me. I'll never forget how it all began.

My father was in the field working and mother had gone to the market. I was home alone, mending clothes, and daydreaming about Joseph, the man I was to marry. I hadn't spent much time alone with him, but we had grown up together. We were each in our teens. I did know Joseph was kind and godly. He was also handsome!

Suddenly I was startled! You know how sometimes you can sense someone standing nearby but haven't seen them? There stood a stranger in the doorway. I assumed he was looking for my father. There was something very different about him, though. He just walked in uninvited! It was a bit scary because men weren't supposed to approach women when alone. It got even stranger when he spoke. "Hail woman, richly blessed, The Lord is with you."

"Who is this?" I thought. "What does he want? Am I in danger? He doesn't seem threatening but..." He certainly had my full attention!

Like every godly Jewish girl, when I was young, I would dream I would be the fortunate woman to give birth to the Messiah. Those days most religious leaders had forgotten about the Messiah and just saw it as foolish girls' fantasies. Our nation had wandered far from God, way into sin. It was especially bad in Nazareth where I lived. It was a corrupt army town with more Gentiles than Jews.

I had all but forgotten those girlish daydreams as I grew older. I didn't catch the man's meaning right away. It seemed impossible to be happening. It seemed like he knew exactly what I was thinking.

"Don't be afraid," he told me. "You have found favor with God." I knew everything I had was by God's grace, that I had done nothing to earn it or deserve it. Why was he reminding me of this?

Then he said it: "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus." 'Jesus' was a common name, the Greek equivalent to our Hebrew name 'Joshua.' They meant "the Lord is our deliverer."

When what the angel was saying sunk in it made me wonder when this was going to happen. Isn't that the first thing women wonder when they find they are pregnant? Did he mean I would be pregnant BEFORE being married? Again, he seemed to read my mind and answered before I asked. It was almost as if he purposely left this out so I'd wonder and he could emphasize it more.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

Nothing is impossible for God. Even having a baby without a human father?

You know, some see me as a celebrity and even worship me. Really all I was was a servant. A servant is the property of his master to use as he decides. It requires an attitude of submission and humility. You might think it was easy to say I was God's servant because of the great blessing He was bestowing on me.

All the implications of the blessing weren't clear to me then, though. What was obvious was the potential cost involved: loss of my reputation and Joseph, criticism and rejection by most people, the discomforts of pregnancy and a family without a father. I put God before myself and immediately knew I had to obey. It had to be total obedience, no bargaining or hesitating.

I had always been willing to do whatever God wanted, always committed to following Him entirely. "I am the Lord's servant," I replied. "May it be to me as you have said." Now you think of a servant as someone who works agreed-upon hours for agreed-upon wages, then goes home to do what he wants. That's not how it was then. A servant was a slave. He had no time which belonged to him, not a free minute ever. He had no wagers, no home, no opinions -- nothing. That's what I was agreeing to be to God -- His servant to use however He chose. I wasn't a naturally submissive person, but I knew this is what God wanted and what I must do. God chose me and I yielded to Him.

It's hard to explain how the pregnancy began. It was the most gentle, painless, loving thing that ever happened to me. This soft yet brilliant light just came around me. I felt so warm and secure, just full of total peace. It faded and was gone as quickly as it came. The whole thing was so delicate and gracious.

Still, it wasn't all easy. I needed someone to talk to about this. Joseph was away building houses. Our contact was very limited anyway because of Jewish tradition. When I told them what happened, my parents believed and supported me, but it was hard for them to understand.

One day I went to the market. I left home with great feelings of love in my heart. I was grateful for all God had done for me, a poor peasant girl. It overwhelmed me. But in the marketplace my joy turned to sorrow and shame as the glances and whispers rubbed rawness into my soul. I wasn't even able to complete my shopping. I hurried home with my basket still half empty. I had to get away. Who would really understand? Elizabeth!

My parents sent me along with some from our synagogue who were going down to Jerusalem and I made the 4-day trip with them. I was really looking forward to talking to Elizabeth. It was as if the messenger put this idea in my mind when he told me about her miraculous pregnancy, too.

As I got closer, though, I got more and more apprehensive. What if she didn't believe me or mocked me? She was much older, the wife of a godly and respected priest. What would she think of an unmarried pregnant teenager? Would anyone ever believe my story?

She was home cooking when I arrived. She answered my knock with "Who's there?" "Mary of Nazareth, Heli's daughter," I called inside. Immediate revelation was given to her about what had happened to me. Her baby jumped for joy and kicked her. Her joy and acceptance of me was total and unconditional. She praised God for His marvelous works. I was greatly relieved! I didn't have to use the 'speech' I had been working on in my mind as I got closer to their home.

We had a wonderful time together. God provided just what I needed. Soon, however, it was time for me to head home. Her baby was about to be born and I had to return. Traveling back toward home brought reality back to my mind. What about Joseph? He must have heard I was pregnant by now. He would have no way of knowing this was God's baby. What would he think of me? I had to leave all that to God. But how would I support the baby? Everything was new and happening so fast. I was scared and excited at the same time. Feeling the baby move within me was absolutely thrilling! Nevertheless, I wondered at times if I could be as good a mother as He needed. Would I be able to meet His needs? What about my needs -- I'd have to keep trusting God to meet them. What would my son be like? What would life have for Him? Somehow, I could sense that there would be pain as well as joy, sorrow as well as pleasure. Time would reveal it all.

For now, I was willing to be God's servant, to have Him use me however He chose. What greater privilege could a person have? What better way was there to spend this short life on earth?

By Joseph

My name is Joseph (Yosef). Those who knew me called me Yosi. Some have said I am the most forgotten character in the Bible. In Christmas pageants even the inn keeper gets a bigger part than me (and there really wasn't an inn keeper in Bethlehem). I'm often just a moving prop, following Mary around. That's a tough role for a man, very humbling. Still, I did have an important part in the story of Jesus' birth. I'd like to tell you about it if you have a minute. My story revolves around my hands. Look at my hands. They tell you that I work with wood and stone. You can see the history of my work in them: scars, calluses and cuts. You can tell a lot about a man by his hands. Farmers have different hands than fishermen. Hands are important to a man. You men understand. We create and produce with our hands. Where would we be without them?

I used my hands to build homes and buildings. Mainly we used stone, but also wood for windows, doors and roof timbers. I worked with my father, first learning from him and then, after my bar mitzvah at age 12, as his partner. We weren't any big 'success' as the world would call it. But family and friends were more important to my father than long hours and lots of money. I'm glad he was that way. I agreed with him. A man must find his fulfillment in his wife and family, not in his job.

You can see why my hands are so important to me. I used them to provide for my family, to love and raise my children. The best thing these hands did, though, was to hold the Messiah, God Himself come to earth as a baby. These were the first hands to ever touch Him. I brought Him into the world with these very hands! You know it does something to a man to see a baby being born. Being there when the woman he loves goes through all that pain brings up emotions and feelings we men usually avoid. I wasn't entirely comfortable with them, but it was good to experience them. There's nothing like holding a newborn baby in your hands to get everything in life in proper perspective! Just think, God used these very hands to raise His son! I never would have thought it would be this way when growing up.

Nazareth was a very ungodly, pagan town. It was a small town full of Gentiles and Roman soldiers. It wasn't a place for a devout Jewish family, but that's where God had put my family. My father was a good role model of a man of God. I, too, committed myself to living for God. I obeyed His law and believed in His promises of a coming Messiah to pay for my sins. It wasn't easy living for God in Nazareth. There weren't many of us who loved God, even among the Jews.

I did have one friend growing up who loved God as I did. Her name was Miriam. You call her Mary. Our parents were friends and we saw each other each time we went to synagogue, even though we spent very little time together. Somehow it became understood that we would one day marry. We got along well and we looked forward to being together. We shared so much in common. As we became teenagers our friendship developed into a deep love for each other. We weren't allowed much private time together, but we just naturally had a deep bonding of our spirits. It was like we knew what the other was thinking, so we didn't have to always be talking. We each thanked God for His wonderful provision and anxiously awaited the time we could start our own family together.

When we were married, a dowry was paid and vows said. All was legally binding. A contract was signed. We were legally married, called husband and wife, but wouldn't live together until later. There was a 9 - 12 month waiting period to make sure she wasn't pregnant and to give me time to build a room onto our family home for us to use. It was during this time that my world fell totally changed!

You know how gossip spreads. I was away from home working and heard in the worst possible way about Mary being pregnant. The more I checked into it the more I found it to be true. What was I to do? I was forbidden by God's law to marry her. The law said she should be stoned, but that wasn't enforced much anymore. I could have her publicly proved wrong and

embarrassed so I could get my dowry back and have my reputation cleared. This is what everyone said I should do. There was another way, though. I could privately and quietly divorce her, lose my dowry and reputation, but protect her from ridicule and criticism. This is what I had decided to do when Gabriel appeared to me in a dream and said it would be all right to go ahead and marry Mary anyway. She really hadn't broken the law for she was still a virgin. The baby was God's! Was I glad! I didn't think anyone would believe me, but I didn't care. Imagine what the other construction workers said when I told them Mary was still a virgin, it was God's miracle-baby in her! They really mocked me for believing that.

All I had was one dream to go on. What if I had imagined it, or had wanted it so badly I only thought it happened? I prayed, talked to my parent's and Mary's parents, and decided to go ahead and marry her as I had wanted to do all along.

We had the final wedding ceremony. There was a special solemnness and seriousness to it under the circumstances, though. It was nice being able to live with Mary and be able to be in our room to talk and pray together. It was frustrating not being able to be close physically, but we both agreed this was best so there could never be any doubt that Jesus was God's baby and not mine. Later we had 4 sons and 2 daughters of our own, but for now it was time to wait. Two of those sons, James and Jude, were leaders in the early church and wrote books that are in the Bible.

It wasn't long, though, before we heard I had to go to Bethlehem for a census and taxation. Only the man was required to go, but Mary insisted on coming to get away from the gossip and to be with me. It took a week to make the 90-mile trip. We slept in tents. Finally, we arrived in Bethlehem only to find it full up with others already arrived for the census. A man was kind enough to let us use the cave under his home for shelter. It was where he stabled his animals. A man wants the best for his wife, and I felt very bad that I couldn't provide any better than that. We were content, though.

We found a midwife to help with the delivery, which came soon after we arrived. Maybe the long trip brought the baby on sooner, but it was a safe delivery and both mother and son were fine. I got to hold the baby when first was born -- with these very hands!

I cleaned out a shelf carved into the wall where food was kept up off the damp, dirty floor and we used that as a bed for the baby. It was amazing how similar His entrance into the world and exit from the world were. There was terrible pain and darkness, His bloody body wrapped in cloths, anointed with perfume, and laid on a stone shelf inside a cave -- both by a man named Joseph! It was my hands that did it the first time, but those of Joseph of Arimathea who did it when Jesus died, for I was no longer alive. Anyway, it was like He was under the shadow of the cross from the very start!

For thirty years Jesus and I were father and son, yet also best friends, together at home, work and synagogue. We bounced thoughts off each other and were as close as any two human beings can be. I knew Him better than anyone else. My hands touched and worked with His hands for 30 years. I never really understood how He could be both man and God, but I know He was. He was my friend, my son, my Savior. Is He your Savior, too? There's none other. I know.

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: As you tell this story, focus on the angels. Talk about how they serve God. They protect and help us like they did baby Jesus. You can talk about Mary's obedience, too.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Talk to them about the role of angels in this story and how God uses them to protect and help us. Teach them that angels are always present, even now as you are teaching. We can't see them, and we aren't to talk or pray to them, but they are always present taking care of us.

2. JESUS' BIRTH IS ANNOUNCED

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

What are angels and what do they do? *(Answers are in italics.)*

*God created angels before He created the world. They worship and serve God.
Angels help us without us knowing it. They protect us and take care of us.
Satan & demons are angels that rebelled and didn't want to follow God so He
threw them out of heaven.*

In what ways was the announcement to Mary similar to the announcement to Zechariah?

*Gabriel appeared both times and said "Don't be afraid." Then he gave God's message
that they would have a child special even though it was impossible (Zechariah was too
old, Mary was a virgin)*

In what ways was the announcement to Mary different than the announcement to Zechariah?

*Zechariah was a priest and was in the temple. He doubted God's word. His son would
be the messenger. Mary was a young woman at home. She believed God's word. Her
son would be the Messiah.*

Why do you think Mary was surprised when the angel told her she was going to have a baby?

She wasn't married and didn't have a husband. God would have to do a miracle.

Mary said she was willing to be God's servant and do whatever He wanted, no matter what it was.
Have you ever told God that? If not, why not tell Him that right now.

(Let them pray to themselves. They can use the same words Mary used)

Why did Mary go to see Elizabeth?

She needed a friend who would understand and whom she could talk to.

What friends has God given you to help you when you are in need?

(This will be different for each one)

What things did Joseph do that show us he was a godly man?

*He was willing to do what was best for Mary, not himself. He prayed for wisdom &
guidance.*

Is it always easy to obey God?

No

When are some times that it is hard to obey God?

(When we are afraid, when people will criticize us, etc.)

What can we do to make sure we always obey God?

Start each day praying for His help and strength, pray before we do things, etc.

God completely changed the plans Joseph and Mary had made for their marriage. Think about
a time God changed the plans you made. Why does He do things like that to us?

(Answers will vary)

3. JESUS IS BORN

(Luke 2:1-20)

Read Out Loud: Luke 2:1-20
By the Shepherds, By Simeon

There are several stories to use with this lesson. You can use all of them or pick which you want to use. You can even make this lesson last more than one week.

By the Shepherds

Oh, excuse me. I didn't see you approach our fire. Come on over, come closer. It's a cold night, come share our fire. We don't get many visitors here. No one bothers with us. Shepherds aren't very popular, you know.

I hope the smell doesn't bother you too much. We don't notice it any more ourselves. We don't have many opportunities to wash -- and neither do the sheep! Oh, well, at least we're in the open air!

I love these dark, crisp nights, don't you? The stars seem so close you can reach out and touch them. You know, this reminds me of another night similar to this one: dark, cool and peaceful. We had surprise visitors then, too. Only they were angels. Say, you aren't angels, are you? No, I didn't think so!

Anyway, back to my story. Where was I? Oh, yes. I was going to tell you about that special night. You know, whenever anything important is happen, God makes it known to us. We wouldn't have known that night was special if God hadn't told us. No one else would have!

Because we were shepherds, we had no civil rights. We couldn't be a witness in court because judges thought we were untrustworthy. We couldn't sell wool or milk from our flocks; people would assume we stole it. The Mishnah, our book of laws and rules, said, "No one should feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit."

Fortunately, God didn't feel that way about us, or we would never have known what happened that night. As it turns out, we were the ONLY ones to find out. Why did God choose shepherds to whom He gave this wonderful news? Could it be that we are humble and open, close to nature and God? Perhaps it was because David himself was a shepherd here in these same hills. That's where he wrote many of his psalms of praise to God.

Anyway, we kept sheep for several owners. Many of our sheep were for the temple sacrifices. Possibly the next Passover lamb was in our flock. We shepherds knew about sacrifice and shedding innocent blood. The sacrifices hurt us much more than the priests who had no connection to the sheep. We knew them by name, raised them by hand from birth, and were closely attached to each one.

The night I was telling you about was a cool night, just a little above freezing. We had a fire to keep warm. After our special messengers left, we talked about how it must have all come about. Probably the angels silently drifted downwards toward earth, hovering and taking up assigned positions. Then Gabriel moved to the front and gave a command. Instantly they were all totally visible, like a flash! The light was God's glory shining on earth. It was the brightest I've ever seen, but it didn't hurt my eyes. It was a relaxing, peaceful light. The sheep weren't even scared by it.

Then there was Gabriel. I'm telling you the guy was huge! He told us to not be afraid, but that he brought us good news of great joy for everyone. 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born you; He is Christ the Lord,' he said. 'This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

All the angels joined in shouting, 'glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.'

Our response was to just fall on our knees in praise and worship. It came naturally, without really thinking about it. We praised God for His faithfulness and keeping His promises to send the Messiah. We praised God for His power in coming as a baby. We praised God for His grace, mercy and love in sending the Messiah. We joined the angels in praising God for this wonderful news. We had often talked and speculated about the promised Messiah: would He come in our lifetime? Would we even know it if He did come? Would the nation receive Him? Most didn't care about God's promises anymore. We didn't have time to think about all of that -- things were just happening too quickly!

Naturally, we were very interested in seeing this Messiah baby. It sounded impossible, though, that the Messiah would be found in a feed trough in a cave! Why not the fanciest palace in Jerusalem? We didn't ask, we just went to town.

We left one man to watch the sheep. They were safe in the enclosure as long as one man sat in the entrance. The rest of us went to see the Messiah. To find Jesus you must be willing to leave all you have: occupation, possessions, even your own sleep and ease when necessary.

There He was, in a manger all right! We were the only ones who were told, it seems. What a privilege! I was struck by how small and helpless He seemed. Why didn't He come as a full-grown man, like Adam did? We were told about his miraculous conception, but his birth was as natural and normal as everyone else's. To be honest, it was hard to picture Him as God, sitting on David's throne forever, worshipped by all creation.

We had an excellent time with Mary and Joseph, talking and praising God. It was encouraging for them to have someone with whom to share their joy. It was confirming to them to hear us repeat what the angels told us. Also, it was inspirational for us to meet and know them. We wanted to serve God as completely as they were. In the months to come we spent many hours with them. We had a special bonding between us that lasted long after they moved.

This whole evening is one we would never forget. We left there, continually telling others what we had seen. We never tired of telling the story. It wasn't until many years later that we realized the culmination of the whole story and just how important this baby would be.

I thank you for listening to my story and sharing our fire. Before you leave, though, there's one more thing I'd like to say. This isn't just a history lesson. This is to show you the importance of worshipping and praising Jesus. We are created to glorify God.

We bring glory to God when we receive His free gift of salvation. Each time we admit sin and confess it, we are recognizing sin is our fault. When we make excuses, we are, in effect, blaming God for our sin. Taking the blame for our own sin glorifies God. When we live with an attitude of bringing glory to God in all we say and do instead of putting ourselves first, we are glorifying and worshipping God. Witnessing to others, of course, does the same. Trusting God, no matter what is a way of showing our love and faith. It complements Him by recognizing His sovereignty. Prayer, likewise, glorifies God by showing our need for Him. All these are ways of worshipping God.

There's no greater joy in life than comes when one is worshipping God. There's no better way to spend your time. God is certainly worthy of it and deserving of it. We'll be doing it for all eternity, so why not start now. Get a little taste of heaven on earth -- worship and praise God!"

By Simeon

Hello. My name is Simeon, or Simon. It's the same name, just written differently. It's a common name: Simon Peter, Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50), Simon the Leper from Bethany, Simon the father of Judas, and me. I had a common, everyday name, and lived a common, everyday life. I had no great social status, no office, no standing. I was a priest and considered that a great privilege, although most of the other priests considered it a nuisance and a burden. There were a small group of us who stayed faithful to Jehovah, loved His word, and awaited the promised coming Messiah. The others, however, just went through the motions of acting religious.

While Zacharias and most other priests lived in various parts of Palestine and took turns in the temple, I lived in Jerusalem all year round. I counted this a great privilege and loved to serve God in any way I could. I often thought of the promised deliverer God would send, and often looked at the babies I dedicated in the temple, wondering if one might be Him.

I was especially alert when I saw what happened to Zacharias after he came from the Holy Place and couldn't talk. Word spread that an angel had talked to him inside. I knew it was a foreshadowing of great things to come. I felt God assuring me through His Spirit that the Messiah would come during my lifetime, and I would actually get to see Him! How I would recognize Him I had no idea, I just left that to God.

One day it actually happened. It started like every other day. I was performing my duties in the temple: receiving sacrifices, singing with the priestly choir in the morning and afternoon, dedicating babies who were brought in, accepting offerings of cleansing, and serving in any way I could. One young couple, no different than anyone else, came in looking lost and confused. I immediately went to them to see if I could help. They came for the mother's purification from childbirth and the baby's dedication. As I spoke to them a strong impression came over me that this was the Messiah! At first, I was confused: this common family and baby were no different than thousands I had seen come through here. The feeling was so strong, though, that I couldn't deny its truth. I recognized immediately that this was God revealing truth to my spirit and I rejoiced in what was happening. My senses became sharper and I became more intensely involved in what was happening.

Despite the press of the crowds, the sounds of trumpets, singing, people shouting and animals moving about it was like we four were alone. I received the offering for the mother's purification. This was standard procedure. Childbirth and its accompanying pain were a constant reminder to women of the sin and uncleanness that came from Eve to all women. The innocent blood offering was a picture of God's coming Messiah shedding His innocent blood to pay for all sin. They were poor and could only offer the minimum sacrifice for the mother and son as well.

It was optional, but some Jewish couples chose to have their firstborn sons dedicated to the Lord when they reached 40 days old. This was recognizing that the firstborn belonged to God since He didn't take their lives in Egypt.

As I held the baby the reality of it all just washed over me. "Sovereign Lord," I said as I dedicated Him, "as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:29-30)." Tremendous peace and joy flooded my soul, such as I never had before or since.

I noticed the parents were aware that this was a very special time for me. I explained to them what God has been showing me. They told me their story about the baby's conception and birth. I was especially interested in the message to the shepherds. I knew many of the shepherds from the Bethlehem area, just 5 miles down the road, were part of the godly remnant, those few still loving God and awaiting the coming of His Messiah. Others were wanting the Messiah to come, but they looked for a military leader to lead a revolt and throw off the yoke of Roman

bondage. We knew better. What a blessed time we had talking there, in a world all of our own. I would think of that conversation many times in the years following it.

It was obvious God put us together on purpose. Not only was He keeping His promise and blessing me in a very special way, but He was providing friendship and encouragement for this young couple who felt so out of place in such a massive confusion of noise and turmoil. I could tell they immediately relaxed and a close bond was formed between us.

As the intensity of our conversation wore down, I started to become more aware of the swirl of activity around. I was no longer totally wrapped up in myself but started thinking of others who also were awaiting this Messiah. I couldn't wait to tell them He was here!

Then out of the corner of my eye I noticed Anna, a very, very old woman who had been a widow since her teens. She was an educated, talented woman who had a deep love for God. She was in the temple every moment the gates were open, worshipping God continually. She seldom even left to eat, preferring to fast often as she prayed and praised, her Maker and Creator. We had often talked of God's promises and shared together our hope in the soon coming of the Son of David.

