

## LESSON 12 \*March 13-19

# Jesus Lays Down His Life for His Friends



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### SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 18:1–19:42.*

**Memory Text:** “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends’ ” (*John 15:13, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** It is by contemplating the Cross of Jesus that we experience both His glory and our own value as human beings.

**T**he Cross forever establishes the value of the human soul. Human beings have experimented with a variety of ways to establish a sense of worth and meaning in their lives. But, ultimately, there is only one place on earth where human value and meaning are forever established. And that place was on a hill called Calvary (Golgotha).

Here, in a way unseen or even unimagined (except within the Godhead), the worth of human beings before God was forever revealed to human beings, angels, and the onlooking universe. Here, more than anywhere else in the universe, the true nature and character of our Creator are revealed.

The story of Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospel of John begins and ends in a garden (*John 18:1, 19:41*). The story itself falls into three parts. First, there is a section describing the betrayal, arrest, and indictment of Jesus (*John 18:1-27*). The central section of the story is concerned with the trial before Pilate (*John 18:29 to 19:16*). Finally, the Crucifixion itself and then burial of Jesus are described in *John 19:16-42*.

Let us take a look at the greatest event in all cosmic history.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 20.*

**Betrayed and Denied** (*John 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27*).

**Read** *John 18:1-11*. What does John say that shows how Christ was fully in control of events that happened there? What does Jesus do to show that He allowed Himself to be taken prisoner?

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In *John 18:1-11*, the main point seems to be that Jesus is in full control of the situation, in fulfillment of *John 10:18*: “ ‘No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’ ” (*NIV*). Although about to be murdered, Jesus is not a victim; all this had to happen. See *John 3:14*. If Jesus had wanted to avoid arrest, He could have simply gone somewhere else other than the Garden where Judas would look for Him. He leads His disciples to the Garden, even though He knows what is coming. He does not wait for the mob to come to Him; He moves forward and addresses them, capable of intimidating them fully should that have served His purpose. His death is voluntary. They could not have arrested Him had He not allowed it.

**How** does Peter react to the situation? Why is that so typically a human reaction?

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Under these circumstances, the reaction of Peter is almost comical. Although Jesus is fully in control of the situation, to Peter things look totally out of control. He whips out his sword and tries to protect Jesus, but Jesus tells him to put the sword away. Jesus must go to the cross, or God’s plan of salvation would fail. The very actions by which Peter sought to gain control of the situation only would have moved things truly out of control. In fact, Peter’s rash action in the Garden jeopardizes the validity of Jesus’ appeal to Pilate later in the chapter (*John 18:36*).

**Jesus knew the future, knew what was going to happen before it did. He does today, as well. What kind of comfort does that give you, knowing that nothing that happens, even in your own life, takes God by surprise? At the same time, what kind of troubling questions does it raise?**

**MONDAY** *March 15*

## **Before Annas and Pilate** (*John 18:12-40*).

Only in the Gospel of John does more than one disciple follow Jesus into the high priest's courtyard (*John 18:15, 16*). Presumably, the girl at the door knew that John (the "other disciple") was a disciple of Jesus but didn't challenge him because he had privileged access.

**Why** does Jesus get slapped in the face in front of Annas? *John 18:19-23*.

Jesus is quite assertive in His encounter with Annas (*John 18:20-23, NIV*). He challenges both the secretiveness of His arrest ("I said nothing in secret") and the legal procedures being followed ("Why question me?"). He even tosses in a dash of ironic humor ("If I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"). In this instance Jesus does not follow an extreme interpretation of "turning the other cheek" (*Matt. 5:39*). He protests His opponent's abuse of authority (*John 18:23*). There is sometimes a fine line between being humble and being abused.

After being taken to Caiaphas, Jesus is brought before Pilate, the central figure of this part of the narrative. At the time, Pilate was in a position of considerable political weakness. A series of blunders had repeatedly offended the Jews. He was unpopular, therefore, and his fitness to rule even had come under suspicion in Rome. One more major conflict with the religious leaders, and he probably would be out of office. This made him extremely vulnerable to blackmail.

In approaching Pilate, the priests first formulate their charge against Jesus in the political terms that a Roman governor could appreciate. Jesus must be executed, because His kingship is a threat to Caesar. But Jesus' statement "My kingdom is not of this world" and the supporting evidence (*vs. 36, NIV*) make it clear to Pilate that Jesus' claim to kingship is no political or military threat to Rome. He determines to free Jesus and at the same time provide the Jewish leaders a face-saving way out, offering to release Jesus on the basis of a traditional prisoner release rather than a judgment of innocence.

