

HOME HOURS WITH THE BIBLE



John's Picture of the Trial and Crucifixion

OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Mar. 31 Jno. 19:4-9, 14-18, 25-30

(Christ's Cross and Mine)

Golden Text—Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us.—I John 3:16.

Devotional Reading—Isaiah 53:1-6.

Home Readings—Mon., Christ Stands Trial, John 19:4-9. Tues., The Crucifixion, John 19:23-30. Wed., The Voluntary Death, John 10:7-18. Thurs. Christ Died for Us, Romans 5:1-8. Fri., Christ's Sufferings Foretold, Isaiah 53:4-12. Sat., The Perfect Pattern, I Peter 2:20-25. Sun., The Cost of the Cross, Matt. 10:34-42.

Time—Jesus was crucified probably on Friday, April 7, A.D. 30.

Place—Calvary, probably outside the north wall of Jerusalem.

The Lesson Story in Everyday Dress

The enemies of Jesus needed all the support they could get to carry out their plans and apparently this is the meaning of the preliminary hearing before Annas. Annas had been deposed from the high priesthood by the Roman authorities. He was held in high esteem by the people and as his word had still greater weight with them after the hated government turned against him, it was natural that the enemies of Jesus should want the people to know that their plan to put the prisoner to death had his support.

After the preliminary hearing before Annas Jesus was taken to the palace of Caiaphas, where the Sanhedrin (once the supreme court of the Jews, but now having no legal standing, though the Roman government allowed it to function so long as it did not get in its way), was waiting for him. Here he was tried under the Jewish law and declared to be guilty of blasphemy and therefore worthy of death. But they were compelled to turn him over to the Roman government for execution, and as the charge of blasphemy would have no weight with Rome, they delivered him to the government on the charge of treason: he had claimed, they said, to be a king. Pilate questioned him and quickly concluded that he was a religious enthusiast and determined to release him. But the Jewish leaders were too shrewd for him, and, turning upon him, they soon had him wound up so completely that the question was narrowed down to whether he would save the prisoner or save himself. It was clear that if he released Jesus they would take revenge on him (Pilate) by bringing charges against him at Rome that would cost him his office. And that settled it: to save himself he consented to the prisoner's death, though he had solemnly declared him to be a just person.

The sentence was passed; the prisoner was

scourged until there was little life left in him; the brutal Roman soldiers made a shameful spectacle of him, subjecting him to unspeakable humiliations; and then he came forth bearing his cross to the place of death. Although so weak from the scourgings he had received and the burdens that were crushing the life out of his heart that he stumbled under the two pieces of wood that were to form the arms of his cross, he refused to be an object of pity, and tenderly reminded the weeping women of their own coming sorrows which would need all their tears.

It was probably eight o'clock in the morning when the Roman officers left Pilate's court with Jesus and started for Calvary, a white limestone knoll a short distance beyond the northern wall of the city where condemned criminals were put to death.

On reaching Calvary he was nailed to a cross and placed between two highwaymen, who were crucified with him. By the order of Pilate a board on which was written, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews," was nailed at the top of the cross. This title being written in the three languages then in common use was read by a great multitude, especially Jews—the place of crucifixion being near the city. The chief priests protested against the wording of the title, but Pilate was in no humor to give way to them any further, and it remained unchanged. When the executioners had finished their work they divided the garments of Jesus among themselves, except the tunic, for which they cast lots, thus unconsciously fulfilling a notable prophecy. When he had hung for some time upon the cross, Jesus, seeing his mother standing near with John and others, said to her (using a term that was customary as a form of courteous address), "Woman, in him you shall find a son"; and then turning to John he said: "Take her to be your mother." From that time the beloved disciple cared for her in his own home. Finally, realizing that his work was completed, he said—and in this fulfilled another prophecy—"I thirst." Someone hastily dipped a sponge in sour wine, and put it to his lips. Presently he said, "It is finished;" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

What Moved Jesus to Pray for the Men Who Were Crucifying Him?

They knew that they were doing wrong, but they could not realize the enormity of their crime, and Jesus thinking of their pitiable condition rather than of his own was moved to pray for them. Had he not taught his disciples to pray for those who spitefully used them? It is easy to pray for others when our minds are not absorbed with our own troubles, but when we are in the midst of suffering we feel that we have the right to be selfish and to pity ourselves only. It is easy to be charitable when there is little occasion for its exercise, but who feels called upon to exercise charity toward his enemies at the very moment they are killing him?

Whatever may be the provocation we can never show resentment so long as the cross is before our eyes.

What Does This Story Suggest about Our Own Cross?

There was a time when almost all followers of Christ faced the possibility of being called to die for their Lord even as he had died on the cross for them. Today this is no longer the case except now and then in pagan lands. But the duty of placing one's life at Christ's disposal still remains as it was at the beginning. The fact that we are no longer called upon to die for Christ does not make it less incumbent upon us to live for him. Certainly there will never be a time when it will not be our duty to present ourselves to God (the God revealed to us in Christ) as a living sacrifice and to live every day and every moment of the day for him, no matter what he may require of us.

It has been said in recent years that the trouble with modern married life is that so many married people who used to be willing to die for each other are no longer willing to live for each other. Can it be said of the average modern Christian that he is no longer willing to live for Christ, much less die for him?—Pell's Notes, copyrighted, 1937, and used by permission.

Learning to Say, "Thy Will Be Done"

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UNITED BRETHREN C. E.—SENIOR

Mar. 21

Matt. 26:36-45; Jno. 6:38

Preparation for the Meeting

Have the regular C. E. meeting room transformed into a Garden of Gethsemane. This may easily be done by removing the chairs, bringing in benches or improvising them, and placing them around the wall. Bring in ferns and greenery of any kind with which to decorate. Perhaps a bird or two might add to the effect. A sun dial might be placed in the center of the garden. In a conspicuous place have the picture of Christ in Gethsemane displayed. Conceal the piano with branches made to look like olive trees.

The Leader's Talk

"What Gethsemane Meant to Jesus"

(To the leader: Use these paragraphs to encourage participation by the Endeavorers in making the Gethsemane experience of Jesus real to them. Then the group discussion will have the proper foundation.)

1. Jesus was sick of soul as he faced the bitter rejection of those for whom he was about to give his life. There was no word of encouragement from the multitudes as he approached the last great battleground. Not even sympathy or pity would they show. Already the calm and serene Master saw the shadow of a cross with no one to even lift a sip of water to his parched lips. Now he