Evidently, she had noticed me first, and seeing the focus of my attention started making her way through the crowd to us. God's Spirit had already firmly placed the thought in her mind that this was the Messiah, so I hardly had to say anything in the way of introduction or explanation. Her years of dedication and commitment to God gave her a special closeness, an insight few had into His workings. We listened in fascination to her words of praise and encouragement to the baby's parents. What a special woman she was! It was extra privilege to share my joy with someone as dear to all God's people as Anna.

Before long, though, I had to get back to my duties. Anna spent the rest of the day with them, showing them around the temple and rejoicing in God's work with them.

I never saw them again, but I never forgot the special time we shared together. I thought of it several times a day for the rest of my life. I talked to others about it, and so did Anna. Some of the younger priests were very interested, and I tried to encourage them to keep their faith in God and not fall into the patterns of hypocrisy and empty ritual that were so common everywhere. Young men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were especially interested, and I prayed often that the words we spoke to them would germinate and take root in their hearts. Who knew what the future would hold? I knew I wouldn't be alive when this baby grew to manhood, nor would Anna, but perhaps some we told these things to would be able to recognize and follow Him when He made His mission known. What a blessed privilege they would have. I envied them, but was ever so grateful for the opportunity God gave me that day to meet and hold His Son, my Savior.

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Talk about how Jesus came as a baby and grew up as a child, just like them. He had parents, brothers and sisters and had to learn to dress himself and feed himself just like they do. He knows what it is like because He was a young child once.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Talk about how Jesus came as a baby and grew up as a child. Focus on him going through all children today go through. He had to learn to obey His parents, get along with His brothers and sisters, be kind to others and help with the work at home. That can be hard sometimes, but we can ask Jesus for help because He knows just what it is like for us since He went through it all Himself.

3. JESUS IS BORN

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Why did God Himself come down to earth to be a person like us? *(Answers are in italics.)*
In order to die for our sins on the cross He had to be a man like us while also being God.

Why did God Himself come to earth as a baby instead of a grown man?
To go through everything we go through in life, so we know He understands.

Why was Jesus born in a dirty stable with animals instead of in a king's palace?
He was very humble and came to the common people, not just the rich and powerful.

Why do you think God chose shepherds to reveal His Son to?
They were rejected and looked down on by others but not by God. They followed Him.

How do you think seeing God's Son affected the shepherds? How did it change them?
They knew God remembered them and cared about them. Hopefully they lived for Him.

What would you have thought if you had seen baby Jesus in a manger in a stable?
(Answers will vary, let everyone answer as if they were there)

Do you think being born in a stable and growing up without a lot of money helps Jesus know what we go through because He went through it, too?
Yes, He knows what we go through, not just because as God He knows everything, but He knows because He went through it Himself.

What hard things are you facing now that Jesus also went through and understands?
(Let the children share difficulties they are facing)

Who were Simeon and Anna?
People who believed God would soon send His Son as Messiah. Anna was an old woman who spent all her time in the temple praising God and serving any way she could. Simeon was a priest working in the temple.

They waited a long time for God to answer their prayers but continued to patiently trust God. Do you ever get impatient when you have to wait for something?
(Let the people share examples and experiences)

What can you do to become more patient?
Pray each day for the fruit of the Holy Spirit, especially patience (Galatians 5:22-23)

4. MAGI VISIT **(Matthew 2:1-18)**

Read Out Loud: Matthew 2:1-18 **By the Magi**

In the final years BC, there was a strange kind of expectation for a coming King. Most educated and trained people were aware of this premonition. They thought He would come through Judah. This affected the whole mood of nations everywhere. The west (Rome) and east (Persia) both felt it. I want to tell you about what it was like to see this King of the universe face to face when He came! What a privilege that was!

Isaiah describes Him this way: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isaiah 6:1-3)."

John also saw Him and tells us about it: "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. ... From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. (Revelation 4:2-11)." I'm here to tell you that that King left heaven to come to earth, to be born in a cave to a young couple far from home. I know. I saw them! I am a Magi.

'Magi' is a Greek word that roughly translates to "wise men who are king-makers." We were not three but hundreds, we were not kings but king-makers, and weren't from the orient but near east. "Magi" is the name of the priestly tribe of the Medes, like Levi is among the Jews. We were skilled, capable, respectable and highly educated men. We held knowledge others had no access to, thus your word 'magic' comes from our name. We were so respected even bandits wouldn't rob us. We ruled as a body. We chose and trained the kings of the east.

We were very religious, having worshipped Zoroaster exclusively until Daniel came and became the top magi during his time in Babylon. He taught us about Yahweh (Daniel 2:10,27,48; 4:7,9; 5:11; 6:4) and a godly minority among us have followed Him from Daniel's time until now, 600 years later. We knew it was about time for this King of the Universe we waited for to be born. Daniel's prophecy that He would be cut off 483 years after the Jews were allowed to return to Israel was the key (Daniel 9:24-27). We knew He'd have to be born soon to grow up and fulfill that prophecy, for the time was almost up. We were watching the skies for a star to announce His coming. Balaam had prophesied a star out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17) and that's what we looked for.

When it appeared, we knew it was no natural event such as a conjunction of planets, a nova or a comet. It wasn't really a 'star' but was literally 'something that shines, blazes in an incredible way.' That's why the Bible doesn't use the normal word for 'star' to describe it (Matthew 2:2). It was really God's Shekinah glory coming to earth once again.

As trained astronomers, we were very interested in this event. As believers in God, we wanted to meet this King ourselves. We knew He was coming to Israel so we went to its capital, Jerusalem. That was a 5-month trip of 1,000 miles. It took months to get supplies collected and business taken care of so we could take this year-long trip. Dozens of us went, protected by a thousand of the best Calvary in the world, servants, luggage, etc. We all rode splendid horses; we were the best horsemen in the world at that time. Thousands of camels carried our baggage.

When we got to Jerusalem, we assumed this new King would be the talk of the town. Imagine our surprise when no one knew about Him and no one cared! People were more concerned about our visit than the birth of their King! Herod was particularly disturbed, and no one knew what he'd do.

You see, our country, Persia, was large and powerful while Rome was weak at this time. Jerusalem was almost defenseless with most of its soldiers gone to fight in Armenia. Thirty years before cavalry had come from Persia and chased Herod to Rome where he needed a large army to recapture his kingdom. We had come here to fight Rome in Palestine in 63 BC, 55 BC and 40 BC. To make things worse for Herod, the Jewish people would have supported us in a revolt if we started one. As it was, we had more than enough soldiers to take over the area. Everyone knew we were looking for a new king for Persia, and old Herod was so mentally sick he'd destroy anything that even seemed like a threat. The Jews were more upset about what he'd do to them than about us or the birth of their King.

Oh, they knew the prophecies about His being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and when we got that information from the religious rulers, we moved on to Bethlehem. Funny, none of them bothered making the 5-mile trip to see their King. That was hard for us to understand when we had come so far as such great expense to see THEIR King!

We knew the general direction of Bethlehem, but not where the boy would be. God's Shekinah glory appeared to move before us and lead us to His home in Bethlehem, the same as the Shekinah glory had gone before the Jews when they left Egypt to go to their promised land.

Mary and Joseph had stayed in Bethlehem with friends like Zachariah and Elizabeth nearby. Back home in Nazareth they would face gossip and rejection. Here they found peace and acceptance. They had long ago moved into a local home as Jesus turned from a baby to a toddler. They had been there almost a year when we arrived.

It was so wonderful seeing this One Whom we knew to be the King of the Universe: God Himself in human form. We bowed and worshipped Him and had a great time talking and sharing with His parents. It seemed to be very meaningful and encouraging to them to have us come so far. I guess the local ignorance of their Son and even the rejection they were facing was discouraging and confusing. They were quite young; it was surprising to see as much maturity in them as we did.

When you love someone, you want to give them gifts. We gave gifts to our God then and there. In our land we were more separated from Him, now we could make it up. We gave kingly gifts: gold (crowns were made of gold), frankincense (pure incense, used in worship to our pure God) and myrrh (ointment for dead bodies, recognizing that this God was also a man). We gave these gifts because of their significance. We could have given silver, diamonds or money but we felt these better expressed the praise and worship in our heart. We had no idea how poor they were, or that they would need these riches that very night to finance their sudden flight to Egypt and sojourn there for several years. God knew, and provided through us before they could even know their need and ask for His provisions.

When the neighbors saw us gone in the morning, and the family with the King gone, too, they assumed we had taken them back to Persia to make Him King there. I wish we could have done that, but it wasn't God's plan. When Herod tried to kill Him, God had already rescued Him. God has His plan and nothing would thwart it. Herod's soldiers did kill other young boys in Bethlehem when they got there, but not Jesus. It was too bad those 2 dozen or so boys had to die. They were the first casualties in this phase of the warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. I'm very glad I was on the side of the King!

Years later we heard that He had presented Himself as King (Matthew 21:5, etc.) but that He was rejected. Only a crown of thorns was given Him. One day, though, He will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19) and then all will be forced to bow in recognition of Him.

I'm glad we could voluntarily bow out of love and devotion, no matter how much it cost us. What about you? Is He your king? His kingdom now is in the hearts and lives of His people. Does He rule and reign as King of your heart and life? We were king-makers, but so are you. Only you can make Him King of your life!

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Talk about how far the magi came so they could give gifts to Jesus. We get gifts on Jesus' birthday, but what can we give Him? He wants our love.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Focus on the sacrifice the magi made to come give gifts and worship Jesus. What can we sacrifice for Him and give Him today? Read John 3:16 about what God gave us.

4. MAGI VISIT **QUESTIONS TO ANSWER**

Who were the magi (wise men)?

They were special men from the east (Persia) who appointed and trained kings in their country. They had heard about the Messiah from Daniel and came to worship Him.

Why do you think they stopped what they were doing, left their families and spent all that time and money to see Jesus?

They loved God and wanted to honor Him as well as see His Son, their Savior.

Why didn't the religious rulers go to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus, even though they knew He was born there?

They were too proud to humble themselves. They thought only of themselves.

How do you think the magi (wise men) felt when they saw Jesus?

It was the most special day of their lives and they thanked God for their Savior.

The magi (wise men) worshipped Jesus and gave Him gifts. Do you worship Him? Do you give Him gifts? What gifts does He want us to give?

(Let the people answer)

Why does Jesus want us to worship Him and give Him gifts today?

It is one way we can thank Him and show Him we love Him. That brings joy to Him.

What gifts does Jesus give you?

(Answers will vary)

What is the best gift Jesus ever gave you?

(Answers will vary)

Have you thanked Him for it? If not please thank Him right now.

(Let them pray and thank God for what He has done for them)

5. JOHN THE BAPTIST POINTS TO JESUS

(Matthew 3:1-12; 4:1-12; Mark 1:1-8, 14; 6:14-29; Luke 3:1-18; 9:7-9)

Read Out Loud: Matthew 3:1-12

By John the Baptizer

You know, every time I think about earth, I get this strange pain in my neck! I'm getting it right now. I wonder what causes that? Maybe it has to do with the last thing that happened when I was on earth. Let's see, what can I remember? I remember being in a dark, damp, cold and filthy dungeon for over a year. I remember trying to keep my faith in God despite the miserable conditions I found myself in. I was confused about the rejection of the Messiah I came to proclaim.

Then bright sunlight entered my cell as the door was thrust open. After weeks of darkness the light blinded me. Before I could see what was happening, I was dragged outside, beaten, hit, spit on, and then forced to kneel with my head over a cutting block. I remember thinking, "I going to die!" I didn't have any fear, just peace. I did have some unanswered questions: If Jesus was the Messiah, why were people rejecting Him? Why did He let them turn against Him -- and me? Did I do something wrong? Then instantly I was in His presence and everything was bright and warm and beautiful. Those questions no longer meant anything. It was all behind me and eternity with Jesus lay ahead. There was no more looking back. I guess you could say I was the first to lose my head for Jesus!

MY NAME IS YOKHANAN (or Yehohanan). You call me John, the one who baptized. I was the son of a priest. I won't tell you a lot about my birth, for I'm sure you know the story about Gabriel coming to my father (Luke 1). I had wonderful, godly parents. However, I didn't have them long enough. They were quite old when I was born, and when they died, I was on my own. I grew up in the wilderness wearing animal skins and eating locust and honey. I had taken a Nazarite vow, which meant I never cut my hair, ate grape products or touched a dead person or animal. I never married.

I could have been a priest, but knew that wasn't what God wanted. God was preparing me to be an evangelist for Him, but unlike your evangelists today. People had to make a 2-day trip to come see me. When there I pointed out their sins as clearly as possible (Mark 1:1-6). God was using me to be a 'herald' - one who went before a king telling people to get the roads fixed and country safe for his welcome. I did this by calling the people to be baptized as an outward sign of their inner repentance (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18).

I started in the fall of AD 29, near the time of Rosh Hashanah which focused on repentance. Since it was the start of a Sabbatical year when all planting and unnecessary work ceased for a year, many were free to come hear me preach. This turned the people's hearts to things of God.

I knew I was getting the people ready for the Messiah and was to point everyone to Him. I had an idea who He was from stories I heard from my mother and father when young. They told me about my cousin, Jesus, and His miraculous conception and special birth. I spent many hours studying the prophecies of the Messiah, and as far as I could tell He had fulfilled every one so far.

Still, when He came and asked me to baptize Him, I wasn't sure. We spent several evenings talking about this and the work God was starting through us. I felt HE should be baptizing ME! Still, I submitted to His will and baptized Him so He could identify with my message and the people's needs (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23). What a privilege that was -- the highlight of my life! Immediately He left for 40 days to seek God's will and spend time with God (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

By the time Jesus had returned, fall had turned to spring (we had no winter in our climate). It was the year AD 30. I was still baptizing in the Jordan River, moving up the Jordan Valley and living off the land. I later found out that the day Jesus was tempted by Satan was the same day I was tempted in the same way (John 1:19-34). The religious leaders came and thought I was the Messiah. I, too, was tempted to be proud and take God's glory as my own. With God's help, I didn't give in to pride. I told them I was just a voice, a spokesman for God. I wasn't the electricity, just the wire that conducted it.

When Jesus returned the next day, Friday, I told everyone he was the Lamb of God, come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:35-51). Some of my followers understood, but most were looking for a king to defeat the Roman armies. Saturday, I sent John and Andrew to Jesus and they invited James and Peter, their brothers. All of us were related in one way or another and had known each other to some extent before this time. On Sunday, when Jews could again travel, they took Philip and Nathanael and the whole group went to Cana to a family wedding. There Jesus would do His first miracle (John 2).

LET ME FINISH UP MY STORY, though. I continued to point my followers to Jesus, but less than a year later I was arrested for pointing out Herod's sin of adultery. After another year in prison, I was beheaded (Mark 6:17-29). I was willing to give my life for Jesus, the One who would give His life for me. I counted it a real privilege. It turned out I was just the first of many to do so.

Matthew suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city in Ethiopia. Mark was killed in Alexandria, after having been cruelly dragged through the streets of that city. Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in Greece. John was put into a cauldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner, and was afterwards banished to Patmos. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward. James the Greater was beheaded at Jerusalem. James the Less was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a fuller's club. Philip was hanged up against a pillar at Heiropolis in Phrygia. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, where he preached to his persecutors until he died. Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned, and then beheaded. Barnabas was stoned to death by the Jews at Salonica. Paul, after various tortures and persecutions, was beheaded in Rome by the Emperor Nero.

It hasn't stopped there. Believers have been persecuted and killed for their faith throughout the centuries. In the past year it's been estimated that 160,000 have died for their faith. More have died for Jesus during the last century than in all previous centuries combined. As the end gets near, Satan steps up his attack against God and his people. Don't be surprised. Jesus told you "In this world you will have trouble," but then He adds: "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). I was just a friend of the Bridegroom; YOU are the Bride (John 3:27-30). You have a much greater position and privilege in the kingdom. Love Him. Live for Him. And if necessary, die for Him. He's worth all that and more!

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: God sent John, Jesus' cousin, to be His friend and help Him. God sends you friends to help you as well. He wants you to be a friend who helps others as well.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Everyone needs friends. Jesus had John, His cousin, as a friend. John understood about Jesus' work for God. It was an encouragement for Jesus. God sends people to encourage you as you live for Jesus. He wants you to find others to befriend and help as well.

5. JOHN THE BAPTIST POINTS TO JESUS

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Who was John the Baptizer? (*Answers are in italics.*)

He was a cousin of Jesus' who God called to tell people that the Messiah was coming and then to tell his followers that Jesus was that Messiah.

What was his life and dress like?

He wore animal skins and ate locust and honey. He lived in the wilderness and dedicated his life to God.

What was his message to those who came to hear him?

He told them to repent and turn from sin so they would be ready to accept the Messiah when He came.

What does the term 'Messiah' mean?

It refers to God Himself who became man and was therefore God and man in One Person. He came to pay for the sins of the world so we could be in heaven with God.

Why did John use the term 'Lamb of God' to describe Jesus?

The Jews thought the Messiah would be a soldier who would lead armies against Rome, but that's not what Jesus came to do. By calling Him "Lamb of God" they would understand He was the fulfillment of the sacrifices of lambs they made at the temple. He was referring to the lamb who died on Passover so they would live. This is what Jesus came to do.

Which followers of John's became followers of Jesus?

John, Andrew, Peter, James, Philip and Nathanael.

How did John die?

John was beheaded when in prison.

What does 'martyr' mean? What other disciples were martyrs?

A martyr is someone who dies for their faith. All except John were martyred, including Paul.

Why does God sometimes allow His people to die early and horrible deaths?

We don't know why God sometimes allows His people to die early and horrible deaths. We know He has a reason, though, and that everything He does is done out of love for us. Sometimes it is for a lesson or message to others. Always, though, it is to glorify Himself in some way and that is what we all want to do in life and in death.

If God willed it, would you be willing to die for Him?

He died for us and paid for all our sins for all eternity, so if we would die for Him, it would just mean we would go to heaven sooner. It would be an honor and privilege if God chose that for us. That is His choice to make, but it is up to us to live for Him each day. Sometimes living for Jesus can be harder than dying for Him.

What can you do to live for Jesus today? How can you show Him by your life?

Answers will vary, but by living as Jesus would in love and forgiveness, in kindness and joy we can show others what Jesus is like.

6. BAPTISM OF JESUS

(Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23)

Read Out Loud Matthew 3:13-17

By John the Baptizer

One of the most exciting moments in American history was when Colonel Travis drew a line in the dust at the Alamo and Jim Bowie, Davey Crockett and 130 others crossed the line to volunteer to die for the freedom of others. It's a recurring theme in history. There is the lone Calvary soldier who stays behind to hold up the Indians for a few minutes so the rest of the troop can escape to freedom. Or there is the doughboy in World War I who goes behind enemy lines to destroy a machine gun nest so his buddies can safely advance, knowing he won't make it back. Then there is the World War II pilot who doesn't bail out of his plane when hit but stays with it to make sure it crashes safely and not where others will be killed. Or it may be the marine in Viet Nam who dives on a live grenade to take the impact in his own body and save the others in his patrol. Many examples could be given, but the greatest one happened 2000 years ago in a place called Palestine. I was the one to draw the line in the dust for my cousin Jesus to cross over. He is the one who took the stand, who was willing to die for us all.

IT HAPPENED THIS WAY. God had called me, John, to be the herald of the Messiah, the one announcing the way and telling everyone that He was coming (Mark 1:1-6). I had been preaching and baptizing at the Jordan River. My message was one of repentance from sin and turning to God for cleansing, as pictured in baptism (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18). The Jordan River was only about 10 feet wide and not very deep. Many traveled for several days to come hear me. Most who came responded, but others came to mock and spy for the religious leaders. It was the fall, near Rosh Hashanah, when the focus is on repentance, of AD 29. Since the Sabbatical year was just starting people were thinking more of spiritual things and they had more time to come to hear me.

It was about this time that Jesus lay down his tools for the last time, took a slow breath, gave his father Joseph a long hug and walked out of the carpenter shop for the last time. He went home, got a few things, said good-bye to Mary and headed south. They had anticipated this day for a long time and often talked about it. They were all excited about what was to come, but it was still a very solemn, serious time.

During the 60 mile walk to be find me Jesus had plenty of time to think. He could have turned back at any time and no one would have known. But He didn't.

WHEN JESUS ARRIVED where I was baptizing, he spent several days on the fringes of the crowd, watching and thinking, awaiting God's perfect timing. One evening when I was alone, He approached me. We talked through most of the night. We had heard about each other often from our parents. The last time we were together we were too young to remember. We talked about family, for we were relatives. There was an instant rapport between us, for we each knew our lives were intertwined in God's will. We were the only two who realized what was about to happen, and even our understanding was very foggy and incomplete. Still, we really appreciated the support we received from each other.

We disagreed, though, about who should baptize whom! I realized I was to obey and serve Him, so I baptized Him. Although He was sinless it was His way of identifying with my message as well as the people he came to save. What an event that baptismal was! I'll never forget it. The heavens opened and God's Spirit came down. God Himself voiced His approval of this step of obedience Jesus was taking (Matthew 3:13-17; 1:9-11; 3:21-23). What made it such a big deal was that it was a public commitment to be the Messiah, a stepping across the line in front of everyone. The line was crossed. His mission had begun. However, someone else was watching and realized He was the Messiah. That was Satan.

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Jesus was obeying God. It made God very happy and He said so from heaven. When we obey God, it makes Him happy as well.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Talk about the meaning and purpose of baptism as a public testimony of dying and coming back to life with Jesus. Jesus did it to obey God and so should we. It shows everyone we want to follow Jesus and live for Him.

6. BAPTISM OF JESUS

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Why was Jesus baptized? *(Answers are in italics.)*

It was God's way to show everyone that He was identifying with John's message and the people's sin. He didn't have sin to be removed, but He was showing He was a person like them. God wanted Him to be baptized and He obeyed.

What happened when Jesus was baptized and why?

God's Holy Spirit came upon Him in a special way to enable Him to do the work of the Messiah. God Himself said that He was pleased with Jesus' commitment to follow Him.

Why was God so pleased with Jesus?