**Read what Jesus says to Pilate in John 18:36. How do you understand what Jesus means when He says that His kingdom is not of this world? What implications do His words have for you, if you claim to be part of His kingdom? Write out your answer in a short paragraph. Be prepared, if willing, to share it with your Sabbath School class.**

**TUESDAY** *March 16*

## **Political Expediency** *(John 19:1-16).*

**Read John 19:1-16.** What irony exists in the actions of the soldiers (vss. 2-4)?

Things get complicated for Pilate when the Jewish leaders reject his offer to release Jesus on terms favorable to them. They want Jesus dead at any cost. That means Pilate either must persuade them against their set opinion or release Jesus in the face of their wrath, which would cost him his job. Pilate was caught in a dilemma between justice and self-interest.

Pilate seeks, therefore, to engage his opponents' sympathy by flogging Jesus and presenting Him before them. But they refuse to be moved. Sensing that Pilate's self-interest has weakened him, the religious leaders start playing dirty; they argue that Jesus should die because He has broken their religious law. They know that Pilate cannot afford to be seen as acting against their religious interests.

**Read verses 7 and 8.** Why was Pilate made even "more afraid" (NIV)? What does Pilate ask Jesus (vs. 9), and why would he ask Jesus such a question? What does that question reveal?

Pilate seems to realize at this point that indecision has been his weakness. He cannot save both himself and Jesus. He determines finally to save himself at Jesus' expense. He will consent to the religious leaders' request, but they will pay dearly for it. He condemns Jesus in exchange for a public confession of their obligation to serve Caesar: "We have no king but Caesar."

Earlier Caiaphas had insisted that one Man had to be sacrificed so the nation might not be destroyed (*John 11:48-52*). Now Pilate is ready to sacrifice the nation in order to destroy one Man. The religious leaders reject Jesus' kingship with such passion that they now rejoice in a king whom they always have hated. Pilate intends to hold them to that pledge in the future. They will have no more power over him. From this point on in the Gospel story, Pilate is unmovable. In one of the Gospel's fascinating ironies, the death of Jesus makes Pilate strong!

**Look at Pilate, doing what he knows is wrong, all for personal gain. What can we learn from his example in order to spare us from making a similar mistake when confronted with a similar dilemma, that of being pressured to compromise on a moral issue?**

**WEDNESDAY** *March 17*

## **Humiliation, Death, and Burial** *(John*

*19:16-42).*

Crucifixion was used by the Romans to intimidate potential opponents. In order to breathe, victims had to push up with their feet to raise their bodies. Death came by suffocation when they were too weary to raise themselves anymore. Death was, therefore, slow and agonizing. Breaking the legs would hasten the process, when that was for the executioner's convenience. An additional element of torture was shame and exposure, being hung naked in front of family and friends.

**What** significance is found in the words of the sign that Pilate had written and placed over the cross? *John 19:19*. **Why** do you think he had them placed there? **Guilt? Arrogance? Fear? A mixture of all three?**

In these verses we see a stronger, bolder version of Pilate, energized by the sacrifice of Jesus. The wording he chose for the inscription placed on the cross made the crucifixion of Jesus symbolic of Rome's dominance over Palestine and its native religion. With the inscription he turned the Crucifixion into a blow against the prestige of the Jews and their religious leaders.

**What** major theme of this passage occurs four times? *John 19:24, 28, 36, 37*.

Although Pilate now feels in control of matters, there are repeated reminders in this part of the text that everything is happening according to the predictions placed in the Scriptures. God is in control, even when human beings feel they are. Jesus' death is voluntary, purposeful, and according to the Scriptures.

In John 19:30, Jesus says, " 'It is finished.' " But what exactly was finished at the Cross? The particular emphasis in chapter 19 seems to be that the Cross is the fulfillment of the Bible prophecies pointing toward the Messiah. Prophecy was fulfilled down to the minutest detail of just what type of garment was divided, what type was wagered for (*vss. 23, 24*), and just how the body of Jesus was handled after His death (*vss. 35-37*). The Cross makes it clear that even when bad things happen in our lives things are not out of God's control. Followers of Jesus do not need to live in fear of what they cannot control.

**What did Christ finish, in your behalf, at the Cross?** *See also Mark 10:45, Heb. 9:26, 1 John 2:2.*

**THURSDAY** *March 18*

## **In Search of the Cross** *(John 12:20-32).*

John offers additional interpretations of the Cross in other parts of the Gospel.

