

LESSON 37

# The Crucifixion & the Criminals

LUKE 23:42-43



BIBLE TRUTH

GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE EVEN TO THE WORST SINNERS

**LESSON SNAPSHOT**

**1. OPENING REVIEW . . . . . 5 MIN**

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

**2. BIBLE STORY . . . . . 10 MIN**

Read Luke 23:32–43 from the Scriptures or read story 115, “The Crucifixion & the Criminals,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

**3. OBJECT LESSON 1 . . . . . 10 MIN**

*A Modern Testimony*

**4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION**

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

**5. OBJECT LESSON 2 . . . . . 10 MIN**

*Compare Their Words*

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ whiteboard and dry-erase marker
- ✓ poster board (optional)

**6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY . . . . . 5 MIN**

**7. ACTIVITY TIME . . . . . 15 MIN**

*A Thank-You Prayer*

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ pencil or pen and paper

**8. CLOSING PRAYER . . . . . 5 MIN**

**9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON . . . . . 10 MIN**

*Casting Lots*

**SUPPLIES:**

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

**TOTAL 70 MIN**

## PREPARING TO TEACH

## TEACHING POINTS

**Jesus spoke forgiveness in the midst of his suffering**—In Matthew 18:21–22 Jesus told Peter that we should forgive someone who sins against us not seven times, but seventy times seven! On the cross, Jesus demonstrated this kind of loving forgiveness when he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Rather than resent the men who tortured and crucified him, Jesus had compassion on them.

**Jesus was mocked**—The crowd, hearing Jesus ask the Father to forgive his oppressors, mocked him. The people, the soldiers, and even the rulers hurled insults at him. To them, Jesus looked powerless as he hung on the cross. Those who at one time had believed him to be the Messiah now shook their heads in disappointment. Matthew tells us that “those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him’” (Matthew 27:39–42).

The people wanted to see if Jesus could save himself. When he didn’t, they saw him as a defeated man. They saw him who had made great claims about being God now suffering and bleeding like any ordinary man. Even the sign above Jesus, meant to mock his claims, testified of his true position: Jesus was the King of the Jews. What they didn’t know is that Jesus was fully God while also being fully man.

**Jesus hung between two criminals**—Jesus was crucified with a criminal on his left and another on his right. Isaiah prophesied about this when he wrote that the suffering servant would be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). One criminal joined the crowd in mocking Jesus, but the other criminal rebuked him for his mocking. The latter realized Jesus had done nothing wrong. He then placed his faith in Christ, saying, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” In a remarkable demonstration of grace, Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42–43). The arm of the Lord is not too short to save the one who repents at the very last moment. In the midst of so much unbelief, we see newfound faith. And the criminal who believed was rewarded with assurance from Christ and life in paradise.

## A LITTLE BIT MORE

### *The Curse of Hanging on a Tree*

God told Israel through Moses that, when one guilty of a capital offense is killed and hung on a tree, his body should not be left on the tree overnight because a hanged person is cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). This ultimately points to the method of Jesus' death. The religious rulers understood crucifixion to be an insult to Christ, who they thought had blasphemed. In fact, Jesus was cursed by God on our behalf. God poured out his wrath for our sin upon Jesus. In Galatians 3:13 Paul says it this way, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'"

## Where Is the Gospel?

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Along with the unrepentant thief, the chief priests, and teachers of the law, Mark tells us that even those people passing by joined in the mocking of Jesus. They challenged Jesus to save himself and came down from the cross. They repeated Jesus' claim to rebuild the temple in three days and jeered.

Jesus would in three days rebuild the temple—the temple of his body. Three days after his death, Jesus would rise again. The mockers called out for Jesus to save himself. Little did they realize that if Jesus had listened to their mocking, no one would be saved. But by dying on the cross, Jesus made it possible for even the mockers to be saved.

THE LESSON

**OPENING REVIEW** ..... **5 MIN**

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

**BIBLE STORY** ..... **10 MIN**

Read Luke 23:32–43 from the Scriptures or read story 115, “The Crucifixion & the Criminals,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

**OBJECT LESSON 1** ..... **10 MIN**

**A Modern Testimony**

If you are aware of a person who experienced a dramatic conversion, invite them to come and share their testimony with your class. Make sure to remind them to include the gospel in their testimony. Help the children make the connection to the thief on the cross whom God saved just before his death.

If you are unaware of a person in your church, then consider someone more famous, e.g., Chuck Colson.

**TEACHING/DISCUSSION**

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

**OBJECT LESSON 2** ..... **10 MIN**

**Compare Their Words**

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ whiteboard and dry-erase marker
- ✓ poster board (optional)

Write the following list of phrases on the whiteboard in the same order as they are listed below. Or print them out on poster board before class.

- “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40).
- “He saved others; he cannot save himself” (Matthew 27:42).
- “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).
- “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” (Luke 23:35).
- “He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matthew 27:42).

Ask the class the following questions:

- Which of these quotations did Jesus speak?  
*(the third one)*
- How is Jesus’ statement different from the others?  
*(Draw out the children here—there is no specific correct answer.)*
- What do you think about what the people said concerning Jesus?  
*(Draw out the children here and remind them that the people thought the Messiah would deliver them from the Romans. They never would have expected the Messiah to die such a cursed death.)*
- What do you think you would have said if you had been there?  
*(We sometimes think too quickly that we would act differently than those who mocked Christ on the cross. But we need to remember that we have the benefit of knowing the truth about Jesus. Without that knowledge, most of us would have joined the mockers.)*

**SWORD BIBLE MEMORY** ..... **5 MIN**

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

**ACTIVITY TIME** ..... **15 MIN**

**A Thank-You Prayer**

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ pencil or pen and paper

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

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

Take time to challenge your class with the gospel. The Bible tells us that today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Help the children not to be fooled into thinking they can postpone committing their lives to Christ until they are older. Emphasize that they need to listen to the Holy Spirit when he prompts them to repent. If they turn a deaf ear to his urgings they need to know that they won't always be able to hear him as clearly as they do now.

**CLOSING PRAYER** ..... **5 MIN**

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

**BONUS OBJECT LESSON** ..... **10 MIN**

**Casting Lots**

**SUPPLIES:**

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

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

Prior to class choose a volunteer to help you. Instruct them secretly to take the straw nearest your thumb, which will be the shortest straw.

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

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

First, read how the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing (Luke 23:34). Tell them how David prophesied they would do that in Psalm 22:18. Explain that this demonstrates the power of God to be in control of all things. Then read Proverbs 16:33 and share how God is in sovereign control of the lot.

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

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

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

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