Because He was submitting His will to God the Father and was willing to be the One who paid for the sins of the whole world.

If Jesus was God, why did He need the Holy Spirit to help Him?

Philippians 2:5-11 says that when God the Son became the man Jesus, He voluntarily laid aside that part of His deity that would have made life easier so He could face everything as we face it. He was sinless and holy, but He voluntarily laid aside His power and knowledge as God so He'd face life and death as we do. He had to do that to be our substitute. He did His miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's why He spent so much time in prayer.

Why was being baptized so significant to Jesus?

He was publicly committing Himself to follow God's will for His life and be the Messiah. By doing so His ministry was beginning. Others would know and so would Satan.

Why didn't John want to baptize Jesus?

He didn't think He was worthy. He knew who Jesus was and felt Jesus should baptize him.

Why are Christians today baptized?

It is our way of showing everyone that we died with Jesus (under the water) and have come back to new life in Him (up out of the water). The water doesn't cleanse, only Jesus' blood cleanses. But doing it in water publicly shows everyone we have accepted Jesus as Savior and want to live for Him.

Will a person go to heaven if they have accepted Jesus as Savior but have not been baptized?

Yes. We should want to be baptized to follow God but that doesn't add to our salvation. The thief on the cross with Jesus wasn't baptized but Jesus said he would be in heaven.

Have you been baptized? What did it mean to you?

(Answers will vary as they share)

After you have been baptized, what can you do to show that you love Jesus?

(Answers will vary)

7. TEMPTATION OF JESUS

(Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)

Read Out Loud: Matthew 4:1-11

By John the Baptizer

The strangest thing happened after I, John, baptized Jesus. I thought He'd start gathering followers and speaking the everyone, but He didn't. Immediately He left us and went into the wilderness to get alone with God to pray, commune, ask for guidance and direction, and have time to think. God's Spirit drew Him (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). For 40 days Jesus prayed, worshipped and strengthened His commitment to follow God's will for Him.

Jesus had often been tempted growing up. He faced all the normal temptations children, adolescents, young adults and then single adults face. He even felt them more keenly because that contrasted so sharply with His innocence and perfection. But none of those temptations was anything like what He was hit with in the wilderness. He had been tempted to draw back and not be baptized, to not even leave the carpentry shop. Now the temptations took a new turn.

For one thing, they came at a time when He was very tired and vulnerable. After fasting for 40 days a person is very, very hungry! He was drained physically, emotionally and spiritually. He was ready to show everyone He was the Messiah, the Savior of the world. That's when Satan hit Him, offering Him easy ways to be the Messiah, so He wouldn't obey God completely.

Some may wonder if Jesus could really be tempted. He certainly could. Could He sin? Yes and no. When He became man, He set aside the use of divine attributes which would have made His life as a man easier, things such as being able to know everything, do anything and be everywhere at once (Philippians 2:6-8). He was still God in that He was perfect, holy, righteous and just. As a man, He was able to sin, but as God He couldn't. If He would have sinned in His humanity, His deity would have stopped it. However, He resisted sin in His humanity and therefore never had to have sin stopped by His deity. Sin would have disqualified Him as our substitute on the cross. It's like a car with a control that won't let it go over 65 MPH, but the driver never goes that fast so it never needs to kick in. Jesus was God. He could have sinned but He didn't. He was certainly tempted to, though! His temptation was just as strong as ours, even more so.

He was tempted PERSONALLY, to reactivate His power as God and make stones into bread so He could eat. It would have meant impatience at God's timing and providing for Himself instead. He was then tempted NATIONALLY, to throw Himself down from the temple where everyone would be impressed as angels caught Him. They surely would have seen Him as God and crowned Him Messiah then and there, but He knew the cross had to come before the crown. Finally, He was tempted UNIVERSALLY. Satan offered Him rulership over the whole world. He was offering Him the authority he got from Adam when Adam sinned. This temptation worked with the first perfect man, Adam, so Satan was sure it would work with the second as well. But it didn't. Again, Jesus knew He had to obey God's timing only, and He could not rule the world without first going to the cross. The end never justifies the means.

At His baptism Jesus was proclaimed Messiah. At His temptation He was proven Messiah by defeating His number one challenger. There would be more battles, that was sure. But for now, the issue was decided. Angels came and ministered to Jesus, feeding and encouraging Him.

How does this apply to us? If Jesus took such a stand for us, we must also take a stand for Him. Jesus is worth dying for, but Jesus is also worth living for! We, too, can have victory over sin and temptation, but only in God's strength, never in our own.

This story illustrates the point nicely. A modern jet on the runway was a beauty. It was equipped with the latest technology and weaponry. The jet could fly at supersonic speeds, and quickly race to great heights. If an enemy plane were in the vicinity, the jet's pilot could destroy that plane miles away, before the plane's pilot could even see him. An Air Force pilot climbed into the jet and off he flew, leaving the earth far behind as he soared above the clouds. Although no one was looking, the pilot straightened himself in his seat. He was naturally proud of his jet, and of himself for qualifying to fly such a wonderful weapon. After he reached cruising altitude, the pilot heard a strange noise. He took off his helmet, and recognized the noise--it sounded like someone gnawing on rubber or plastic. Peering down below the instrument panel, to his horror the pilot saw a rat, out of his reach and gnawing on the main electrical wire between the jet's controls and its engine. If the rat were to cut through that line, the jet would careen out of control, and crash immediately. The pilot's first instinct was to descend--an emergency landing. But he had flown so far that there was not enough time to land. So, he decided to ascend-- the rat couldn't breathe at a higher altitude. The pilot put on his oxygen mask, boosted power to the jet's engine, and quickly climbed as high as he could go. Soon the gnawing sound ended. When the pilot landed safely, he found the rat--dead. The only way we can have victory over sin, the only way we can stand for Jesus, is to live above this world and move as close to Jesus as possible. If that isn't where you are, you're in danger!

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: We will all be tempted to sin. Sin is when we disobey parents or God. Even Jesus was tempted. Children are tempted to lie, steal, disobey or fight with others. So was Jesus, but He never did. Ask God for help to make you like Jesus and not sin.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Sin is doing or thinking anything that Jesus wouldn't do or think. Jesus overcame temptation by quoting Bible verses. It is important to memorize Bible verses, like Jesus did, so we can quote them when we are tempted.

7. TEMPTATION OF JESUS **QUESTIONS TO ANSWER**

Is this the first time Jesus was ever tempted? *(Answers are in italics.)*

No. He was tempted growing up the same as we are.

What made these temptations different from others?

When we commit to following God and are doing His will, Satan always attacks harder. He focuses on our real needs but tries to get us to meet them on our own instead of waiting for God to provide. The things Jesus was tempted to do weren't 'wrong' but they weren't God's perfect will for Him at that time. He tempts us in the same way.

If Jesus was God and was sinless and perfect, could He have given in to the temptation and sinned?

Yes. Jesus had a free will like us. He didn't have a sin nature. He was like Adam before Adam sinned in Eden. If Jesus would have sinned, He couldn't have been our Savior for He would have been guilty of His own sins. God cannot sin, but Jesus resisted temptation as a person, just like us.

What were the three temptations Satan offered Him?

1. Make stones into bread: instead of waiting for God to provide for Him, He would take things into His own hands and feed Himself. Satan wants us to be impatient and not wait for God but to do things our own way instead.

2. *Throw Himself down from the temple: everyone would be impressed to see angels catch Him and they would make Him Messiah and King – but He wouldn't go to the cross to pay for our sins. Satan offers us short-cuts so we can make life easier for ourselves, but that's not God's way.*

3. *Offered rulership over the whole world: this worked when Satan tried it with Adam ("make you like God") but it didn't work with Jesus. Jesus knew He had to trust God's way and God's timing. Again, He would have avoided the cross if He followed Satan. Satan always tries to make His way seem easier, but it is worse in the long run. Satan wants us to find the easy way in life, without difficulties, but that isn't God's will.*

What did Jesus do to resist? How was He able to have victory?

He knew God's will because He knew the Bible. He quoted the Bible each time. Each quote was from Deuteronomy. The Word of God is our weapon, our sword (Eph 6:17).

Do you know any Bible verses by memory? Which ones?

(Let them say the Bible verses they know)

What are some of the temptations Satan uses against Christians today?

(Answers will vary)

What Bible verses can you memorize and use against these temptations?

(Answers will vary – have them say the Bible verse from memory or look it up and read it. They can write down a list of verses to use for different temptations). Listed below are some Bible verses to use for various temptations. Spend lots of time making sure they know verses they can use:

Victory is Promised: I Corinthians 15:57; I Chronicles 29:11; Proverbs 21:31; I John 5:4, 18; Rev. 12:11; 15:2; Romans 8:37; II Corinthians 2:14; John 16:33

God Promises to Fight for Us: I Samuel 14:47; Jeremiah 1:8

God Is Always with Us: Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 18:20; John 14:16, 21; Revelations 3:20

God Hears & Answers Prayer: Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; Jeremiah 33:3

We will never Be Separated from God: Romans 8:35-39; John 10:27-29; 3:36; 5:24

God Will Meet All Our Needs: Philippians 4:19; Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32; I Samuel 12:24

There Is No Need to Worry: Matthew 6:25,34; I Peter 5:7; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 5:38-39; Psalm 37:1-9; Jude 24

God Promises His Care & Protection: Deuteronomy 33:27; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 23:24; 32:7

God uses all our problems and troubles for our growth and his glory: Romans 8:28-29

You Won't Ever Face Anything You Can't Handle with God's Help: I Corinthians 10:13

Peace Is Available No Matter What: John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; II Timothy 1:7

Trials Are Allowed to Bring Spiritual Growth: Psalm 119:67,71,75; 94:12; Isa. 48:10; Rom. 5:3

The Believer Has Nothing to Fear: Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; I Samuel 17:45-47; II Samuel 22:33-35,40-41

God Will Give Us Courage: Proverbs 38:1; I Corinthians 16:13; II Timothy 1:7

Power of the Word of God: Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11; 59:21; Psalm 119:81, 105, 111-112; Proverbs 30:5; Lamentations 2:17; 3:37; Matthew 24:35; John 5:24; 8:51; 15:7; Romans 10:17

8. NICODEMUS – BORN AGAIN

(John 2:23 – 3:21)

Read Out Loud: John 3:1-21

By Nicodemus

Well, it's finished. We just buried Him. I don't think I'll ever get used to seeing a body after it's been crucified. It hardly looks human anymore! This time is the worst of all. A million emotions flooded my heart: grief, sorrow, but especially guilt and remorse. It's funny how you see things differently AFTER an event than before. Too often fear rules and dominates. Then afterwards one is left with only regrets. I've had more than my share, but none worse than my fear of letting others know I was a follower of Jesus. I lived with that mistake, but maybe my story can help you not do the same thing. I hope so, for regret is a miserable emotion to live with.

MY NAME IS NICODEMUS. I was a leading religious ruler in Israel. I held a high, powerful position. I was very rich and influential. I was extremely well educated and one of the top scholars of my day. You could say I had it all -- outwardly that is. I guess I had too much, because I didn't want to jeopardize it for what REALLY mattered.

My story starts in the summer of AD 30. It was the time of the Passover. Jesus was in Jerusalem with some of His followers and had just cleansed the temple (John 2:13-22). I could understand why He did it, but I knew it wouldn't be a popular move! In one way I wanted to learn more about Him, for what I had heard and seen appealed to the emptiness inside me. But I didn't want to risk losing my hard-won position and prestige. I never liked to be criticized. So, I came to Jesus as night (John 2:23 - 3:21).

It was more convenient then, too, for we were both busy during the day. Also, it was the only time we could have privacy for people were always around him all day. What I heard that night changed my life forever! It's like Jesus knew the inner emptiness and longing of my heart, like He understood it better than I did. He showed me the solution wasn't in external religious observance, but in an inner new birth. I needed a personal relationship with Him, not the admiration of my peers, to meet my need. My pride and fear kept me spiritually blinded to what he was saying. In the weeks and months that followed, however, I couldn't forget them. As I investigated His claims, I came to believe that He was God, the Messiah come to earth. I put my faith in Him and considered myself a supporter and follower of His, but I never let anyone know. I was afraid of what they would say for I knew the other leaders hated Him.

THAT WAS ME. I remember one time, about 2 years after I spoke with Jesus, when the Sanhedrin was talking about Jesus and how to get rid of Him. It was obvious they were jealous of Him and His popularity. I couldn't stand it any longer so I spoke up, but what I said was very weak. "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51). It was better than silence, but not much better. My fear still controlled me. You know, usually the fear itself is worse than the thing we fear! So, it was with me. I can see how Satan was using my fear to keep me silent. His lie was that I would suffer more than I could bear if I stood up for what I believed.

I CONTINUED TO PUT OFF taking a public stand for Jesus. Five months later it was too late. "One of these days" is none of these days. I missed my opportunity. Caiaphas had his way. Judas played right into their hands. Jesus was dead. I never had taken a public stand for him. I knew I wasn't going to be mocked, for no one knew of my faith but me! Instead of feeling safe I just felt miserable. Fear does that to a person.

When I heard that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body, I offered to help him. I didn't know he was a secret follower as well. Who else among our number were? None of us spoke out. What if I would have spoken out, might several others have then found the courage to follow my lead? I'll never know. We all took the easy way.

Anyway, I made it known publicly where I stood by helping bury Him (John 19:39). That night I couldn't help remembering the earlier night 2 ½ years ago, when I listened to His words. If only I'd have chosen differently. If only I'd have taken a stand for Him like He took for me! Instead, I had the shame, guilt and regret of letting my fear rule my decisions.

BUT GOD WAS GRACIOUS. He forgave me and used me anyway. Yes, I ended up losing all I had among the Jews, as I feared would happen. You know, though, when it did happen it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be! I had something so much more important to me now, something that REALLY met my inner needs. I had Jesus and my faith in Him.

I was baptized by Peter and John. I had to leave Jerusalem and eventually was killed for my faith. It was all worth it, though! Jesus was always with me helping me through it all. He will help you, too, if you stand up for Him. Don't be like me and live with regrets. Don't wait until it is too late, like I did! Don't put Jesus off. He won't let you down!

I recall a story about a man who had to cross a wide river on the ice. He was afraid it might be too thin, so he began to crawl on his hand and knees in great terror. He thought he might fall through at any moment. Just as he neared the opposite shore, all exhausted, another man glided past him nonchalantly sitting on a sled loaded with iron. If the ice was strong enough for all that weight it was strong enough for the man who was crawling as well. How like some Christians! They are headed for Heaven but they live in fear thinking God's promises aren't strong enough to hold them. They need only to look at Isaiah 12:2 to realize that God is their salvation and the Lord is their strength and song. By resting completely upon Him and taking His promises at face value, we can drive out the paralyzing fear that hinders our effectiveness in serving Christ. The biblical antidote always works: "I will trust, and not be afraid."

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Psalm 118:6

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Read John 3:16 and talk about it. Talk about God's love for them. Give examples of God's love from the Bible and daily life.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Explain what Jesus means by being "born again." Physical birth brings physical life and spiritual birth brings spiritual life. After birth comes growth. Babies eat and grow. They learn to talk and walk. The same is true spiritually. We grow by learning the Bible. We learn to obey God. Memorize John 3:16 if possible.

8. NICODEMUS – BORN AGAIN

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Why did Nicodemus go to see Jesus at night? *(Answers are in italics.)*

It was more convenient since both were busy during the day and couldn't have privacy to talk. Perhaps Nicodemus didn't want anyone to know what he was doing.

Jesus told Nicodemus he had to be "born again" (John 3:3). What does that mean?

It means we must be born spiritually. Our physical bodies came alive at our physical birth. We come alive spiritually when we are born spiritually. When we accept Jesus as Savior the Holy Spirit lives in us and gives us new life.

Can you say John 3:16 by heart? If not, it is a good verse to memorize.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Why didn't Nicodemus take a stand for Jesus before the Sanhedrin (John 7:45-51)?

He was afraid of what others would say because most of the men were against Jesus. They would have criticized him and he might have lost his position and job.

When do you face fear of standing up for Jesus? What is it hard for you to talk about Him?

(Answers will vary)

What can you do to overcome fear?

Pray for courage. Memorize Bible verses about fear and quote them as soon as something you start feeling fear. Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; I Samuel 17:45-47; II Samuel 22:33-35,40-41

What are some Bible verses you can quote when you are afraid?

(Answers will vary. You can use verses at the end of the teaching session.)

Why did Nicodemus take a stand and let everyone know he believed in Jesus after the crucifixion when he didn't do that before?

He realized Jesus was God and Messiah even before the crucifixion. He knew he should have taken a stand for Jesus much earlier so knew he couldn't deny Him anymore,

Tell about a time when you took a stand for Jesus and how it turned out.

(Answers will vary)

What did you learn from that experience?

(Answers will vary)

What advice would you give someone who was afraid?

(Answers will vary)

9. JESUS' DISCIPLES

(Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9-13; 10:24-42; 16:24-28; Mark 1:16-20; 3:13-19; Luke 5:10-11; 6:21-16; John 1:19-51)

Read Out Loud: Matthew 9:9-13

(There are two stories to use with this lesson. You can use all of them or pick which you want to use. You can even make this lesson last more than one week.)

By Matthew

Day after day I say in my booth by the road Via Maris. Business was good. I could charge the people any amount I wanted for their tax, as long as I turned some of it over to Rome. It was an easy way to get rich fast. Of course, I wasn't very popular, especially not with the Jews. They rejected me, saw me as a traitor, because I was cheating them and working for the hated Romans. I wasn't even allowed in their synagogues, but who needs them! I was rich and secure. Still, I must admit that my money meant less and less to me as I got older. It just wasn't bringing the happiness and peace I thought it would.

Then I saw Him coming down the road. He regularly paid taxes to me. I had heard of His teachings and miracles, of His talks about forgiveness and the coming Kingdom of God. Whenever He came, I always avoided eye contact with Him, for it made me feel guilty and dirty. Still, He was always nice to me. In fact, several times He talked to me about a better life, about giving up all this to follow Him. A few years earlier I would have laughed at the idea. He didn't have any money, not even a home -- He had nothing! How could being a penniless traveler be better than being rich and powerful? Lately, though, I found myself thinking about Him quite often. I felt strangely drawn to Him, even wondering what it would be like to give it all up and follow Him. I didn't think about it for long, though, because I never thought He'd have me! Still, I envied those who could be with Him. I decided I could help His cause best by staying away from Him.

One day He stopped at my table and I was surprised. I knew He'd moved here, to Capernaum, from Nazareth (Matthew 4:13-16). It had something to do with being rejected in His home town (Luke 4:16-30) -- I knew what that was like! But why had He come to my booth? He didn't owe any taxes, what did He want?

"FOLLOW ME" He said (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). I was stunned! He not only spoke to me, but He wanted me to travel with Him. He wanted me to identify myself with Him. He was even willing to identify Himself with me. All of a sudden it seemed like a great idea! Why not? I thought -- life is empty this way. Having a lot of money isn't all I thought it would be. There was just something about Him that attracted me. I realized I had made the decision inside long ago, I just never thought it would be possible! I closed up my books, shut the booth and left. I followed Him from then on. I sold the booth and business and returned as much dishonest gain as I could to the people I had cheated. I used the rest of my money to help support Jesus and His followers. People were shocked that I'd want Him, but I think they were even more shocked that He'd want me! It was the best move I've ever made!

One of the first hurdles I faced was getting along with my new fellow followers of Jesus. We had been enemies for years, and it took a bit of work on both sides to see each other as friends and comrades. The fishermen were the hardest, for they were the most outspoken in criticism. Before long they saw I was sincere in my faith and we became friends.

CAPERNAUM, despite being a good agricultural area, was mainly a fishing town. Capernaum was right on the Sea of Galilee. The lake was 8 miles by 12 miles. It was shaped like a pear. Jesus did most of His miracles and teaching on the banks of this lake. Jews loved fish much

more than red meat, and were willing to pay dearly for it. Commercial fishing flourished. It was done by nets which had floats on one edge and weights on the other. A second boat, or a fisherman in the water, would pull the net together, trapping fish inside. It was hard, tiring, often frustrating work. When not fishing the men spent many long hours cleaning and repairing their nets, for they were constantly tearing or decaying. Mushy, briny and sardines were the main fish that were caught.

I remember one day, about a month before Jesus called me from my booth, that I was watching Peter, Andrew, James and John come in from a long night of fishing. They didn't catch anything. They had just cleaned the nets and were ready to go to bed when Jesus told them to go out into deep water and try again (Luke 5:1-10). Everyone knew it was the wrong time of day and wrong place to fish, plus the nets would need to be cleaned and dried all over again! I was surprised to see them obey, but even more surprised to see the great number of fish they caught! It really hit Peter hard, for that's when he realized that Jesus truly was God. Jesus' response to them all was, "Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men!" (Luke 5:10)

He invited them to follow Him, "Come, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). Several of these fishermen followed. Actually 8 of Jesus' 12 disciples were fishermen. Little did I know that Jesus would very soon come and call me to leave my work and follow Him, too. "Fishers of men." The phrase stuck with me and I thought of it as I began following Jesus. There obviously was a real similarity between fishing for fish and bringing others to Jesus.

For one thing, we need to **FISH actively**. We can't sit back and wait for the fish catch themselves! We are to be fishers of men, not keepers of the aquarium. We can't be fearful of rejection, as Nicodemus was. Also, fishermen must **go after the fish**. They must go to where the fish are. Sometimes it is inconvenient and costly, but it must be done. Fishing must be done **seriously**, too. It is not just a fun pastime for God's children. Fishermen in Galilee had to catch fish or starve. Fishing for men is more serious, for what happens to the fish that aren't caught? They end up in hell forever.

Because of this we must fish **determinedly**. The purpose of fishing is to catch fish! Fishermen weren't showing off equipment or working on their suntan. They were determined to catch fish. In order to do this, they must fish **tactfully**. Different fish are caught by different bait. Some are caught best in groups, others alone. It takes study and skill, experience and work to get good at it. Jesus 'fished' differently for the woman at the well (John 4) than he did for Nicodemus (John 3). Thus, fishermen must fish **continually**. They aren't going to catch any fish if they don't have their net or bait in the water. When not fishing, they are getting ready for the next time they fish: repairing and cleaning nets, etc. We, too, must be continually fishing or getting ready to fish. Time spent in prayer and Bible study is essential to successful fishing.

