

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 10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

5. OBJECT LESSON 2 15 MIN

Saved in the Nick of Time

SUPPLIES:

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

6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

7. ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Color a Picture

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page for NT Lesson 37—one for each child
- ✓ markers or crayons

8. CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

Compare Their Words

SUPPLIES:

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

TOTAL 80 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.

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 **10 MIN**

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

OBJECT LESSON 2 **15 MIN**

Saved in the Nick of Time

SUPPLIES:

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

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

Divide the class into two teams. Place a piece of masking tape lengthwise down the middle of the table. Draw twelve marks along the line like a ruler and label them from 12 down to 1. Twelve should be at the far end of the table counting down to one closer to the center of the table. Prop up the end of the table without the numbers with several books or adjust the legs so the table slants downward. The object is for one team to release the ball on the high side and have it roll down along the tape towards the numbers on the low side of the table.

One team stands in line to roll the ball down the table. The other team tries to snatch the ball up with the salad tongs. (Allow younger children to use their hands to catch the ball if the salad tongs are too difficult.) The object is to wait as long as possible to grab the ball—until it rolls to the higher numbers. If you miss, it will fall off the end of the table into “destruction.” The longer you wait to grab the ball, the higher score you are awarded. Award points according to the last line the ball crossed before it was grabbed.

After everyone on a team has had a chance to roll or catch the ball, switch positions. Each team is awarded points according to the number the ball crossed last. The opposing team may roll the ball fast, but it must roll along the tape and not bounce. If the ball rolls off the tape line or bounces, the opposing team loses five points.

After the competition, ask the class the following questions:

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

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

Read the account of the thief on the cross and ask the children where he would be if he were the ball on the table. What can we learn about God’s forgiveness from the way he saved the thief?

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 **10 MIN**

Color a Picture

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page for NT Lesson 37—one for each child
- ✓ markers or crayons

While the children are coloring, engage them by asking the following questions:

- What did the robber who was sorry for what he had done ask Jesus to do for him?
(He asked Jesus to remember him in heaven.)
- What did Jesus tell him?
(Jesus told the robber, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” Jesus forgave the robber his sin and promised him heaven. The robber trusted and put his faith in Jesus. The robber did not

understand all that was taking place—Jesus dying for his sins, but he did understand that he was a sinner deserving of punishment and that sinless Jesus was the Messiah.)

■ **How can we follow the robber’s example?**

(We can believe that Jesus is the Savior and call out to him to change our hearts just like he changed the heart of the robber.)

CLOSING PRAYER **5 MIN**

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

BONUS OBJECT LESSON **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.

1. “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).
2. “He saved others; he cannot save himself” (Matthew 27:42).
3. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).
4. “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” (Luke 23:35).
5. “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.)