Most fishermen fish **lovingly** -- they enjoy what they do. That is to be our sacrificial motive for telling others about Jesus. Our purpose is to lead them to believe in Jesus. For this to happen we must fish **patiently**. Fishing is hard, difficult work that takes lots of patience. Animals that eat fish are patient when trying to catch them. Finally, fishermen on the Sea of Galilee had to fish **cooperatively**. They are more effective when they work together. Jesus sent out His disciples two by two.

"**COME,**" He said, "and I will make you fishers of men." If we do the COMING then He will do the MAKING. We can't make ourselves fishers of men, but we can offer ourselves as available for Him to make fishermen of us.

Following this Jesus went out with His new disciples so they could learn to fish for men following His example. He taught, healed and cast out demons (Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 1:21 - 2:12; Luke 4:31 - 5:26). When He invited me to follow Him, I immediately followed (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). I invited all my friends to my house to meet Jesus (Matthew. 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39). I wanted them to find what I had found, and many of them did.

I spent the next 3 years with Jesus, and after He died, I stayed in Judea for a dozen years, preaching and witnessing. Then I went to Ethiopia and Persia. Since I was well educated, I was able to speak to kings about my Savior. I wrote the Gospel of Matthew, too. I had good response there, reaping what the wise men (Magi) had sown a generation before. I died in Egypt having my head split open with an ax. I was a tax collector, I was a disciple, but mainly I was a fisher of men. Are you?

By A Disciple

A certain man wanted to sell his house for \$2,000 and a poor man wanted to buy it but only had \$1,000. After much bargaining the owner agreed to sell for only \$1,000 with just one condition: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door. After a while the original owner wanted house back. He found carcass of a dead animal and hung it from the single nail he still owned. The new owner couldn't remove it for the nail wasn't his. Soon the smell of the decaying animal made the house unlivable and family had to move. They lost everything because of one small nail. If we leave even one small peg of sin in our life, Satan will hang all his rotten garbage on it and make our life miserable.

THAT'S WHAT JESUS was trying to teach us when He called us to be disciples of His. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt 11:28-29). Most men looking for volunteers paint a rosy picture for their followers: benefits and blessings. Jesus warned us to count the cost, to make sure we knew what we were getting into.

He made sure we understood that salvation was a simple matter: realizing that each one of us was guilty before God and that He, because He was holy and just, had to punish sin. Jesus came to die in our place to take that punishment so we could be forgiven and go to heaven. That is salvation. Discipleship is a different matter. It means taking another step with Jesus after salvation, that of submission to God's will and doing His work. Salvation concerns sins being forgiven so man can live with God in eternity, but discipleship is for those who would live their lives on this earth as Christ lived His. But it isn't easy! Jesus said we had to "take up our cross daily" to follow Him (Luke 9:23). That means dying to ourself and what we want and living for Him.

"In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the disobedience and worldliness among many Christians today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of ourself and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility." (A. W. Tozer, 1897-1963)

PAUL puts it this way in Romans 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will." Jesus gave up everything for us, He asks us to give up everything for Him.

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Children are to follow, obey, trust and learn from their parents. God is our heavenly Father and we are to follow, obey, trust and learn from Him. God uses our parents to teach and take care of us.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Explain the difference between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is a free gift we just receive. It doesn't cost us anything because Jesus paid the price. Discipleship comes after salvation. We promise to live for Jesus and obey Him. That costs us a lot because we do what He wants, not what we want.

9. JESUS' DISCIPLES

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Who was Matthew and what did he do for a living? *(Answers are in italics.)*

He was a tax collector, someone hated by the people because he collected taxes for Rome. He overcharged and kept extra the money for himself.

Why would Jesus want someone like Matthew to be a disciple?

Jesus loves and wants everyone to follow Him, no matter what they have done. He knew Matthew was searching for something more in life and only Jesus could fill that need.

Why did Matthew give up his job and money to follow Jesus?

He knew that money didn't satisfy and only Jesus could give him the peace and meaning he so greatly needed.

What did Jesus mean when He called people to become "fishers of men"?

He wanted them to bring people into God's kingdom by telling them about Jesus.

What are some of the similarities between fishing and bring people to Jesus?

Fish actively – don't wait for the fish/people to come to you, go to them

Fish where the fish are – go after the fish

Fish seriously – what happens to those who don't come to Jesus?

Fish determinedly – main goal is to catch fish/win people for Jesus

Fish tactfully – different fish/people respond to different things, treat each one separately

Fish continually – fishermen stick to it; we are to always be looking for people to talk to

Fish lovingly – enjoy what you do, it's a great privilege and opportunity

Fish patiently – must be patient to catch fish or bring people to Jesus

Fish cooperatively – fishermen and Christians are to work together for God

What is a disciple?

Someone who is a Christian and lives for Jesus in their daily life.

What is the difference between being a Christian and a disciple?

All disciples are Christians but not all Christians are disciples. Becoming a Christian is the first step. We freely receive God's gift of salvation by grace. It doesn't cost us anything, Jesus paid it all. That means the Holy Spirit dwells in us and we will go to heaven when we die. Then the issue is who we will live for each day: self or Jesus? Becoming a disciple is making a life-long commitment to live for Jesus and serve Him. That does cost us a lot, because we do what He wants instead of living for ourselves and our sinful desires. It doesn't earn or keep salvation

Are you a disciple? If so, did you start living for Jesus at salvation or sometime later? When?
(Answers will vary)

Is it hard or easy to be a disciple? Why?

Very hard for we are naturally self-centered and want others to serve us. To put others first and serve them and God is costly. We must forgive, love, spend time with God, and trust Him in all things. But that is the best way to live our lives!

THE 12 DISCIPLES

NAME	RELATION	HOME	OCCUPATION BEFORE JESUS	MINISTRY	DEATH
ANDREW	Son of Jonas & Joanna Brother of Peter	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); then ministered in Ephesus, Russia, Scythia Greece	Tied on an "X" cross in Scythia, preached 2 days until dead 11-30-69
NATHANAEL (Bartholomew)	Unknown	Cana	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); ministered with Philip in Asia Minor, Armenia	Flayed alive, beheaded, cast into sea by barbarian king Astyages
JAMES (son of Thunder)	Son of Zebedee**	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18)	Beheaded by Herod Antipas, 44 AD Acts 12:1-2
JAMES the Less	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Fisherman	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Palestine & Egypt	Crucified in Egypt
JOHN	Son of Zebedee**	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 3; 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Wrote John, I, II, III John, Rev, Ephesus (with Mary), Patmos	Natural death (very old) - attempts to martyr him failed
JUDAS (Jude, Thaddaeus)	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Fisherman	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Assyria & Persia	Beaten to death in Persia/Syria with a large club
JUDAS (Ischariot)	Unknown	Judea (only one not from Galilee)	Treasurer	None	Suicide
MATTHEW (Levi)	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Tax Collector very well educated	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Wrote Matthew, Ethiopia & Persia	Head split open with an ax in Egypt
PETER (Simon)	Son of Jonas & Joanna Brother of Andrew	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem, leader of early church (Acts 2 - 11, 15); Wrote I, II Pt; Mark written about him, Asia Minor, Britain (?), Rome w/ wife	Crucified upside down in Rome by Nero after wife martyred
PHILIP	Unknown Greek name	Bethsaida	Unknown	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Ministered in Phrygia, Galatia, France (?), , Asia Minor	Hung against a pillar at Hieropolis (near Colossae)
SIMEON (Zealot)	Unknown	Galilee	Zealot under-ground freedom fighter	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Ministered various places	Crucified
THOMAS	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Fisherman	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Parthia, Persia & India	Body run through with spear in East India

* Cleopas also called Alphaeus, probably Joseph's brother; Mary his wife was with Jesus throughout His ministry; children seem to have been Matthew & Thomas (twins?), James the Less and Judas Thaddaeus, therefore all were probably cousins of Jesus

** Zebedee's wife was Salome, the sister of Mary, children were James and John, they were cousins of J

10. MIRACLES AT THE SEA

(Mark 4:35-5:43; Luke 8:22-48)

Read Out Loud: Mark 5:1-13

By Jeshua

A number of years ago a man picked up a beautiful rock from a nearby stream bed and used it as his cabin doorstep. Sometime later, an expert in rocks and minerals who was traveling in the area stopped at the cabin and noticed the doorstep, which he immediately recognized as a huge lump of gold. In fact, it proved to be one of the largest gold nuggets ever found. The man had it for years but didn't recognize its value. Like the man who failed to recognize gold when he held it in his hands, the disciples failed to recognize the true nature of the Lord -- even after more than three years with Him. We were without excuse for He did all He could to tell and show us.

LORD, LUNATIC OR LIAR My name is Jeshua, but you never heard of me. I'm not mentioned in the Bible. I am typical of many who followed Jesus. But my story today is not about me. It's about Jesus. I remember a couple days during September of 31 AD when I learned this myself. My work was slow and I wanted to get some first-hand information about this Man, so I followed Him around for two days. The first day started with His family, led by His own brother James, trying to have Him put away for being insane. As strange as it sounds, I guess I can understand why they wanted to do that. I mean, He was clearly and continually claiming to be God! Now what do you do with claims like that? The religious rulers said He was a liar but it was easy to tell He firmly believed all He was saying. Therefore some, including His family, came to the conclusion He was crazy - a lunatic. The only other choice was to believe His amazing claims -- that He truly was the Lord. Those still are the only options. He wasn't just a good man, a fine teacher, for no ordinary man over and over claims to be God! Everyone must decide if they believe He is a liar, a lunatic or the Lord!

Anyway, this rejection by His family brought up lots of questions about why, if He really was God, so many were rejecting Him as their Messiah. I remember He told a series of parables sitting by the sea to explain this (Matthew 13). Basically, what He said was that His kingdom would start small and slowly grow until one day it took over the whole world. Well, He was certainly right about the slow, small start part!

ACROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE That same evening, Jesus told us that we were going to the area of the Decapolis. Well, naturally we wondered why we'd go to that God-forsaken land. Jesus said it was to spread the message of the kingdom throughout that whole area. It seemed the job would take months at least -- how long were we going to stay? "Just a few hours, half a day at most" Jesus said. We asked how that could be done and Jesus told us he had a man picked out there whom we'd meet. He'd spread the word. We thought he must be someone very special: highly trained, skilled, well-educated, great contacts and so forth. "Actually," Jesus told us, "He hasn't any of that. He's just been hanging around the cemetery lately." The cemetery? What was he, a funeral director, a grave digger? What does he do at the cemetery? "Well, mainly he runs around naked, breaking chains, cutting himself, banging his head on stone markers and terrorizing anyone he meets." We had heard reports of such a man. Frankly, we were too stunned to reply. It just didn't make sense. We had no idea how this could be Jesus' special messenger.

SATAN ATTACKS Unfortunately, Satan figured out what Jesus was going to do (Mark 5:1-20). That's why he tried so hard to keep it from happening. Since boating is the quickest way across the large lake, that's how Jesus chose to go. However, a sudden terrible storm came that would have killed us had Jesus not intervened. Why had He led us into a storm? Why does He

lead you into financial, relational, job, family or health storms? It was to show how He can deliver when things are hopeless. It was a real miracle – the first one I saw personally. Oh, I had heard of many others, and talked to people who had been miraculously healed. But to see His stop that terrible storm with one word was something I'll never forget!

WHAT IS A MIRACLE? A miracle is not a coincidence of natural happenings. It's not magic. It is overriding natural laws by a higher law. Jesus called them 'signs.' We realized they were done for a purpose – proof that Jesus was God. The focus was not on the miracle itself but what it taught about Jesus. If He had power over physical ills, He could also heal spiritual ills. If He could deliver from demons, He could deliver from sin. If He could give physical sight, He could give spiritual sight. If He could feed with physical bread, He could feed with spiritual manna. If He could bring the physically dead back to life, He could do the same with the spiritually dead. If He can stop a storm on an ocean, He can stop Satan's attacks against us. When we are helpless, He can deliver.

There was no single pattern: some asked to be healed, others didn't. Some had faith, others didn't even know who Jesus was. Whatever the illness, whatever the need - Jesus met it. He had total control over nature: calming the sea, cursing a fig tree, turning water to wine, catching many fish when there weren't any there a moment before – all these are done by Jesus with just a word. Miracles were a means to an end, not an end in themselves. That's why not every sick person in Palestine was healed. Physical healing was to show He could heal spiritually, and that was much more important for it lasted for eternity. Healing a body just lasts a few years, but spiritually healing from sin lasts for eternity!

Satan can do miracles, too. He can counterfeit God's power with shows of his own (Matthew 7:22-23). His power is limited by God, however. He can't stop Jesus' power. Jannes and Jambrees counterfeited and challenged Moses but lost to God's power.

Anyway, we safely pulled up on the beach, slept the night, and ate breakfast. Then came one of the greatest miracles I had ever seen. Jesus cast demons from this crazy, naked, almost inhuman man and made him whole again (Mark 5:1-20). He was the one Jesus had chosen to take the message to that whole area. We got right in the boat and went back across the sea, calm this trip, to Capernaum.

MORE MIRACLES When we got back word of our return had preceded us. Crowds were everywhere. Everyone wanted a touch, a miracle in their life. Jarius, the local synagogue ruler and a very fine man, had a daughter who was deathly sick (Mark 5:21-43). On the way to seeing her, Jesus was interrupted by a woman who had been constantly bleeding from a tumor for 12 years. Upon touching Jesus, she was immediately healed – another miracle! Jesus stopped and talked with her. The interruption made Him late to Jarius' home, and by the time He arrived his daughter was already dead. What did He do? He held her hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" (Mark 5:41) Immediately she got up and was fine – the greatest miracle so far!

The day wasn't over, though. I watched Him heal 2 blind men and a man who was demonized, blind and dumb (Matthew 12:22-32, Luke 11:14-23 and Mark 3:20-30). Many times when Jesus cast demons out, people were instantly healed of their illnesses and ailments.

Jesus obviously had power over Satan. Jesus still has that same power today. Look what He's done in your life – that is a miracle! The greatest miracle of all is spending eternity in heaven with Him! Have you asked Him to forgive your sins so you can be with Him forever?

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Tell them what miracles are and give examples. Explain that only God can do miracles. They prove what a great God He is.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Ask them to name as many miracles as they can in the Bible. Why did Jesus do miracles? What do miracles teach us about God?

10. MIRACLES AT SEA

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

What is a miracle? *(Answers are in italics.)*

A miracle is God overriding natural laws by a higher law.

Can Satan do miracles?

He can, but only with God's permission as we see in the book of Job. He can't stop God's power. He can counterfeit miracles, only God can really do miracles.

Why didn't Jesus prevent the storm so the disciples wouldn't be afraid?

Jesus lets His followers get in tough situations so they will learn to trust Him and see Him deliver them.

What 'storms' is God allowing in your life right now? Why doesn't He remove them?

(Answers will vary) – He doesn't remove them because He is using them to increase our faith and teach us to trust Him.

What should you do when you get afraid of something that is happening in your life?

Remember that Jesus is in control of it, has a good reason for what He allows to happen and deeply loves you.

How many miracles can you count in this story? Some of these are made up of several miracles together.

Storm on sea stilled, boat didn't sink

Demonized man healed & restored, dressed, wants to follow Jesus, pigs killed

Woman with the bleeding tumor healed in body and soul

Jarius' daughter healed, Jairus' faith increases

Others healed: blind, dumb, demonized

What can we learn from Jesus healing the demonized man?

Jesus' power is greater than Satan's power. He can and will cast out demons when we ask in Jesus' name. He cares about everyone and wants everyone free.

Why did Jesus choose this man to be His spokesman in that area?

The man knew what Jesus did in His life and could tell others about Jesus. That's all God wants us to do – tell others about what Jesus has done for us.

How do you think Jarius felt when Jesus was stopped and his daughter died because He didn't get there on time? How do you feel when it seems Jesus is taking too long to do something?

He must have been disappointed and impatient, like we often feel.

When do you get most impatient? What makes you most impatient?

(Answers will vary)

What can you do to become more patient with God and others?

Realize God is in control of everything and His timing is different than ours. He is never early but He is never late. Trust that God does everything at the right time. Memorize some Bible verses about patience and quote them when you feel impatient. Good verses to memorize: Psalm 37:7-9; Romans 5:3-4; Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 10:36; James 1:3-4

11. FEEDING PEOPLE

(Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-38; Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-9; Luke 9:10-17)

Read Out Loud: Matthew 14:13-21

By the boy who gave his lunch to Jesus

The days started like any other typical day in Capernaum. We woke up and started going about our daily business of working or shopping. I was learning how to repair nets for the fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee so I could be a fisherman when I grew up. James, John, Peter and Andrew were out of town so only one boat would go out today. We were expecting them back soon, any day now. Jesus had sent them out by twos to teach and heal.

Jesus Himself was seated nearby, looking out over the water as if something was bothering Him. Later I was told He just found out that His cousin, good friend and partner in ministry, John the Baptizer, had just been killed by having his head cut off! Perhaps Jesus was mourning him and wondering if what happened to the messenger would happen to Him as well.

It wasn't long until people discovered Jesus and started demanding He heal the sick they brought. Weren't they sensitive to His needs? Didn't they respect His privacy? No wonder He had to slip away at night to be alone to pray.

As the sun worked its way up the sky and I completed my task, my attention was caught but a large, loud group moving quickly to where Jesus was patiently teaching and healing. There was Peter in the front, with John, James and Andrew with them. I knew it was too late to go fishing since that usually was done in the cooler evening or early morning hours, so they probably wouldn't be coming for their boat. Instead, I went over to where they were approaching Jesus.

They were all excited, everyone shouting to be heard over everyone else, all with great stories of the success they had enjoyed as they taught, healed and cast out demons in Jesus' name. The bedlam was so great Jesus couldn't hear them, so He motioned for them to get into the remaining fishing boat and push out. I thought Jesus was going to teach from the boat again, but they kept on going. Obviously, Jesus wanted time alone to listen to them and share their excitement while also sharing His sad news about their mutual friend, John.

The people who had gathered weren't to be put off so easily, though. Some started running along the shore to cut across to where they thought the boat might land so they could continue their demands for Jesus' attention. I followed along, grabbing up the lunch my mother had packed for my noon meal as I passed by the newly-mended nets.

The boat didn't put ashore but kept traveling, so we kept following. They would have to land somewhere, so we kept going. More and more people caught up to us and others from the town we passed through joined us as we follow the shoreline northeastward. Soon there was a large group making its way around the lake on foot.

Eventually we arrived at the spot where Jesus' boat was landing and swarmed around Jesus and the disciples. I knew Peter and James well, and it was obvious they and the others were upset because they wanted all Jesus' attention just to themselves. Jesus, though, had compassion and patience for the people.

The day was already well advanced and it was past time for our noon meal. I had my lunch but soon realized no one else had brought food. There was no place to buy enough food for such a large crowd. A quick estimate revealed there were at least 5,000 men. Add to that children and women and we numbered about 20,000. It would cost a fortune to buy enough food for all of us,

ever if it had been available. I was hesitant to eat my lunch in front of everyone, knowing that wouldn't be polite. But I surely was getting hungry!

Jesus was sensitive to all our needs and realized we were getting quite hungry. He asked His disciples, who had just seen God do many miracles, to handle the situation but it seems they forgot their newly-learned lessons and didn't know how to feed us. Andrew had been talking to me and noticed my lunch so he told Jesus about it, thinking that at least Jesus would have something to eat even if the rest of us didn't. When he asked me for it, I was hesitant to give it up, for mother knew I was a growing boy and quite hungry. All she had packed was 5 small loaves of bread and 2 fish. Reluctantly I gave it up, knowing mother would be proud of my manners under the circumstances. After all, sharing with Jesus was a real privilege.

We had seen Jesus do many miracles, but this one was special because it benefited all of us and not just someone else. A miracle is really what it was, for when Jesus took my food, prayed for it, and broke it to eat it, instead of eating it He passed it to the disciples. Only He kept breaking and breaking and breaking and giving, giving, giving. Yet that same small loaf was still in His hands – it never got smaller! In fact, the food just multiplied. It increased so fast that there was enough for each of us to eat our fill and even have 12 full baskets left over.

I used to think that I was too young to do anything for God. After all, I was just a child. Then I started thinking of other children God had used. David was a young boy when he killed a lion, a bear and Goliath (1 Samuel 17). He wrote songs of praise to God when he was a shepherd. They are now some of the psalms in our Bible. Samuel started serving God in the temple when he was about 4 years old (1 Samuel 1:24). Josiah was 8 when he became king and led the people back to God (2 Chronicles 34:1; 2 Kings 22:1). Then there was the Jewish servant girl who sent Naaman to Elisha to be healed (2 Kings 5:1-19). I remembered that Jesus had told the disciples to let children come to Him when they tried to keep us away (Matthew 19:14). I even heard Him once say that adults needed to have faith as us children had (Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:14, and Luke 18:1). That made me feel good. I guess God can use a child. He often has in the past.

I was thrilled to think that Jesus did all that with my little lunch! It made me think, if He can use something small as my lunch, perhaps He could use someone as small as me. If I gave Him my life, would He use and multiply it, too, for His glory, like the fish? I know He would. I'll find out, I guess, for I've given Him my heart to use for His honor and glory as well. Have you?

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Remind the children that Jesus provides our food, just like He fed the people in Jesus' day. Always thank Him for the food He gives you. You can talk about the boy who shared his food and show them that Jesus uses little children to help Him. Also talk about the importance of sharing.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Ask them if they were that little boy, would they share with Jesus? Was the boy glad he did? If you give what you have to Jesus for Him to use, will He bless it and use it as well? Remind them the boy was about their age, and they aren't too young to serve Jesus or be used by Him.

11. FEEDING PEOPLE

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Why did everyone want to see Jesus? *(Answers are in italics.)*

Some wanted to learn from Him but most wanted to be healed or have Him do something for them.

Do some people today just come to Jesus for what He can do for them? Do you?

Yes. Hopefully you don't just come to Jesus when you need something from Him..

Why does God like to use little things and little people?

Then it is obvious He gets the credit and glory for it!

Can Jesus use children and young people or just grown adults?

Yes!!!!

Name some children or young adults that Jesus used for His honor and glory.

Children include Samuel, David, Josiah (became king at 8 and led the people back to God) and others. Young adults include Joseph (Old Testament), Mary & Joseph (New Testament), Timothy, Mark, servant girl who sent Naaman to Elisha.

In what ways has God used you or others you age whom you know to serve Him?

(Answers will vary)

Has God ever done anything miraculous to help you, your family or anyone you know? Tell about what happened.

(Answers will vary)

Jesus cared about their needs and met them. What needs of yours does He meet?

(Food, clothing, home, transportation, entertainment, friends, love, protection, etc.)

Give some examples of how He meets these needs, how He provides.

(Answers will vary but can include gifts from others, enabling us to earn money, etc.)

When is the last time you thanked Him for these things? Stop and pray now and thank Him.

Why did Jesus stop what He was doing to meet the people's needs?

He had love and compassion for them.

What lessons can we learn from Peter who was walking on the water while he kept his eyes on Jesus but then started sinking when he looked at the waves around him?

We must keep our eyes on Jesus at all times and not look at the difficulties and circumstances around us.

What lesson can we learn from Peter looking to Jesus for help when he started sinking?

When we get our eyes off Jesus and start 'sinking' in life we need to look right back to Him for help.

12. JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION **(Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)**

Read Out Loud: Matthew 17:1-8

By James (Brother of John)

Have you ever had a prayer answered so strong and clear you were amazed? I did. The prayer was about Jesus – if He was God or not. I think I always knew, but I wanted to be really sure. Know what I mean?

You know, hearing that your cousin is God is really something. Believing it takes lots of faith. Committing your life to live for Him and serve Him is, well, you want to make sure!

JESUS THE MAN Did Jesus really live? There's no doubt about that. History proves Him. Historians of His day wrote about Him. Was He really a man who was born, lived and died? No doubt. But was He also really God?

JESUS THE GOD I feel I can answer this as well as anyone. I knew Jesus His whole life. I was His cousin, a disciple, one of the inner 3 disciples. My mother and His mother, Mary, were sisters. I followed Him from the beginning, knowing He was the greatest Rabbi ever. It was in the summer of 32, though, that any doubt about His deity was totally removed. Jesus had been ministering for 3 years by then. I didn't know it at the time, but by that time next year He'd be in heaven.

Jesus had just been through a terrible day. He heard that John died and His life was in danger. The disciples just returned from a successful trip telling others about Him and were all excited. People crowded around Him everywhere. He didn't handle that like any man I ever knew. When crowds followed Him around the lake He taught, healed and fed them. Then He had to help His disciples keep from drowning on the way back. Who can walk on water? Who can stop a storm with a word? Who can feed 30,000 people with a few small loaves and fish? Only God can do that!

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE GOD I watched Him closely as we traveled. People were healed by a word or a touch. He said He was the Bread of Life sent from God (John 6:46-51). Many times, He claimed to be God (John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5; etc.). He performed miracles, accepted worship and forgave sin (Mark 2:5). He clearly claimed to be equal with God (Matt. 28:19; John 5:17-18; 12:45; 13:20; 14:1, 9) and one with God (Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12; 8:39; John 10:30, 36-38; 17:11, 21-22; 20:28). We all knew He said He was from heaven (John 6:33, 35, 51) and was sent by God (John 4:34; 5:37; 7:16, 28-29; 8:16; 9:4; 11:42; 14:24; 16:28; 17:18, 23). Over and over, He identified Himself as the Son of God (Matt 16:17; 22:42-45; Mark 12:35-37; 14:61-62; Luke 20:41; John 9:35-37; 22:69-70). You didn't have to be around Him very much before you understood His claims to have always existed (John 8:58; 17:5), have omniscience (Matt 11:21-22; Luke 10:13), omnipresence (Matt 18:20; 28:20) and omnipotence (Mark 14:61-63; Luke 22:69-70; John 2:19, 10:18; 11:25-27). The more time we watched Him the clearer it became that He was not just a man like the rest of us.

There is no doubt that **Jesus claimed to be God**. The whole tenor of His life points to that. He verbally claimed to be God many, many times (John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5; etc.). He accepted worship as if He were God. He claimed to be able to forgive sin (Mark 2:5). Now, what are we to make of someone who claims to be God? What would you say if your neighbor started claiming to be God? There are three options or possibilities about such a person. He is crazy, a **lunatic**, for he truly thinks he is God but is wrong. He knows he isn't God but tries to convince everyone he is anyway, thus he is a **liar**. Or he really is God and **Lord** of all! Lord, lunatic or liar are our options. Just a good man, a fine teacher, a moral example -- these are not options for one who

claims to be God! If He is a lunatic or liar He doesn't qualify as a good, fine person. If He is Lord, He is overqualified and far more than just a good, fine person. Thus, He is either God to be worshipped and obeyed or an impostor to be forgotten and ignored.

It was about this time that Peter had opportunity to put all of our feelings into words when Jesus asked him if we disciples were going to leave Him as so many other followers had. "Lord," Peter said. "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." It was clear enough. His actions backed up His words: power over nature, illness, even Satan and his forces. It was mainly the religious rulers who denied His deity, mainly because of their pride and jealousy. They looked for every excuse they could to discredit Him. One of their main reasons was because He did not keep all their manmade laws, like ritual hand washing before eating. Jesus said it was what was the inside, not the outside that mattered.

IF GOD BECAME MAN Jesus kept healing. He healed a demonized little daughter of a Phoenician woman. In fact, He did all you would expect God to do. I had often thought about it, and I knew if God ever came to earth, He would have an unusual entrance. What is more unusual than being born of a virgin? In addition, He have to be without sin. Jesus was sinless. I knew Him my whole life, and lived with Him day and night for the last 3 years. If God became man, you would expect Him to do the supernatural (miracles), speak the greatest words ever spoken and have a lasting and universal influence. Furthermore, you would expect Him to satisfy the spiritual hunger in man and to exercise power over death. Jesus did all of these and many more showing He was indeed God Himself. Then one day Jesus gave us a test.

RESURRECTION PROVES DEITY We were walking on a long, lonely road near Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked us "Who do the people say I am?" After telling Him, He asked us who we thought He was. Peter said it for all of us: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:13-20). This really pleased Jesus. He had been making it clear since we met Him. Then He started talking about His death and resurrection. Dying didn't mean He wasn't God, it really just proved He was. Who but God could come back from the grave?

TRANSFIGURATION PROVES DEITY It wasn't long after that happened that we got to see Jesus in His Godly glory. No one could experience that and doubt He was God. Jesus spent lots of time traveling throughout Galilee (John 7:1). He found faith among Gentiles, healing the daughter of a woman who had more faith than He found among the Jews (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). He healed a deaf mute (Mark 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37) and again fed a crowd, this one of 4,000 men (Matthew 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9). Still the people demanded proof He was the Messiah (Matthew 15:39 - 16:4; Mark 8:9-12). That proof would be the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38), alive after being dead for 3 days.

Jesus had warned us of the subtle growth of the sin of unbelief, like leaven (Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 8:13-21). Then traveling on Jesus healed a blind man (Mark 8:22-26).

Upon reaching Mt Hermon, He stopped and talked to us, His disciples. He asked us if we knew Who He was. When we did, He was most encouraged at our faith (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21). Then He warned us that, instead of setting up a throne, He would be crucified but would come back to life (Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22). He went on to teach us about discipleship (Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-9:1 Luke 9:23-27) and the commitment it would take from us to follow Him in the coming difficult times.

He then went further up Mount Hermon. Peter, John and I were with Him and we saw Him transfigured! We saw His eternal glory (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). We were on a mountain and He was transfigured. There He was in all His glory, talking with Moses and Elijah about His coming death and resurrection. Just think – we saw the Shekinah Glory and lived! God

Himself spoke, saying Jesus was His Son. This later led to a discussion about John fulfilling the prophecy of 'Elijah' coming before the Messiah (Matthew 17:9-13; Mark 9:9-13). When we went back to the other disciples, we found demons indwelling a boy and the disciples not able to drive them out. Jesus rebuked them and they left immediately (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43). Again, He told us about His coming death and resurrection (Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45) so we would be prepared and not lose faith when it happened. How could we not see the truth: He really was 100% man and 100% God!

FULFILLED PROPHECIES PROVE DEITY Seeing Moses and Elijah with Him brought to mind all the prophecies of the Prophet to come who would be like Moses, and one like Elijah who would precede Him. In fact, hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah were being fulfilled in Jesus. Matthew was keeping a list of them. It was said He would be born of the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15; Gal 4:4; Matthew 1:20), of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18,24-25; Luke 1:26-35) and would be called the Son of God (Psalm 2:7). He would be a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 22:18), Isaac (Genesis 21:12) and Jacob (Numbers 24:17), of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10) and the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1,10; Jeremiah 23:5). The probability of these just happening by chance would be 1 in 10 with 16 zeroes. If each chance is a silver dollar and they were laid down side-by-side totally covering all of India, layer after layer would be laid down until they were half a meter deep, one is marked, all others not, then blindfold a man and let him walk anywhere, the chance he'd pick the marked one the first time is the same as the first 8 prophecies above happening by chance. And there were hundreds of other prophecies of the Messiah which Jesus also filled! What more proof would one want that He is God? If He didn't fulfill those prophecies then no one ever will for all the records to prove what tribe and family they come from were destroyed when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD.

WHAT ABOUT YOU? Do you believe He really is God? If so, that will change your life! Check out the facts. The more closely you look, the more obvious it becomes. Two unbelievers once sat on a railroad train, discussing the life of Christ. One of them said, "I think an interesting story could be written about him." The other replied, "and you are just the man to write it. Tear down the prevailing sentiment about His divinity, and paint Him as a man - a man among men."

The suggestion was acted upon and the book written. The man who made the suggestion was Colonel Ingersoll, the noted atheist. The writer was General Lew Wallace, and the book was called "Ben Hur." In the process of constructing the life of Christ, Gen. Wallace found himself facing the greatest life ever lived on earth. The more he studied, the more he was convinced Christ was more than man. One day, he was forced to cry, "Verily, this was the Son of God!" In trying to prove Jesus was just a man, he realized the proof showed He really was God. Have you come to this realization? Is He your Lord and God? Does your life show it?

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Talk about Jesus being born as a baby, growing up as a child just like them, and being a man like us. Also talk about Him being God who left heaven to come to earth. They won't understand it all, but will believe it by faith. Talk about the difference it makes that He is God.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Ask them if they believe Jesus is God. If they say "Yes," then ask them why they believe that. Talk about the proofs that Jesus is God. Ask them what difference it makes if Jesus is God or not? Ask them what they would say if a friend asked them why they believed in Jesus. Talk to them about the difference this should make in their lives as they live for Him.

12. JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

If someone asked you how you know Jesus is God, how would you answer them?

Use the answers in today's lesson: Jesus claimed to be God, He did everything God would do were God to become man, the transfiguration and resurrection prove He is God and He fulfilled all the prophecies that were made for the Messiah.

When are some of the times Jesus claimed to be God?

(See lesson "Jesus Claimed to be God")

If Jesus is not God (Lord) what must He be?

Either a LIAR for He often said He was God or a LUNATIC (crazy) for thinking He was God when He wasn't. He couldn't be just a good teacher, though, for a good teacher can't be a liar or lunatic.

How does being resurrected prove Jesus was God?

No one has ever come back to life from dead. Only God could do that. Death, sin and Satan couldn't defeat or hold Him. He is greater than them.

What was the 'transfiguration'; and what happened there?

Jesus let His glory shine through His humanity. All the rest of His earthly life He hid His glory as God but here, with Elijah and Moses, His glory was seen. He was talking with them about His upcoming death and resurrection. He needed the fellowship and encouragement.

Why did Jesus let His disciples see Him that way?

He wanted them to be assured that He was God – give them more proof. Peter, James and John were His closest friends on earth and He wanted to encourage them, increase their faith, and share this special time with them.

What would you have thought if you had been there?

(Answers will vary)

Peter was talking when He should have been listening so God interrupted Peter (Mark 2:5-7). Do you spend more time talking to God or listening to Him? Which is more important?

What God has to say to us is MUCH more important than what we have to say to God. He already knows what we say to Him but if we miss what He wants to say to us we miss something very important.

What are some prophecies that Jesus fulfilled that shows He is God?

(See lesson, "Fulfilled Prophecies Prove Deity")

What difference does it make if Jesus is just a good man and not God?

If Jesus isn't God, we have no salvation, no one to pray to, no Holy Spirit inside us, the Bible isn't true, and we are eternally lost in our sins forever.

Break up into small groups of 2 or 3 or as a group let one person be someone wondering how we can know Jesus is God and another person play the role of a Christian talking to them. This can help you get used to what to say to others.

When you close in prayer, spend time listening to God and not talking. What is He saying to you?

13. MARY, MARTHA & LAZARUS

(Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44; 12:1-11)

Read Out Loud: John 11:32-44

By Lazarus

A LESSON ABOUT OVERCOMING DEATH BY LAZARUS Have you ever died and come back to life? I'll tell you, there's nothing like it! I love to hear stories about the 'other side.' Some of them you can't trust, but the ones in the Bible are the most dependable ones. Have you heard them? There is the story of the boy God brought back to life through Elijah (1 Kings 17:21-22). There is also the son of the Shunammite mother in the time of Elisha (2 Kings 4:33-36). Then there was the man who came back to life when he was buried in Elijah's cave (2 Kings 13). God worked through Peter to bring Dorcas back to life (Acts 9:40) and through Paul to raise Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). Jesus Himself raised a son of a Nain widow (Luke 7:14-15), Jarius' daughter (Luke 8) and Lazarus -- that's me! Actually, I was one of two Lazarus' in the Bible. Jesus used both of our deaths as a testimony to Himself.

LAZARUS & THE RICH MAN (Luke 16:19-31). The other Lazarus was a poor, sickly beggar in a true story Jesus told. He was crippled, dumped by a road where he was at the mercy of people to throw their scraps where he could reach them. He had to fight off wolf-like wild dogs for the food. Well, he died but, being a believer, his spirit went to heaven while his body went to the always-burning garbage dump, Gehenna.

For a believer death means being immediately in God's presence in heaven (Luke 23:43). It isn't loss, it's gain! Two little birds had a nest in the bushes in the back part of the garden. There is a story of a little girl found a bird's nest. It had four speckled eggs in it. One day, after she had been away some time, she ran into the garden to take a peep at the speckled eggs. Instead of the beautiful eggs, there were only broken, empty shells. "Oh!" she said, picking out the pieces, "the beautiful eggs are all spoiled and broken!" "No," said her brother; "they are not spoiled: the best part of them has taken wings, and flown away." So, it is in death: the body left behind is only an empty shell; while its soul, the better part, has taken wings, and flown away.

The rich man outside whose mansion Lazarus had been dumped, also died. He went to hell because he didn't have faith in God, just in himself. His body went into a fine tomb, but His soul to hell. What contrast! In this life Lazarus had torment, but in eternity, treasure. For the rich man it was the opposite. Who was better off? Remember that everyone will one day die. No one escapes death. It is final, there is no chance for salvation after death.

LAZARUS, MARY & MARTHA (John 11:1-44) That brings me to my story. God used my death for His glory, too – but in a different way. He brought me back to life! I wasn't the focus of the story, though. He just chose me for His glory – what a privilege that was!

I was sickly my whole life. In mid-February, 33 AD, I was so sick everyone thought I'd die. Mary and Martha sent to Jesus to come heal me. We'd seen Him heal so many others. But He didn't come. He sent the messenger back saying that my sickness wouldn't end in death. However, by the time the messenger got here, I had died! That just added to everyone's grief. Where was He? Why didn't He come? How could He be so wrong?

Eventually He did show up, after I was in the grave 4 days. They tell me He never did offer a word of explanation about why He hadn't arrived earlier. He talked with Martha, a theological discussion to stretch her faith. He comforted Mary, an emotional time of crying with her.

Then Jesus went to the tomb. He asked them to move the stone. Martha, thinking He just wanted to view my body one final time, reminded Him that I had been dead four days – the stench from decay would be awful. Jesus persisted. No one knew what He was going to do. You know,

Jesus never preached a funeral sermon. Every funeral He attended He ended by bringing the dead person back to life. That's what He did with me, too!

"Lazarus, come out!" He called. If He wouldn't have said "Lazarus," everyone who was buried there would have come back to life!

Funny, I knew I had been in heaven and had to leave, but the memory was so fleeting, so quickly gone, that I didn't have time to complain. I would have really resented being back on earth if I had remembered what the previous 4 days were like. I guess that's God's mercy. I did have a vague memory of great peace, love and joy.

What happened to me, and the others who came back to life, is called resuscitation, not resurrection. I had the same body, which got older and eventually died of old age. I did not have a new, eternal body like the other Lazarus received when he went to heaven. I got mine when I died for good many years later.

You see, I was able to conquer death because Jesus was greater than death. He proved that on the cross, a few weeks later. What death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death (2 Corinthians 15:51-57). When death stung Jesus Christ, it stung itself to death (Hosea 13:14; Isaiah 25:8). At first it seemed like death conquered Him on the cross, but the resurrection proved otherwise.

An event much later helps explain what happened. It was June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the Allies (British, Dutch, and Germans) under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signal stations was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral. Late in the day it flashed the signal: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- -." Just at that moment one of those sudden English fog-clouds made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war. Suddenly the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- - T-H-E - - E-N-E-M-Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy; defeat was turned into victory! So, it was when Jesus died but then came back to life. Revelation 1:18: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death & Hades."

I was never afraid of death after that. In fact, I kind of looked forward to it. One day I was sitting by a main road in Jerusalem. A Roman chariot came charging down the street and right past me, the shadow passing over me. I thought how different it was being run over by a shadow than by the chariot. I thought about Jesus' promises of victory over death, and the 23rd Psalm about death being a shadow. Only the shadow of death can touch us. Psalm 23:4 says: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me". Do you have that assurance? If you put your faith in Jesus, you can!

The raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) was so obviously a supernatural miracle that none could deny it or explain it away. It happened so close to Jerusalem that many people there knew Lazarus, a well-to-do and influential man. Many came to talk to him about what had happened. When the religious rulers checked it out, they couldn't find any way to explain it away. They decided Jesus and Lazarus both would have to die to stop this strange movement that was gaining so much support. They were jealous. While most people didn't accept Jesus as Messiah and Savior, the majority did take His side in His conflict with the proud and controlling religious rulers. Having set in motion the events that would soon end in His death, Jesus then withdrew to Ephraim where it was safer (John 11:45-54) for it still wasn't time to die for sin. That's my testimony. I died and came back to life. You will, too, if you believe in Jesus!

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Young children don't really understand death, but it's still important they know that as Christians we have nothing to fear. Explain how we get old, then our body dies but the real us inside lives in heaven with Jesus forever. Talk about heaven.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Older children can have questions and fear about death. Assure them that Christians will be with Jesus in heaven forever. Explain how our bodies die, like animals. But, unlike animals, our real self inside, the part that thinks and feels, will live forever with God in heaven in a perfect body.

13. MARY, MARTHA & LAZARUS **QUESTIONS TO ANSWER**

Who were Mary, Martha and Lazarus? *(Answers are in italics.)*

They were brother and sisters who lived together. The women were probably widows and it seems Lazarus was sickly. They were well-to-do people in Bethany. Jesus stayed with them when He visited Jerusalem.

Why did God let Lazarus die (John 11:1-44)?

To show His power and strength by bringing him back to life.

Why didn't Jesus go to help Lazarus right away, why did He wait?

To test and strengthen their faith, and to have everyone know Lazarus was really dead so He would be glorified all the more when He brought Lazarus back to life. He could have prevented his death but it showed His glory more by bringing him back to life.

Can you give an example of when it seemed Jesus didn't help you right away when you asked? Why might He have waited?

(Answers will vary)

What if Jesus wouldn't have been able to bring Lazarus to life? What would that mean to you?

If Jesus wasn't greater than death, He would have stayed dead and He wouldn't have provided salvation. Plus, He wouldn't be able to bring us back to life after death, either.

Are you afraid of death? Why don't Christians have to fear death anymore?

We don't have to fear death because Jesus conquered it and, although our bodies die, the real 'us' lives forever. Death is a 'shadow' because its power has been broken (Psalm 23:4).

Revelation 21:4 "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

John 11:25-26 "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'"

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life."

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

14. TEARFUL ENTRY

(Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19)

Read Out Loud: Matthew 21:1-11

By Joses

Every once in a while, a decision has to be made which affects the whole course of history: Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit or Moses' decision to leave Egypt. Two thousand years ago the nation Israel found itself at just such a turning point decision. It was the biggest turning point in history since Eden, so important it is recorded in all four gospels (Jesus' birth is only recorded in two). The date was Monday, March 30, 33 AD.

THE BACKGROUND Jesus had been preaching for almost 4 years, but the majority of the people, and especially the religious rulers, had rejected His claims to being God come to earth as the Messiah. Now it was time for the Passover, when the town grew from 100,000 to a million people. Jesus came to Bethany, over the Mt of Olives from Jerusalem, on **Friday**, March 27. On **Saturday** Mary anointed Jesus' feet for burial. Judas opposed the action as wasteful, but Jesus defended her, saying she was doing the right thing. On **Sunday** many Jews went from Jerusalem to Bethany to see Lazarus. Many believed because of his testimony. The religious rulers planned to kill Jesus. You won't find my name in the Bible, but I was there and want to tell you about it.

THE CHALLENGE Monday morning Jesus sent two disciples to get an unriden donkey (Matthew 21:1-7). Every other day he walked into town, but this day He was making a statement. He was coming to town as the Prince of Peace and people would be forced to respond one way or the other. He is going to put them on the spot. He could have come on a span of beautiful horses, or carried by angels, but he came the way a new king would enter Jerusalem. Before He had always told His followers to not tell anyone who He was, now He is publicly proclaiming His kingship. It is the day people are forced to receive or reject Jesus as Messiah.

Of course, Jesus knew how the vote would go. Daniel 9:24-27 prophesied that on this very day the Messiah would be "cut off." This was fulfilled to the exact day, as God had told Daniel.

Jesus' intention was obvious to everyone present on the Mt of Olives that day, for Peter started leading the procession and others followed (Mark 11:7-10). People put their coats down for Him, as they would have put costly rugs before a king entering Jerusalem. They waved branches and palms, symbols of victory. It was the belief that the Messiah would come to town on a donkey, from the Mt of Olives, with palm branches being waved. This is what Jesus did. People thought the enemy He was coming to conquer was Rome, but it was really sin and death.

Excitement grew among the emotional out-of-town Jews who came looking for a thrill, a break from the boredom. True believers in Jesus as Messiah soon picked up the emotion, and everyone started shouting "Hosanna" ("save us now") and "Hallelujah" ("Praise the Lord"). They were quoting Psalm 118:25-26.

Meanwhile, when word spread to Jerusalem about what was happening, many residents and visitors to Jerusalem went out to see what was happening (John 12:12-19). The religious rulers trailed along to keep their eye on things (Luke 19:39-44). Nothing escaped the notice of their spy system. They told Jesus to silence His disciples, tell them they were wrong to proclaim Him Messiah and King. Jesus instead said they were right in what they said, and it had to be proclaimed that day. If the people didn't proclaim Him Messiah, the very rocks would cry out!

THE CHANGE The strangest thing happened, though, when Jesus reached the crest of the Mt of Olives and looked down on Jerusalem. With all the excitement and praising going on around Him, He started crying. It wasn't just a quiet sob, it was a loud, long, uncontrolled heart-break of

a cry. Why? Jesus knew the nation as a whole was rejecting Him. He foresaw the terrible destruction that would soon come upon Jerusalem as a result of this. And it broke His heart. The 'Triumphal Entry' really was a TEARFUL entry. Jesus had been anointed for burial by Mary, and here He was, going to His death in Jerusalem. By showing up He was, in effect, voluntarily turning Himself in to die for the sins of the world.

Naturally this quickly quenched the emotional display of the ones with Him. They were confused, most slipped away so they wouldn't be caught with Jesus and get into trouble with the religious rulers. Just like that it was over! It seemed it had hardly started and it was finished – and what a strange end. It was like there was some unspoken agreement among everyone to act like nothing had happened. Just get back to business and forget this whole thing. Pretend Someone didn't just proclaim Himself Messiah-King after three years of teaching and miracles.

THE CHARGE Large crowds were gathered in the temple when Jesus entered, for that was the common meeting place for those in town. Things were really busy the week before Passover. Everyone was curious about Jesus coming to town, for they had heard about His proclamation on the Mt of Olives. Also, they were aware of the religious rulers' threat to arrest Jesus if He came to town again. The last time in town they had tried to stone Him and Jesus only survived because of a miraculous escape. While glad to see Him because of their curiosity, they weren't in any way ready to accept Him as Messiah. "Who is this?" they asked – who does He think He is? "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth" others answered. He's just a man, not the Messiah-King. The people had been forced to decide and they rejected Him.

Ironically, at this very time, a few feet away, the priests were selecting and setting aside the Passover lamb which was doomed to die for the nation at 3 PM on Friday, April 3, 33 AD (the very same time Jesus died on the cross). Just as the lamb was set aside to die for the sins of the people, so was the Lamb of God set apart and doomed to die for the sins of the world.

Only one group supported and praised Him in the temple. The boys choir sang "Hosanna to the son of David." This made the religious rulers furious, but because of public opinion they weren't able to arrest Jesus in public. He went back to Bethany that night, over the Mt of Olives. It was like when the Shekinah Glory of God left the Temple for the Mt of Olives in Ezekiel's day. The decision was made. The nation as a whole had decided, and their answer was a clear 'no.' Individuals could be saved, but the clock was ticking down for the nation.

THE REST OF THE WEEK The next day, **Tuesday**, Jesus cursed a fig tree without figs on the way into town. Like the nation Israel, it was a hypocrite. In town Jesus cleansed the temple, then foretold His death and resurrection. **Wednesday** morning was filled with verbal challenges from the religious rulers. Jesus admired the widow who gave her last ½ penny. He then gave His disciples the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) and spent the afternoon teaching in the temple. The religious rulers planned Jesus' arrest and made arrangements with Judas to provide a time and place to arrest Jesus when He wasn't among the crowds.

Thursday Jesus walked through town and the temple, using His last free hours on earth to reach out to thirsty, open people. In the afternoon the preparations for the Passover began. Those from Galilee celebrated Thursday evening while the other Jews celebrated on Friday. It was the beginning of the end. The people had decided, and they would suffer the consequences of their decision. So will we. What have you decided about Jesus?

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Tell them that Jesus loves to hear them sing praises to Him. Sing lots of praise songs and talk about the words they are singing and what they mean.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Tell them God created music and singing so they can praise Him. Ask them what they have to thank and praise God for. Spend time singing songs of praise to Him. Talk about the importance of accepting salvation, not just acting like a Christian.

14. TEARFUL ENTRY

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Why did Jesus come into town on a donkey that special day? *(Answers are in italics.)*

It was the belief the Messiah would come down the Mount of Olives on a donkey with palm branches. Jesus was telling everyone He was their messiah.

How did the people respond?

Some came and recognized Him as Messiah. Others didn't.

What did the religious rules say to Jesus?

They asked Jesus to tell the people to be quiet.

What did Jesus say to them?

Jesus said that if the people didn't praise Him the rocks would cry out! He was showing that He was their Messiah King and He deserved praise and worship.

If Jesus knew that He would be rejected by the nation, why did He even bother to offer Himself as King?

He wanted to be fair and give them a chance. That way they would know they had a chance but rejected Him. The nation as a whole rejected but individuals could still come for salvation.

Why did Jesus cry as He saw the city?

He knew the misery and suffering that would soon come because they rejected Him.

What things today make Him sad enough to cry?

Sin, evil, people being hurt and taken advantage of, judgment on those who reject Him.

Why did things change when Jesus entered the city?

The people who came with Jesus were afraid of the religious rulers so they didn't want to be seen with Jesus. The others didn't believe He was the Messiah.

Who were the only ones who praised Jesus in the temple?

The children! The boys chorus praised Him but they are the only ones who did so.

What was the significance of what happened this day?

Jesus offered the Kingdom to Israel. They rejected it because they rejected Him as King.

What will happen next time Jesus comes as King?

He will come as a lion, not a lamb, and everyone will bow and worship Him (Rev. 19).

Where does Jesus want to be King today?

He wants to be king in our hearts today.

Have you made Him King of your life?

(Answers will vary – hopefully all will say yes)

What does it mean to make Jesus King of your life?

He rules my life, I am His servant and live to do His will. I learn and obey His Word.

15. JESUS' LAST SUPPER

(Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-38; John 13:1-14:31)

Read Out Loud: Luke 22:14-20

(Listed below is the order of events at the Last Supper meal Jesus shared with His disciples. You can summarize this content into one session or spread it out over several. You don't have to talk about all they did. You can pick and choose what applies to the people you are teaching.)

Passover is the oldest continually observed religious custom, with the exception of the Jewish Sabbath. It continues today as Passover among the Jews and the Lord's Supper among Christians. Understanding its roots and significance is extremely important to understand Jesus' final meal on earth. Let's look at what happened in the upper room that night of Thursday, Nisan 13, 33 AD.

There were actually two celebrations of the Passover that were allowed by the priests. Those from Galilee celebrated the Passover Thursday evening while the others celebrated Friday evening. This was because of the difference in reckoning days in a solar compared to a lunar calendar, one starting at sunset and the other being like our calendar today. This was allowed because of the large number of people celebrating in Jerusalem. It made it so rooms could be used twice and so the priests had more time to kill and distribute the ¼ million lambs needed each year. Jerusalem's population swelled from 100,000 to as many as 2 million for Passover.

PREPARATION Earlier in the day Jesus had sent Peter and John into the city to make preparations for their Last Supper with Jesus. The house they used had to be totally clean, which meant no food with leaven was allowed to remain anywhere in the house. A special set of pans and dishes was used for Passover to make sure no leaven was stuck in the cracks. A search would be made for any leaven crumbs anywhere. They would be gathered and burned as a picture of sin being removed (1 Corinthians 5:7). This reminds us that we are to not have any sin (any 'leaven') in our lives when we partake of the Lord's Supper, as Paul so sternly told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Firstborn men fasted this whole day, as a reminder of redemption in Egypt when the first-born died of they hadn't put the Passover lamb's blood over the door.

MIDDLE MATZO BROKEN The next activity centered on the matzo. Matzo is bread without leaven in it. Leaven is a microscopic bacteria which is placed in 'yeast.' When exposed to water and warmth the bacteria rapidly grow. It causes a fermentation which produces a gas. This process will continue until the dough is sour and ruined unless the bacteria is killed by baking. Thus, leaven is a picture of sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). It starts small, hidden, unseen, but unless it is killed it will grow and destroy everything.

Therefore, the matzo became a picture of Jesus Himself – without any sin. It was round, without beginning or end. It was pierced in the shape of a cross. This helped spread the heat in the baking process, but also speaks of Jesus. The same word is used of Jesus being pierced for our sins (Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 53:5).

On the Sabbath the Jews would eat 2 matzo's, double the normal portion. It was a special day. On Passover they would eat 3. Three in the Bible stands for God - the Trinity. The Jews today take these 3 matzo and make what is called a 'unity' with them. It is a beautiful picture of Jesus. The three matzo are placed on a pile, with a napkin between each and on the top and bottom. These 3 stand for God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The middle matzo (picturing God the Son) is removed from the other two, as when God left heaven and came to earth as Jesus (the Incarnation). Then this middle matzo is broken in two, a picture of Christ's

body, pierced and broken for our sin. The first half is put back between the other two matzo picturing Jesus' spirit going immediately to heaven at death. The other half is wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden in a dark place until the third cup. A child (or the youngest person) at the table takes this and hides it until later. This pictures Jesus' body wrapped in linen and buried until the third day. The rest of the significance of this will be explained later. Isn't this a beautiful picture of Jesus?

STORY OF THE EXODUS The story of the Exodus is told, often in response to the four questions asked about why this night is different. We don't know how much detail Jesus went into here, or what else He taught, but certainly the centrality of the lamb must be brought out. The very first name/title attributed to Jesus when He first presented Himself for public ministry was 'Lamb.' "Behold the **Lamb of God**, Who takes away the sins of the world" John the Baptizer had said (John 1:29, 36). Philip (Acts 8:32-35), Paul (1 Corinthians 5) and Peter (1 Peter 1:19) also referred to Jesus as the Passover lamb.

This would have had great significance to his listeners, since sheep were an important part of their daily lives. They were valuable animals, used for food (meat, milk, cheese) and material (wool, skins). They were used for sacrifice, too.

After the first sin in Eden, God (God the Son, always the Second Person of the Trinity Who appears to man) **shed innocent blood to cover sin**. From then on Adam, Able, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and all God's people offered blood sacrifices. It was God's way of teaching them that innocent blood must be shed to cover sin. When Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, God provided a ram substitute (Genesis 22), showing that innocent animal's blood is a substitute for the blood of the one who sinned. This is even more clearly taught in the story of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-13).

First, the **lamb was chosen** on the 10th of Nisan. Sheep are gentle, innocent, meek, dependent, defenseless animals. This pictures how Jesus was when taken to die for our sins. The lamb had to be unblemished, in perfect condition, speaking of Jesus' sinlessness. It had to be a male in the prime of life (one year), also speaking of Jesus. It was set aside for 4 days, Nisan 10 to 14, to make sure it was sinless. Jesus ministered publicly almost 4 years, showing all, He was sinless and perfect.

Then the **lamb was killed** on Nisan 14, It didn't do them any good alive. It had to die. Jesus' perfect life doesn't get us salvation, it only condemns us by showing us that a perfect life could be lived. The substitute for sin must die to pay for sin. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). The owner would place his hands on the sheep, picturing transfer of their sin to the animal. Sin can't really be transferred, but it symbolically showed what happens when we place our faith in Jesus. Because the animal was now seen as guilty of sin, it had to die. "The souls that sins must die" (Ezekiel 18:20-24). It was to be killed on Nisan 14, 3 PM – the exact day and time that Jesus died upon the cross!

After being killed, the **blood was applied** to the sides and tops of the door post. It was the blood that caused the angel of death to 'Pass Over' the house. It wasn't the good works of those inside, nor their jewels, their gold, their skills or talents. It was only the blood, Man's good works are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), like dung heap rubbish (Philippians 3:8). Only the blood saves. The blood was applied where all could see, it was a public testimony. The lamb was killed on the doorstep, where the blood was collected. Then it was applied to the top and sides of the door. Connect these and you have a picture of a cross, with the blood where Jesus died: crown of thorns on head, nails through wrists and feet. It was this blood that protected against deserved judgment. After being applied the people would enter 'through the blood' and stay inside all night (Exodus 12:13-28). Any who applied the blood were safe, Jew or Egyptian. Any who did not suffered the death of all firstborn males. The Jews were as deserving of death as the Egyptians, even more

so because they were much more accountable. All this is a picture of how we are safe because of Jesus' blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9:12; Revelation 1:5; Romans 5:8-9).

The blood of these animals didn't remove sin, it just covered it until Jesus' blood came along to wash it away. The animals' blood was like putting a throw rug over a stain on a floor until the right cleaner (the blood of Jesus) can be found to take the stain away.

Finally, after being killed and the blood applied, the **lamb was eaten**. It wasn't killed to be looked at, but to personally identify with. It provided the nourishment and sustenance they would need for the journey which was before them. We need to feed on Jesus too, eat his flesh and drink His blood as He commands (John 6:53-57) to be strengthened and nourished for our spiritual journey. That means we must learn and apply His teachings to our life, making them part of what we think and do. The Jews had to do that the same night; they couldn't wait. The lamb had to be roasted, not boiled in water – it had to not only die but face the fires of hell, as Jesus did for us.

Then for the next 7 days the Jews were to eat nothing but **unleavened bread** (Exodus 13). God was telling them that the first lesson they had to learn after salvation (Passover lamb) was the importance of avoiding sin, of living holy lives for Him.

That is what makes the Passover so special. It teaches about the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world – Jesus the Messiah.

MEAL IS EATEN Jews today eat a full course gourmet meal; appetizer, soup, chicken/turkey/kid/lamb, etc. If lamb, it is partly boiled and partly roasted so it doesn't resemble the sacrificed lamb as they can no longer sacrifice since that can only be done in the temple in Jerusalem. There is no temple today. What Jews are now eating, in effect, is the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for since AD 70 it stopped being the Passover. Today they use an egg (roasted) which they cut and dip in salt water to lament the fact they have no place to offer sacrifices for sin. There can be no real Passover without a sacrificial lamb, and God stopped the sacrificial system when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

Mealtime is a good time for conversation, and Jesus used this time to comfort His disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" ... Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ... Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ... All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.... These things I have spoken to you, that you may have peace in me. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.!" John 14:1-6, 15-18, 25-27, 16:33

AFIKOMEN EATEN ('ah-fee-KO-men') This is the final food of the Passover meal, so this will be the last taste left in the mouth, which is very significant to the Jews. The hidden (buried) Afikomen (1/2 of the middle of the 3 matzos) is found and ransomed (redeemed). A price is paid to whoever finds it, like Jesus paid for our sins with His blood. The youngest person at the table, who hid it, is paid to find it and bring it back. This 'redeeming,' 'buying back,' is the word

used to buy back one's slave if they ran away. It pictures man running away from His Creator into sin, being bought back by the price paid by Jesus on the cross.

Finding and unwrapping this afikomen pictures Jesus, the true Bread of Life and Manna of God, coming back to life on the third day (here the third cup). Jesus Himself made this analogy. With this Jesus instituted the bread of the Lord's Supper: "This is my body."

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat: **This is my body.**" (Matthew 26:26) He voluntarily "took it," No one forced Him. "Jesus made Himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man." (Philippians 2:7). He said "this is my body." It represents His body, it doesn't become His literal body, that was obvious to those with Him in the upper room that night.

Then He "blessed it." He sanctified it, set it apart for a specific purpose, as He Himself was set apart for the purpose of redemption since He was born.

Next He "broke it" – He did it Himself, it wasn't done by the Romans or the Jews or anyone else. "No man takes my life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). He Himself was the ultimate provision for man, the fulfillment of all the animal substitutes like the ram for Isaac (Genesis 22). Abraham didn't have to kill his son, God stopped his arm, because, on that same mountain, God killed His own son. There was no more possibility of a replacement, Jesus was the replacement – for each one of us.

After breaking the matzo, Jesus "gave it" to each one who would receive it. "He gave His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). It was a free, unconditional gift. All they had to do was receive what Jesus offered. They put their hand out and He filled it. The same is true of salvation. Just put your heart out and let Him fill it. Have you received this free gift of Salvation He so generously wants to give to you?

CUP # 3 - REDEMPTION The cup is filled again. This is the cup of redemption. Pouring is a picture of Jesus' blood poured out, shed for us. Number 3 stands for deity. This is where Jesus instituted the cup of the Lord's Supper for He said "This is My blood" (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20). This act ended the Old Testament rule of the law. This act started the New Testament rule of grace. Up to now the Passover stood for physical deliverance from Egypt, from now on it was replaced by the Lord's Supper which stands for spiritual deliverance from sin.

"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. **This is My blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you; I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29; Luke 22:18).

First, He "took it" voluntarily. Imagine what went through Jesus' heart/mind as freely picked this up. Last time He dealt with this same cup He asked God to take it from Him. He will ask once again in Gethsemane "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39). On the cross He'll say "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). He could have rejected it, poured it out or turned from it, for it represented all of our sins – but He didn't.

Then He said "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24). The juice was the blood of the grape, a picture of blood. It was crushed from the grape by an olive press, which in Greek is "Gethsemane." Jesus' next stop that night would be in a place called Gethsemane because it was used as a place to crush the juice from grapes and olives. What happened figuratively there would literally happen to Him as the pressure began. It caused blood to come out with His sweat, so great was the pressure. "The Lord was pleased to CRUSH Him, to put Him to GRIEF." (Isaiah 53:10) "...bruised...crushed...poured out" (Isaiah 53) "The life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11) "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. (Hebrews 9:22)

He then did a strange thing, He “gave thanks” for this! How could He give thanks for that which represented his death, for God’s wrath poured out on Him? For one thing, this was God’s will, done for God’s glory and He was committed to that (John 4:34; 12:27-28). Then, too, He looked ahead to the future joy He would receive after the cross (Hebrews 12:2; Psalm 16:9-10) instead of focusing on the present price to be paid. This is a good principle for us to follow as well. Mainly, though, He did it for us. “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:28)

It was this shed blood that paid for the new “covenant” which He was making, one based on grace instead of law. The issue at stake was eternal salvation. The terms were that God would provide all that was necessary for eternal life with God. All man had to do was accept it. There were no conditions, it was unconditional and can never be rescinded or made null. The length of effectiveness of this covenant is forever.

Blood was the price paid to make the covenant good, the price paid. Blood is a sign of life. Physically blood cleanses the body as it flows through it, and spiritually it cleanses us of sin, too.

Next Jesus “gave it to them” free and unconditionally, for them to just receive it.

He told them to “drink all of it.” They were to drink deeply, fully, totally. It would quench their spiritual thirst and meet all their needs and desires. It sustains spiritually, just as fluids sustain the body physically. It refreshes, as blood does when we are weak. It renews. We need a constant flow of Jesus in us as well as our own physical blood. It cleanses, physically flushing our system and removing impurities. It revives and brings strength. There is no substitute for blood - ours or Jesus’.

The disciple’s response to all of this was that they drank it.” They personally accepted what He offered them so freely. It pictured their salvation – freely accepting His work for them. What a meaningful, moving time that was for them. From now on the Passover would be different. Instead of referring to the Passover and their physical deliverance from Egypt, now it would refer to our spiritual deliverance from sin and Satan. Truly this was a profound moment.

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Talk about Jesus having a special meal with His best friends. During the meal He tells them the good news that He will soon die for their sins but then come back to life. He tells us these things in the Bible. The Bible is His special book and is important for us to learn.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Teach about the Passover and the innocent, perfect lamb that had to die so it’s blood could be put on the door and the firstborn males inside wouldn’t die. It was a picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who was sinless but had to die to pay for our sins. Talk about the juice as a picture of the blood on the door and the bread we eat as a picture of the unleavened bread the Jews ate. Jesus changed the meaning to represent His blood shed and body broken for us. All we do is accept them and eat, just like salvation comes from freely accepting Jesus as our Savior.

15. JESUS' LAST SUPPER

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

What was the Passover and why was it celebrated? *(Answers are in italics.)*

The Passover celebrated the Jews deliverance from Egypt in the time of Moses.

What does the blood of the lamb stand for?

A lamb was killed and its blood put on the doorposts. The people under the blood were safe while the other first-borns died. It pictures Jesus' blood who saves us. When the people lived in tents, they didn't have door frames so they used grape juice to picture the blood of the lamb and that's what we use for the Lord's Supper today.

What did the people do to prepare for Jesus' last supper/Passover?

The house was totally cleaned, special dishes were used, no leaven was allowed in the house. The firstborn men fasted until the evening meal.

Why weren't they allowed to eat leaven during this time?

Leaven (yeast) is a bacteria that grows and gives off a gas. Actually, it decays the cells. Thus, it is a picture of sin for it grows from small and destroys. Without leaven bread is very flat. The Jews didn't have time to let the leaven raise for they were in a hurry to leave. Now it stands for Jesus' sinless body just like the juice stands for Jesus' blood.

What is an example of a sin that starts small and hidden but grows to cause destruction?

(Answers will vary)

What was pictured by the matzo being broken?

Its pictured Jesus' body being broken for our sin.

Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). What does this say about other religions that also claim show the way to God?

Jesus is the only way. All others are counterfeits that mislead (Acts 4:12).

Jesus told the disciples they would have difficulties in the world but He would give them peace despite the problems. Tell about a time when you had God's peace despite difficulties you faced.

(Answers will vary)

Jesus 'gave thanks' before He broke the bread or drank the juice. How could He give thanks for that which was a picture of the terrible death He was going to die?

He wasn't thankful for the pain that was coming, but was thankful for the privilege of doing God's will and providing for our salvation. He looked forward to the glory He would have after salvation was accomplished.

What can we learn from this example?

When we go through hard times, we must remember we are doing God's will and He will use it for His glory and our growth. Also, we must remember how wonderful things will be in heaven when there is no more suffering. Now is our time to serve Him here.

What does it mean to you when you partake of the Lord's Supper? What do you think about?

(Answers will vary)

16. ARREST & TRIALS

(Matthew 26:47-27:26; Mark 14:43-15:15; Luke 22:47-23:25; John 18:2-19:16)

Read Out Loud: Luke 22:39-53

By Bartholomew, Peter and Pilate

(There are several stories to use with this lesson. You can use all of them or pick which you want to use. You can even make this lesson last more than one week.)

By Bartholomew

When Jesus forced Judas' hand at the Passover meal and told him He knew he was going to betray Him, it threw the religious leader's plans way off. They wanted to wait until AFTER the Passover to act against Jesus for then all the out-of-town visitors would be gone. However, when they discovered they had lost their only inside man and they had already paid for his services, their hate pushed them to act instead of waiting.

Realizing Jesus wasn't in the Upper Room, Judas led the mob to Gethsemane where Jesus had been spending the nights. It was as if Jesus purposely went there to be discovered. My name is Bartholomew, a disciple of Jesus. I was with them that night and I'd like to tell you about it. I'll never forget it, neither should you!

THE WALK TO GETHSEMANE When our Passover was over, Jesus said something strange about the "evil prince of this world approaching" (John 14:30). We didn't understand it at the time, but later it all fit together.

As we left and walked through the streets of town, we sang Passover Psalms (113-118). Presently Jesus started teaching the disciples about our need of Him as the vine (John 15-16). He talked about difficult times that would be coming but said the Holy Spirit would be with us. We asked questions and He answered them.

Then we were about to cross the Kidron, normally dry but now a bubbling creek because it was spring. Jesus paused and watched the water. It did look different, somehow darker. Then we remembered. The slaughter of the ¼ million Passover lambs had begun in the temple and the blood drained through a channel cut in the rock to the Kidron. Seeing the innocent blood of those lambs really hit Jesus hard. I remembered John the Baptizer pointing Him out as the 'lamb of God' and He Himself saying He was the Good Shepherd who lay down His life for the sheep.

Jesus must have been thinking the same thing, for He soon started praying as we walked (John 17). He prayed for Himself, that He would do God's will. He prayed that we disciples would be faithful, and He prayed for disciples in future ages to be safe and protected. It was a serious, moving time.

GETHSEMANE By the time we arrived at Gethsemane, however, we were all very tired. It had been a long day. Those of us who were first-born had fasted, then we had a big meal in a stuffy room, now we were relaxed and very tired. Gethsemane was a good place to sleep. It was a place where olives and grapes were crushed between large stones in the fall, extracting the juice from them. The rest of the year it was a rich man's retreat from the heat of Jerusalem. The owner of this particular plot had given Jesus the key so He could use it when He needed a place to go. He had been sleeping here the last several nights instead of going back to Bethany. It gave Him privacy and more time to pray.

THE LONELY BATTLE It soon became evident, though, that Jesus wasn't going to be doing any sleeping that night. He didn't want us to sleep, either, but to pray so we wouldn't fall into temptation. Even in such trying times, His love for us caused Him to think of us and our needs first.

We watched Him go a short distance away and pray, and it was obvious He was in agony. He was overwhelmed with grief, swept with unrest. Obviously, a great battle was going on. He fell to the ground and cried a loud, long and deeply (Hebrews 5:7). He lay face down, then got up and staggered a bit, only to fall down in prayer again. I felt like I was intruding on His privacy by watching, but couldn't tear my eyes away. "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as You will" He kept crying over and over (Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42).

Angels appeared. Some drove back the demons who were tormenting Him, others comforted and ministered to Him. Then they were gone and the battle resumed, but He seemed to have more strength to battle. It was a cold night but He was sweating profusely. The sweat was darker than water. I realized there was blood mixed with it! He was under so much pressure that the tiny capillaries in His skin were breaking. I looked at the olive press nearby – it was the same thing. The anticipation of bearing our sins was starting to crush the life blood out of Him.

Do you understand what the struggle was all about? Jesus was perfect, He had never experienced sin, guilt or separation from God, things we live with every day. He naturally drew back from identification with our sins, but He did it out of love for us. That was the only reason I could think of for Him going through with this – for me.

JUDAS ARRIVES I couldn't stay awake any longer but fell asleep. Before I knew it, Jesus was shaking me awake. Surely it wasn't morning already? It was still dark, but the sounds and lights from a large group of men coming from Jerusalem were visible in the distance. They were headed this way. What was happening? Jesus just stayed and watched them come. My first impulse was to flee, and I'm sure that thought crossed His mind, too, but He didn't do it.

It seemed strange to have so many religious rulers and soldiers coming with Judas. It was also unusual for him to give Jesus such an intimate, long kiss. What happened to his respect for our Master? Jesus seemed to know things weren't right, but still reached out to Judas in love instead of rejecting him.

Obviously, the kiss was a signal of some sort, but Jesus took control before the rest of the mob reached Him. "Who do you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. No charges were read, no warrant presented. When Jesus readily admitted "I Am He" everyone stepped backwards, fell to the ground, and was pinned there. Even Satan-indwelt Judas was stuck to his back. Just the force of His eternal name Yahweh, which was embedded in the "I Am" He spoke, had more power than they could resist. He was showing them Who He really was so they wouldn't make a mistake that would have eternal consequences for them. He released the power and they stood up. When He asked them again who they wanted it was as if they hadn't experienced this awesome power. How could they not learn anything from it? (John 18)

By saying they wanted just Him, Jesus was covering for us, so we wouldn't be arrested as well. He knew we couldn't have withstood the test. Once again, His love for us put our needs before His own. I wonder how many other times He had done that but I hadn't noticed.

Peter rushed up with a table knife from the Passover, trying to attack the Romans and set Jesus free. Later we realized this was Satan's way of starting a riot so we would all be killed right there. Then He couldn't have gone to cross and paid for our sins before dying! Or at least, Jesus could have slipped away during the confusion and been safe, but again He wouldn't have paid for our sins on the cross on Passover day. Jesus saw through it, though, and quieted the whole

disturbance. He even healed the man's ear where Peter had attacked him. He told us if He wanted to escape, He'd could call hundreds of thousands of angels to help. But He didn't.

DISCIPLES FLEE All this was too much. We turned and fled back into the trees. I completely forgot my promise never to desert Him. I looked back for one last glimpse before ducking behind a tree. They had thrown Jesus to the ground and were tying His hands and feet with ropes and chains.

Tears fell as I fled. Why did this happen? Why did He allow it? Couldn't He have escaped? Of course, He could! In the first place, He could have not come to the one place Judas would look. He could have walked away while we slept. He could have left His enemies pinned to the ground, or even slipped away during Peter's attack. He could have called angels to deliver Him. Why didn't He?

The only reason is that He loved us. He loved me. He loved you. He did it for our sakes. It wasn't the nails that held Him to the cross, it was His love for us. What a great, unconditional, wonderful love that is! If He loved us that much before we became children of His, how much must He love us now?

Do you experience His love for you? Do you allow Him to show you that love? Are you aware of the many things He does for you because He loves you? Do you respond to that love by loving Him back? Do you love Him more than anything or anyone else? Even family? Even self? His love is available to all who come to Him for it.

By Peter

My name is Peter and my story is similar to that of a seed (John 12:23-24). Before planting it is hard and unproductive. When it is buried in the ground a process begins that leads to eventual fruit. Darkness and dampness cause the hardness to begin to soften. I, too, had to go through trials and difficulties to soften. I was hard and unproductive for I was in control of my own life. I had to die to myself to be useful to Jesus. It took pain and suffering to do it.

After time is spent in darkness and dampness, a seek begins to enlarge. It gets beyond its own limits. Then a chemical change takes place. Starch changes into sugar. I had to get beyond my own limits, too. That which was coarse and unappealing (starch) had to be changed to something sweet in me, too.

As a seed enlarges it eventually breaks open. God broke me out of my mold and habits. That's when growth starts. First a root grows. This anchors the seed and provides stability and a source of nourishment. It wasn't until I died to myself that I could put my roots in Jesus and His Word.

Up to this point, everything that happens to a seed happens underground, out of sight. Then the change starts to become evident to all. A little shoot appears. There is evidence of life. Eventually it grows and fruit is produced (Galatians 5:22-23). When you read about me in the book of Acts, you'll find I became a new, a different person. God had to break me before He could use me. I always depended on myself to do what needed doing. God had to soften me to teach me to depend on Him, knowing that only then would I be truly useful.

THE PROBLEM At the Last Supper I told Jesus He was wrong, that I would NOT deny Him. I knew I wouldn't. I thought I could do whatever I wanted but that wasn't true. I was acting in my own strength, and that always got me into trouble. When I attacked the crowd in Gethsemane to set Jesus free, I was again acting in my own strength. Actually, I found out later, I was playing right into Satan's hands for such an uprising would have gotten Jesus killed then and there. We would have been killed, too, and Jesus wouldn't have purchased our salvation on the cross!

When Jesus reprimanded and corrected me, I saw I had failed him. As was my way, I ran away from my mistakes. I completely forgot my promise to not desert Him and fled into the trees with the other disciples. I ran and hid with John. Later I found out what happened and pieced together all we heard.

THE TRIAL 1 Jesus was roughly tied and dragged across the Kidron, red with blood from the Passover lambs which were being slaughtered in the Temple. He was taken into Jerusalem through the sheep gate, where they took the sheep to be sacrificed. Jesus went to His own slaughtering. First, He was taken to Annas where He was to be tried, found guilty, and executed. However, the only 'witness' they had, Judas, had deserted them. The trial was a mockery of justice. It was illegal to charge a criminal at night or on the eve of a festival. Prior notice had to be given of a trial, and there was no quorum of judges nor a defense for the accused. The high priest was to be the accused's defender, not accuser. It wasn't a trial, just a murder plot! They questioned Jesus, looking for a trap to destroy Him. When He politely refused, they struck Him in the face with a stick.

Denial 1 Meanwhile I was outside. I couldn't stay away. I drug John along to find out what was going on, but I was doing it all on my own strength – no prayer or anything. That's why, when the girl who let people in, thought I was one of Jesus' disciples, I denied without even thinking. You see, it caught me off guard. I wasn't expecting it then and there. I realized as soon as I said the words, though, that all my heroic promises were gone. My confidence in my self was shaken. I was just an arrogant coward!

Later, when I looked back, I could see that it wasn't really that event that caused my sin. My problem had started long before. That was just the culmination of it. It really started at the meal when, in my pride and self-confidence, I wouldn't let Jesus wash my feet and insisted He was wrong about my coming denial. Then in Gethsemane, instead of taking His advice and praying, I slept. The attack on Malchus should have alerted me to the fact that I was not depending on His strength, but just doing what I thought was right in my own power. Also, I never should have been hanging around the courtyard with Jesus' enemies. That denial shook me, but didn't break me.

TRIAL 2 Meanwhile, Jesus was taken to a different part of the same home where Caiaphas held another court session. Caiaphas was Annas' son-in-law, the figure-head High Priest, whom Annas controlled. He was a sly manipulator and self-centered opportunist. Some of the chief priests and teachers of the law were there, but no witnesses. How could they get Rome's approval for execution if there were no witnesses and no real charges? False witnesses were paid to come forward and tell whatever they could, but even then, no two could be found to agree about anything. Witnesses were needed to prove any charge as well as to throw the first stone. Finally, they remembered when He said, "I am able to destroy this temple and in three days will build another." He was referring to His body but they twisted it to mean a threat to destroy their temple. They accused Him of being equal to God. When Jesus didn't deny He was God they had their pretense: They condemned Him to death for claiming to be God.

He was physically abused. They spit in His face, slapped Him, smashed His face with their fists and blindfolded Him before hitting Him. Then they mockingly challenged Him to 'prophecy who hit you.'

Denial 2 I could hear the uproar start where I was in the courtyard. People at the windows watched and yelled. I was at the fire warming my hands with the same people I had attacked in Gethsemane. The servant girl, who was now off duty at the gate, walked by and angrily accused me of being with Jesus. I don't think she was bothered that I was a disciple, but that I had called her a liar. Again, I denied her accusations. It was obvious everyone believed her and not me. Eventually the conversation turned to other things, though, and I felt relieved. Then it happened.

Denial 3 The group nearby kept talking louder and louder, looking and pointing at me. They were loud enough for everyone to hear. They recognized me as a Galilean by my dress and accent (I just couldn't keep my mouth shut!). I could tell the servant girl was there, egging them on. And then I saw a relative of Malchus, and knew he recognized me! Cold sweat broke out on my skin, despite the chill of the night. Have you ever noticed how your sins come back to haunt you? I cursed and swore to convince them I wasn't a follower of Jesus.

But then I heard a rooster crow and I remembered. The scales fell off my eyes and an awful awareness of what I had done arose in my heart. I noticed some movement out of the corner of my eye. Someone was being led through the courtyard to another room. His face was black and blue and covered with spit. His eyes were swollen shut and blood dripped from His face and scalp. He looked awful! Suddenly I recognized Him, something about the way He carried Himself when He walked. I knew Him. It was Jesus. He glanced over at me and time stood still. Our eyes locked for an instant and I read deep pain in His. I knew it wasn't from the physical beating but from my words. Those closest to you can hurt you more by their rejection than any stranger can ever hurt your body!

The reality of it all hit me hard. What I'd bragged, what I'd done – I could see it all clearly for the first time. Me – the bragger and failure. Immediately He was shoved on and those by the fire left to follow to the new trial site. No one noticed as I ran out the gate weeping.

I wept profusely, loud and bitterly that night. Long after I was out of tears, I kept crying. I couldn't stop. I had failed at my strong point. The guilt and failure of it all was too real. Instead of protecting Him, I hurt Him. He was right! I was broken.

TRAIL 3 Later I found out that the third religious trial, by the Sanhedrin, was just to make official the decision that had already been made. Details were taken care of to present their weak case to Pilate.

During all this time I roamed the streets. I looked awful and felt worse! Always before I could blame someone else. Always before Jesus bailed me out and I would convince myself I would do better next time. None of that happened this time. I hit bottom. I was broken. If I couldn't depend on myself, who could I depend on? Then it hit me! That was exactly what He was trying to teach me. I had to stop depending on myself and depend totally and only on Him!

A couple days later I heard He was alive, and He sought me out and reassured me that He still loved me. Can you believe that? Despite my failure He still loved me! Who can understand that kind of love? Not me! That whole experience was the worst thing that ever happened to me. But you know what, it was also the best. Has it happened to you? Has your self will been broken so you totally depend on Him and live in His strength? Like a wild horse, you won't serve your master until you are broken.

By Pilate

Those Jews had to be the worst people on the face of the earth to rule! They were arrogant, self-righteous, stubborn, manipulative, sneaky and deceitful. They would take but not give. They wouldn't face you man to man like us Romans. We hated them as much as they hated us, maybe even more! I should know. I was their ruler. My name is Pilate.

We Romans took away their freedoms and privileges, taxed them heavily and didn't allow them to execute anyone without permission. That's why they got me involved in their miserable murder plot! Oh, how I hate them! It was the worst thing I ever did! It was the biggest mistake of my life and changed everything, on this earth and for all eternity! This is my story.

TRIAL 4 I was a successful career soldier who was rewarded by being made governor of Judea. However, I was better at leading soldiers into battle than in politics and government.

The day I was talking about started like any other day, but it didn't stay that way long. I'll never forget it. It was Friday, April 3, 33 AD. The 6 AM night report from the duty officer spoke of an arrest in Gethsemane. Then I was informed of the arrival of the religious leaders and a mob of people. They had a bloody, beaten-up man with them. Why would they come to me on this, the day of their Passover, when they knew being in my presence would make them unclean and unable to partake? It must be very important to them. When they wouldn't come in, I made my first mistake by going out to talk to them. From then on, they had the upper hand. That first compromise set the pattern for the whole day. One little compromise leads to awful results!

You must remember that my past conflicts with the Jews didn't turn out too well. Twice I had riots on my hands and each time they complained to Rome about my treatment of them. Rome told me to keep things quiet or I was out! That meant that if they protested again Rome would replace me. Truly that gave them leverage to get their own way, and they knew it and used it!

Anyway, back to this man they brought in. Imagine the audacity of them – they didn't have any real charges against Him! They just wanted me to sign a blank check so they could do whatever they wished! I gave approval for a Jewish trial – but it turns out they had already had their trial! What they wanted was approval for execution.

They came up with some charges about Him being anti-government and anti-taxes – but they were all guilty of that themselves. Then they said He claimed to be a king, which made Him a threat to Caesar. I couldn't believe that. He seemed incapable of harm, but the charges were too serious to ignore.

I should have ended it all right there but I didn't. My pride kept me from giving in to them, but my fear kept me from turning them away. When I asked the prisoner if He was a king, He said He was! Knowing I had to investigate further, I brought Him inside. He said He was a king, but not any threat to Rome. He had some other kind of Kingdom He was king of. What a confusing mess! I'd much rather be leading troops into battle than doing this!

When I told the Jews I found no reason to have Him executed, I should have turned my back on it all. Instead, I listened to their yelling and threats. I was looking for an easy way out of this mess. I should have done the right thing and released Him. Instead I came up with a plan. I decided to turn the matter over to Herod, since I heard them say He was from Galilee. I know that was wrong and Herod had no authority, but perhaps it could get me off the hook.

TRAIL 5 At first Herod was fearful this man was John the baptizer come back to life to torment him for having him beheaded. But when he realized that wasn't the case he and his soldiers mocked and abused the prisoner and sent him back to me. Herod found no guilt of any crime in him. He didn't want to get involved.

TRIAL 6 I was really disappointed when I was informed Herod had returned Him to me. Herod was so impressed by my offer, though, that the rift between us was mended. I didn't care.

While He was gone, I had conferred with my intelligence officers and found out the man's name was Jeshua (Jesus). He supposedly did miracles and claimed to be God's Messiah. The people had rejected Him on Lamb Selection Day when He rode into town on a donkey while some people waved palm branches and acclaimed Him Messiah and God.

Don't misunderstand me, I'm was no religious person, but like all Romans I was very superstitious and I wasn't going to mess with any 'god.' So, I asked the religious rulers to just let Him go since Herod didn't find any guilt in Him, either. I wasn't surprised when they wouldn't.

By this time, I was getting frustrated and impatient. The rulers were obviously in a big hurry to get this done and I wasn't moving fast enough for them. They had paid a large number of

people to gather and pressure me to execute Him. That's when I thought of another compromise I might make.

I tried to have the crowd choose Him as the prisoner that was released on this day. I thought I was giving them no choice when I offered Barabbas as the other option. He was an insurrectionist, a murderer, public enemy number 1 and hated by everyone. At first it seemed my plan was working, but when I was interrupted to read a note from my wife, warning me to not harm this prisoner, the religious rulers turned the crowd their way. I was forced to release Barabbas.

When, in frustration, I asked them what they wanted me to do with Jesus, they yelled "Crucify Him!" They had lost their minds with a lust for blood and death. Instead of just wanting me to allow them to stone Him, now they were pushing for me to do their dirty work for them! My pride kept me from giving them what they wanted, but my fear kept me from doing what was right.

Then I thought of still another compromise. If the crowd wouldn't listen to reason, maybe I could appeal to their sympathy. I had the prisoner hung from the ceiling and whipped. I mean this was an awful whipping! It was called the 'half death' because one was more dead than alive, and wished they were dead. Thirty-nine lashes were made on His back with leather tipped with bone and steel. The skin was stripped off and the raw tendons and nerve endings exposed to the air. Immediately the victim went into shock from the loss of body fluids. Salt was rubbed into the back to revive the victim, and a robe plastered against it to stop the bleeding.

My soldiers then took Him into another room, tore that robe off (which started the bleeding again) and put a purple robe on Him in mockery. They made a crown of thorns and beat it into His scalp with sticks. Then they gave Him an old scepter and pretended to worship Him. They spit on Him, beat Him, and had a contest to see who could hit Him hardest and knock Him furthest. They pulled out handfuls of hair and beard. I couldn't believe what had gotten into them. It was like some evil, demonic forces was driving them. They were wild animals, going way beyond what I gave permission for.

When He came before the crowd again, I was sure the people would feel He had been punished enough. He could barely stand and had to be dragged out. However, the same maniacal wildness was in them that was in my soldiers. What was going on? All I could do was wash my hands of the whole thing, reminding them that this was all their fault and not my doing.

I saved my neck that day, but lost my soul. Three years later I was removed and forced to take my own life to preserve my honor. When I stood before God, I knew that He was indeed the King of the universe. Everyone on the other side of the grave knew. If only I had believed earlier...

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Tell them how people picked on Jesus and did unfair things to Him, but He was kind to them and didn't try to hurt them. He went through all the bad things we go through. Talk about how they should treat people who are cruel to them.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Talk about the unfair things that happened to Jesus, but He didn't get angry and try to hurt them back. He forgave them and was kind to them. It's OK to defend yourself and protect others who are being picked on, but always remember Jesus' example to show love to those who are unkind to you. Remember, Jesus was picked on and treated unfairly, so He knows what it is like. When that happens to you, talk to Him because He understands. The reason Jesus let them do those things to Him was because He loved us and was willing to take our punishment for sin on the cross. Talk about what they can do to show Jesus' love to those who are cruel to them. You can also talk about Peter and his fear. What should they do when afraid? Peter and Pilate both compromised but it led to sin and misery for both of them. Ask them when they are tempted to compromise and what they should do to resist?

16. ARREST & TRIALS

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Why did the religious rulers decide to arrest Jesus during the Passover instead of waiting until later when the visitors had left Jerusalem? *(Answers are in italics.)*

Because they lost Judas as a spy. He was the only one who would know where they could find Jesus and when Jesus knew what Judas was doing, Judas is no longer available to spy. Plus, he was to be their star witness. They had already paid him so they had to act now or not be able to have his help. God forced them to act now by doing this.

Why was Jesus struggling when He prayed in Gethsemane?

He knew bearing the sins of the whole world would be terrible and He naturally drew back from contamination with sin and its consequences. He went through with it for us though.

If Jesus was God, why did He let them arrest Him, why not get away?

He was committed to God's plan to pay for our sins on the cross and this was God's will.

Why did the disciples run away instead of staying with Jesus?

They were afraid so they ran and hid.

Do you get afraid? What should you do when afraid?

Everyone gets afraid. When we do, we must remember God is greater than our fear and He promises He is always with us. Memorize and quote Bible verses about God being greater than our fear (Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; I Samuel 17:45-47; II Samuel 22:33-35,40-41)

How does Jesus' arrest and crucifixion show His love for us?

The only reason He did it is because of His love for us. It wasn't the Romans or even the nails that help Him to the cross. It was His great sacrificial love for us!

What did Peter brag he would do no matter what?

Stay faithful to Jesus despite what happened and what the other disciples did.

Instead, what did he do and why?

He got afraid and lied. He denied even knowing Jesus. He was afraid what people would say to him. He should have been faithful and trusted Jesus.

Why didn't the religious rulers give Jesus a fair, legal trial?

They just wanted an excuse to kill Him because they were jealous. They allowed Satan to put hatred in their hearts for Him.

Why didn't Pilate release Jesus if he knew Jesus was innocent?

He was afraid the Jews would complain to Rome and he'd lose his job and life.

Why didn't Jesus defend Himself during His trials?

He knew their minds were made up and wouldn't change. He knew it was God's will for Him to die and He was submitting to that. If He said He was God they would have mocked Him and He didn't want God's truth made fun of.

How does it make you feel to think of what Jesus went through for your sins?

(Answers will vary)

17. CRUCIFIXION

(Matthew 27:31-66; Mark 15:20-47; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:16-42)

Read Out Loud: Mark 15:25-39

By Barabbas

Hello! My name is Barabbas. Really it is Bar-Abba. “Bar” means “son of” and “Abba” means “father.” I was “son of the father” because my father was a well-known rabbi. My first name was very common – Jesus, the same as Joshua in the Old Testament. Thus, I was Jesus Bar-abba (Jesus, son of the father) and I was fighting for the physical deliverance of Israel. My life crossed paths with another Jesus, Bar-Joseph, Who was working for the spiritual deliverance of Israel. What a way our paths crossed!

BACKGROUND I was an insurrectionist. I was a leader in the underground. We were in rebellion against Rome and murdered soldiers whenever we could. We called ourselves Zealots. Today you would call us terrorists. I was full of hate and bitterness for anyone and everyone. If someone wasn't for us, he was our enemy. That included this other Jesus. I first heard of Him from Simon the Zealot, who left us to be one of His disciples. When he tried to tell me about this better way of love and peace, I spit on him and walked away. I was too disgusted to talk.

I never met that Jesus in person. He was in the same prison I was in but in a different place. There were no prison terms then. Prison was just a temporary holding place until trial, then one was flogged, executed or released. It was April 13, 33 AD and I was awaiting execution. I had been arrested and found guilty and was to die that morning. It was to be a public, horrible death as an example to others.

RELEASE Since Maccabean times it was the custom to release a prisoner at Passover, symbolizing the freeing of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. Rome carried on this practice. Evidently Pilate used this as a way to have the other Jesus released. I could hear the crowds from my cell, but not Pilate. I heard the crowds start chanting “Barabbas,” then after a pause “Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!” I assumed I was doom. A cold chill shook me as the reality of crucifixion settled over me. I was as hard and cold as anyone, but I was still human! When soldiers then burst through my cell door and dragged me out, I assumed that was it. When they opened a side door and threw me out into the street, I couldn't believe it! I quickly scampered away, but not too far. My two buddies were still there, about to be killed this day. I felt like I was deserting them, although I wasn't about to go back inside. I was very curious about why I was released. Was it the prisoner exchange? If so, who was taking my place?

When I saw it was this other Jesus I didn't care. I hated Him. He was weak. He could have turned the crowds into an army and fought the Romans but didn't. I had no respect for cowardice like that. Still, something started changing inside me. For the first time since I was a child, I felt pity, sorrow for another human being. I guess it's because I could identify with Him. He was taking my place on my cross.

TO GOLGOTHA Then I saw Him for the first time, carrying my cross toward Golgotha. It weighed 200 pounds. An awful curse from God went with it (Deuteronomy 21:23). Of course, they made Him and my two friends go the long way, weaving up and down streets so more people would see what happened to those who opposed Rome, before exiting the city. Their crimes were written on boards which were carried in front, then nailed to their cross. Funny, all His said was that He was the “King of the Jews.”

Going outside the city pictured exclusion, rejection by God. That's where the ‘scapegoat’ was sent. I wondered how someone who claimed to be God would handle that. Before He got

there, though, it all was too much for Him physically and He collapsed under the weight. Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service.

EXECUTION Golgotha was an awful place! It meant ‘skull,’ and that’s what the place looked like. It had the smell and feel of death everywhere. Some mercy was shown, though, by offering a narcotic (gall or myrrh). Surprisingly, Jesus rejected it. That made me curious.

I watch as He was stripped naked and thrown backward on to the wood. I involuntarily flinched as His raw, bloody back hit the rough wood. I turned away as His arms were spread and nailed, and then His feet. That was my cross. That should have been me....

The cross was lifted and dropped into a hole with a jarring thud. There He was. His arms and knees were flexed a bit so He could pull Himself up to allow air into His lungs. Perhaps I’d better quote what a medical doctor in your day says about crucifixion:

“The cross is placed on the ground and the exhausted man is quickly thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square wrought-iron nail through the wrist deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flex and movement. The cross is then lifted into place. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees flexed. The victim is now crucified. As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain. The nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again, he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet. As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through his muscles, knotting them deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subsided. Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen. Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-renting cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against rough timber. Then another agony begins: a deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with cerium and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over. The loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level. The compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues... Finally, he can allow his body to die...” (Adapted from C. Truman Davis, M.D. in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8). No wonder Jesus spoke very little on the cross.

THE END COMES Then it got dark, like midnight. Even I could feel an evil chill in the air. I couldn’t help thinking that Satan and his demons were everywhere, attacking Him as He hung there in my place. He cried out, really yelled, that God had deserted Him. I found out later that during that time He was literally taking my place in hell. Then, after 3 hours of dark torture, He seemed to have peace. He said His work was done He voluntarily died. Then the sun shone again, but an earthquake hit at that very moment. He took my place, know what I mean?

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Tell them Jesus took our punishment, like if you disobeyed and deserved a spanking but someone else came and took the spanking for you.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Explain why Jesus died – to suffer and pay for our sin so we won’t have to. Point out He thought of each of them by name when He suffered for them. We should turn from sin because it was our sin that made Him suffer. Thank Him for doing it for us.

17. CRUCIFIXION

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Who was Barabbas? *(Answers are in italics.)*

The leader of the criminals crucified with Jesus. He was released instead of Jesus.

Why was Barabbas, a guilty, man set free?

It was the custom to release a prisoner at Passover. Pilate gave the people a choice, assuming they would release Jesus instead of the hated Barabbas. But the religious rulers had bribed the people in the crowd and they called for Barabbas to be released.

Why was Jesus, an innocent man, condemned?

The Jews were jealous of His popularity and Pilate was afraid to release Him even though He was not guilty. It was all part God's plan for Jesus to die for our sins.

What was crucifixion like that made it so painful and awful.

Nails were in the great nerve-centers of the wrists and ankles. The back which had been whipped raw rubbed against the rough wooden cross. There was exposure to the hot sun and no water. The person couldn't breathe very well and eventually, after several days, died of lack of oxygen.

What made Jesus' death worse than others by crucifixion?

God placed on Jesus during those hours all our sins. Then He punished Jesus with the punishment we would have deserved and received by spending all eternity in hell. Jesus had to be a man to take our place. He also had to be sinless God or He would have had to die for His own sins.

What did Jesus mean when He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit turned their backs on Jesus because He became guilty of our sins and God cannot have anything to do with sin. He had never felt the guilt of sin or the awfulness of being separated from God before.

Why did it become dark everywhere?

That showed that darkness and evil seemed to be winning. Satan and his demons were doing everything they could to destroy Jesus. God is light, but Jesus was dying. It also gave Jesus some privacy from everyone watching as He went through His agony. It must have been lonelier for Him in the dark, though.

What do you think Jesus thought about while He was dying on the cross?

He thought about each one of us, by name, as He suffered and paid for every sin we would ever commit. He thought of us with love, that's why He didn't come down from the cross.

How does it make you feel to realize Jesus actually thought about you, in love, on the cross?

(Answers will vary)

If Jesus did all that for you, is there anything He asks of you that is too much?

No

What can you do for Him?

Love Him. All we can give Him is our heart, and that's what He wants most from us. That's why He died for us, so we can be close to Him. We show our love by obeying Him, praising Him, thanking Him and telling others about Him.

18. RESURRECTION

(Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-14; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-20)

Read Out Loud: John 20:1-31

By Thomas

Have you ever seen a crucifixion? No, I guess you haven't. You aren't missing anything. I mean, it's AWFUL! The pressure and toll it takes on a body is inhuman, and if a person has been flogged previous to it, it's hard to recognize it as a human body. None of us disciples, who bragged so grandly about never deserting Him, were there. It ended up being two religious leaders who took His body for burial. It's good they did, or He'd have been thrown into the garbage pit and incinerated. I wasn't around to see this because I ran and hid, but I heard about it later. My name is Thomas.

DAY 1 We Jews count our days by parts of days, and the first day Jesus was in the tomb was Friday. He was put in a little after 3 PM and there until the day ended at sunset, which is when Saturday, the Sabbath, the second day began. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea got permission to get the body, used their own funds for spices and donated a tomb. Praise God!

DAY 2 The Sabbath went from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. We all stayed hidden. The others gradually gathered back in the upper room but locked the doors out of fear. No work or travel was allowed on the Sabbath. We never ever gave a thought to His prophesied resurrection. It seems the religious rulers did, though, for they even made preparations to prevent it. They sealed the tomb and stationed Roman soldiers to guard.

DAY 3 Before dawn some of the women started out to get to the tomb at first light so they could properly dress His body with spices. It was the only way left to show Him their love and devotion. Sometime that night angels came and moved the stone to show that the tomb had been vacated. They also chased the soldiers away, making it safe for the women. They weren't aware of the guards, nor did they have a plan for moving the stone, which took many strong men to move. But God had taken care of all those things for them.

At the tomb they noticed the stone was gone, and so was the body! Confused, they thought His body was stolen. First, He is killed, now they don't even have His body!

Meanwhile, at the temple at this same time, the High Priest was waving a barley sheaf in front of the torn veil which had been pinned back in place. Firstfruits was being celebrated, a promise of more to come. Only later did we realize how beautifully this spoke of Jesus' resurrection and all of ours to follow.

The women missed all this, only grieving the loss of the body. Eyes downcast, they didn't notice the 2 angels inside and 1 outside the tomb. They were startled when the angels spoke, reminding them He had said He would come back to life and He had! Their emotions were so strong that their rational thinking was impaired. The women didn't grasp what the angels were saying. Grief overcame faith. They returned to the upper room and told that the body was stolen.

FIRST APPEARANCE John and Peter ran to the tomb. Being younger, John got there first and stood at the door, staring in. Peter rushed by and entered, confused and sad. John then entered and saw the linens that had wrapped Jesus. The head piece was neatly folded and set in place, the other still formed like an empty cocoon. John didn't remember Jesus' words, but the evidence made him think perhaps Jesus was alive. He didn't say anything, though. They then started back to the upper room with their news.

Meanwhile Mary Magdalene, the leader of the women, who had been wonderfully saved and delivered by Jesus, had left following Peter and John, but at a slower pace. Somehow, they

missed each other coming and going, probably taking different routes. When Mary got to the tomb, she was emotionally drained from 3 days of grief and crying. Seeing the angels, she assumed they were gardeners and wanted to know where they had put the body.

Then someone said, “Mary,” and she recognized the voice. Immediately falling on her knees, she hugged Him. Jesus told her to go tell the others that He was alive. After she left some other women came and they, too saw Jesus. However, the disciples wouldn’t believe the woman no matter what they said.

APPEARANCE TO OTHERS Somewhere in this time Jesus appeared in private to Peter to make things right between them. In the afternoon Mary (mother of James the Less and a cousin of Jesus’ mother) and her husband Cleopas (brother of Joseph) were walking back home to Emmaus. They were confused and hurt and it had been a long, tiring walk.

A stranger joined them and they started talking about what had happened. They invited Him to eat with them, and that’s when He revealed who He was. Immediately He disappeared.

Well, they had to rush back to Jerusalem, to the upper room, to give this good news to everyone there. Jesus appeared there, too. He just materialized despite the doors being locked. He ate with them and told them how His resurrection had been prophesied throughout the whole Old Testament. It was a glorious time, or so I was told.

APPEARANCE TO THOMAS As you may know, I was not present when all this happened. I was away from the others, hiding in fear. To be perfectly honest, I was really feeling sorry for myself over this all. I had heard the supposed accounts of the resurrection, but wouldn’t believe them. I didn’t want to get my hopes up again. I wouldn’t believe the others even after they all claimed to have seen Him. It’s not that I thought they were lying or making it up, it’s just that I wasn’t ready to let go of my pity and depression, so I didn’t believe them. It took a week for me to climb out of that pit and be where I should have been in the first place, with God’s people. You know, you miss a blessing when you aren’t with God’s people when you should be.

A week later, also on a Sunday, Jesus appeared to all the disciples and followers again, and this time I was present. He told me I could come touch and feel Him if I needed more proof, but I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was Jesus! I fell on my knees before Him, saying, “My Lord and My God.” He said I was blessed for seeing and believing, but those later who would believe without even seeing were even more blessed. That means you who are reading this.

THE STORY GOES ON That wasn’t the last time we saw Him. Actually, we saw Him about a dozen times over the next 40 days. Sometimes He appeared to individuals, other times to several people at the same time. Once He even appeared to a group of over 500 people. Mainly we saw Him back home, in Galilee. He never did appear to any of His enemies, the religious rulers. Many of them came to accept Him as their Savior and Lord, and then some saw Him. But those who didn’t believe never did see Him. They had enough from the soldiers who were guarding the tomb. They told them about the resurrection. The religious rulers believed them for they bribed them with a million dollars to lie and say His disciples stole His body.

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Tell them that everything and everyone dies, but we don’t have to be afraid of it because Jesus overcame death. They may not understand the concept, but it’s good for them to hear the story of His resurrection and victory over death.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Explain why this is the best day ever. Jesus showed He was greater than death. He proved that He defeated death and paid for sin. He came back to life from being dead. Therefore, we don’t have to fear death because we know that even when our body dies, our soul, the real us inside that thinks and feels, will live forever with Jesus.

18. RESURRECTION

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Jesus' body was put in a tomb, but when did His soul and spirit go to heaven?

Immediately at death. He told the thief who believed in that that "today you will be with Me in paradise."

Where do we go when we die?

Our bodies go into the ground but our soul and spirit, the 'real' us, immediately goes to heaven to be with Jesus. He gives us a temporary body to use until our old bodies are resurrected and changed into eternal bodies.

Who do you know who is already in heaven with Jesus?

(Answers will vary)

How do you think they feel about being in heaven with Jesus?

Great!!!

Who saw Jesus alive first? Why?

Mary Magdalene. She was always faithful to Jesus and was at the cross and waiting at the tomb. Jesus rewarded her for her faithfulness.

At first the disciples didn't believe that Jesus was alive, but then they believed. How do you think they felt when they realized He had conquered death and was alive again!

(Answers will vary)

How many days did Jesus appear to people before He ascended?

40

How many times during those days did He show Himself to His followers?

12

Why did He appear to so many people for such a long time?

To make sure everyone knew and believed He was alive.

What was special about Jesus' appearance to Thomas?

Even though Thomas was doubtful Jesus went out of His way to show Thomas He was alive and He loved and cared for Him. He doesn't get angry when we struggle with doubts but loves us and helps our faith to grow.

What difference would it have made if Jesus hadn't come back to life?

We'd have no salvation, Jesus wouldn't be God and wouldn't be in heaven helping us, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have come to indwell us, the Bible wouldn't be true, we would have no church, no forgiveness, no hope – nothing!

Jesus' resurrection body looked like His earthly body but it was perfect, sinless, never got tired or sick and will last forever. You will have a resurrection body like this as well. What do you think you will like best about it?

(Answers will vary)

19. ASCENSION
(Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:3-14)
Read out Loud: Acts 1:3-14
By Judas Thaddaeus

I was one of Jesus' disciples. My name is Judas Thaddaeus, but after the other Judas betrayed Jesus I dropped the "Judas" and just went by Thaddaeus. Wouldn't you have done the same? Judas, after the tribe of Judah, was a fine name until Judas Iscariot forever put a black cloud over it. It's very sobering to realize I could have done the same thing the other Judas had done if it weren't for God's grace in my life. What a difference that decision of Judas' made. He will spend all eternity separated from God while I will spend eternity in God's presence in heaven. How do I know I'll be with Jesus? An angel told me! If that sounds strange to you, I can assure you it seemed strange to me as well – but then there were lots of strange things happening in those days!

Jesus, the Messiah, had been cruelly crucified by the Romans. Stranger yet, He came back to life on the third day! For forty days He walked with us and appeared to us. Yet we knew that wouldn't last. The way it all ended was equally strange.

We had all gathered in Jerusalem one last time and walked out of the city to Bethany on the Mount of Olives. We had been there many times and memories, both good and bad, flooded our minds as we walked. This was the way to Mary, Martha and Lazarus's home. Jesus rode a donkey into town while people shouted Hosannah. We knew this was the spot where God's Shekinah Glory (His Presence that had been in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle) ascended into heaven when He left the temple during Ezekiel's time. We also knew that Jesus said He would one day come to earth again, and this would be the very spot where His foot would touch ground! We knew He would soon be leaving, but how would we manage without Him? We needed Him so very much. How could we carry on without Him? On our own, we realized, we were nothing! How would we ever manage?

As had so often happened over the years, Jesus answered our question before we even asked it. It was uncanny how He could read our thoughts – but then He was God, wasn't He? He quickly reminded us that the Holy Spirit, Whom He had often talked about (especially at the last supper the night before He was crucified), would indwell us and enable us to carry on God's work! He told us to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come. Then the Spirit would show us what to do next. His Presence in us we would replace Jesus walking among us.

As Jesus was saying these things, He started ascending into heaven. He just went up and instantly we all knew that this was good-bye. This wasn't like the other times when He temporarily left. This was the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.

Again, our questions were anticipated and answered – this time by 2 angels who said that Jesus would certainly return, and it would be in exactly this same way as He went. Later, when the Holy Spirit did come and indwell us, He helped us remember these things and put them together just as Jesus had said He would.

We remembered other words He spoke to us when we ate together for the last time in the Upper Room. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:1-4) Knowing He was going to prepare a place for us to come be with Him gave us a lot of comfort.

It was further assurance I will spend eternity with Him! Knowing that will happen can really help me face whatever the future may have for me!

A few years later Paul added more details about this happening. He said that the next event on God's prophetic program is the Rapture – the trumpet will sound, Jesus will appear in the sky, and every person from the cross to the present who has accepted Jesus as Savior will be taken to heaven. If they have already died their bodies will be taken to heaven to join their soul/spirit which went there immediately at death. Jesus told the thief on the cross beside Him, "TODAY you will be with me in paradise." His body stayed on the cross when he died but He was in heaven with Jesus!

Read Paul's exact words about this: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Paul also explained to the Corinthians that we will have a new body, one not limited like this earthly body is. It will be like Jesus' resurrection body. "But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So, will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:35-44)

So, while we lost Jesus' presence at the ascension, we gained much more than we lost. Instead of living among us, He lived in us by the Holy Spirit. And it wasn't just the 11 of us that had this benefit – every believer from that time on has the same great privilege. I see now that Jesus had to go to heaven to assume headship over the church (Hebrews 10:12,13; Ephesians 4:8,10; Psalm 68:1) as well as sending the Holy Spirit (John 16:7,14; Acts 2:33; John 14:16-19). Now that He is in heaven, He is our mediator and defender, He intercedes for us at the right hand of God (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 6:20). So, we have Him inside us now and when we die, we will go to be with Him forever! That's a good deal no matter how you look at it!

FOR USE WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: Share the good news that Jesus is alive in heaven now watching us and helping us. That's why we can talk to Him in prayer.

FOR USE WITH OLDER CHILDREN: Tell about Jesus is now in heaven watching over us, protecting us, helping us and sending angels to help us. He lives in heaven but He also lives in our heart when we put our faith in Him. He is God, so He is everywhere. But He lives in His people in a special way. Explain the Holy Spirit to them as best you can.

19. ASCENSION

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

What does it mean when we say Jesus 'ascended' to heaven? (*Answers are in italics.*)

It means He 'went up' into heaven while the disciples watched.

Why did Jesus want to have His disciples watch Him ascend into heaven?

So they would know for sure that He was gone for good and they would never doubt where He was or Who He was. They didn't. Their faith was so strong they were willing to die for Him.

Where was the place from which Jesus ascended into heaven?

The Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, the same place His foot will touch earth when He returns to the earth.

Why were the disciples told to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come? Why not get right to work?

We can't do anything without God's power in us and that power comes when His Holy Spirit indwells us. God tells us that at the moment you accept Jesus as Savior the Holy Spirit comes and lives in you forever.

What things are you able to do because God's Spirit is inside you that you wouldn't be able to do without Him?

Have real love, joy, peace, patience and self-control. Be able to forgive others. Courage to tell others about Him. Understanding as you read the Bible. Power and strength to live like Jesus.

Who was present to tell the disciples that Jesus would be back in the same way He left?

2 angels

What is it called when Jesus comes back for all the Christians who are alive, but doesn't touch foot to the earth?

The rapture. The trumpet will sound, the bodies of dead believers will be resurrected and living believers will be changed into eternal bodies and taken immediately to heaven (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

What is Jesus doing in heaven now?

He prays for us. He defends us to God when Satan accuses of sin, saying that He paid for all our sins so Satan can't have us. He guides and directs us. He leads the Church, which is called His Body. He gives us spiritual gifts.

Do you ever get afraid of dying?

(Answers will vary)

Why shouldn't we be afraid?

Jesus defeated and conquered death. He comes gets us when we die and take us to heaven to be with Him forever. Nothing could be better than that!

CONCLUSION

I hope you have found this book helpful. Its purpose is to help you better develop your own sermons and Bible studies, not do all your work for you. Use what I have provided and change it, add to it, adapt it or do whatever God leads you to do. They are given as a start to help you better communicate God's Word.

If you have questions or suggestions, please let me know. If you use any of these sermons or studies, I'd love to hear from you. Tell me which ones you used and how the people responded.

Thank you very much for using this book. May God continue to bless you and use you for His glory!

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