**How** does John turn the words of Caiaphas into a theology of the Cross? *John 11:49-52.*

What is so special about the Cross that Paul refused to glory in anything else (*Gal. 6:14*)? Through the words of Caiaphas, John expresses that in some sense the death of Jesus stands in place of every other human being.

According to Paul, at the Cross the wages of sin (*Rom. 6:23*) were placed upon Jesus as the Representative of the sinful human race. If the law of God could have been changed, humanity could have been saved without a cross; thus, in the truest, most dramatic sense, the Cross affirms the perpetuity of the law. The Cross condemned human sin in the person of Christ (*Rom. 8:3, 1 Pet. 2:24*); the resurrection of Christ paves the way for our resurrection at the end of the world (*1 Cor. 15:12-23*).

**How** does Jesus Himself express the significance of the Cross? *John 12:24, 31-33.*

Jesus expresses the “one in place of many” theme in terms of seeds. Then in verses 31-33 He shows that the Cross results in the condemnation of Satan and of sin in a mighty act of judgment. The Cross also becomes a wonderful magnet of attraction that draws “all men” (*vs. 32, NIV—in the original, the implication may include the entire universe!*) to Jesus.

What is so attractive about the Cross? Above all else, the Cross affirms the incredible value of the human person. “One soul is of infinite value; Calvary speaks its worth.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 184. God so loves every human being that Jesus would have died for even one (*John 3:16*).

As Creator of the entire universe, Jesus possesses in His Person infinite value. In dying for you and for me, Jesus testified to the infinite value He places on every one of us. And the value we have in the Cross is a value that does not change, no matter what we do or whom we become. If we should, in the end, choose to reject the Cross, our value in eternity will be measured by the pain of our absence that is felt in the heart of God.

**What should the Cross do to our pride, self-sufficiency, and arrogance—and why?**

**Further Study:** Read *The Desire of Ages*, pages 758–764, where Ellen G. White offers a powerful theology of the Cross, without any direct reference to the Gospel of John, except for the words of 19:30, “‘It is finished.’” List the main themes of her presentation in that chapter. Then list the main ideas of John’s theology of the Cross as expressed in the lesson and in any other passages of the Gospel that may address the issue in some way (such as *John 2:1-11, 6:50-59, and 16:7-11*). Compare and contrast the respective emphases of Ellen White and John. In what ways does she deepen and broaden the concept of “One in place of many”?

“Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour’s love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.

“Paul saw that the character of Christ must be understood before men could love Him or view the cross with the eye of faith. Here must begin that study which shall be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In the light of the cross alone can the true value of the human soul be estimated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 273.

**Discussion Question:**

**In the first Ellen White quote above, why does all our hope rest on the Cross? What happened there that gives us such hope?**

**Summary:** The Cross is the place where human value and meaning are established. “Christ paid an infinite price for us, and according to the price paid He desires us to value ourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.

When we gain a sense of our value in the Cross, we can begin to avoid the ups and downs that come when our self-worth is based on performance or on the fickle opinions of others. When we see ourselves in the light of the Cross, we develop the strength to overcome sin, the confidence to defeat Satan, and the joy that comes from knowing who we are. No wonder Paul said, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Gal. 6:14, NIV*).

## Love Without Limits— Part 2

by RUTH SCHNEIDER TESCHE

God called me to minister to prisoners and lead them to the Savior, but often God used the prisoners to lead me closer to His will, as well. When the warden asked me to help a new prisoner, I was willing, until I realized it was a man who had committed a terribly cruel crime in our town. Then God worked with me until I was willing to pray for Jamir.

Soon God told me to go visit Jamir. It took awhile to pray through my prejudices, but finally I asked the warden whether I could visit him. I trembled as I entered the prison's visitation room. A prisoner I did not recognize walked toward me. Our conversation was awkward, and he did not want to hear about God. But before I left, I told him I was praying for him.

For weeks I resisted visiting Jamir again. Every time I thought of him I still saw the terrible crime of which he was accused. Then one Sabbath I visited another couple with whom I was working in the same prison. During our conversation the couple told me, "There is a prisoner here who wants to talk to you." Of course I agreed. The guard brought in the prisoner. When I heard Jamir's name announced, I stiffened. I could not refuse to see him, and I could not leave for I was locked inside a prison.

A few minutes later Jamir appeared, greeted us, and kissed me on the cheek. *That monster kissed me!* I thought to myself. I stumbled through the visit.

At home I ranted at God. "How can you ask me to work with this man? I can't handle it!" For weeks I fought God about Jamir until finally, exhausted and weary of arguing, I gave in. "OK, God, if it's Your will, use me." Finally I had peace.

I began spending time with Jamir. I spent more time and money for Jamir than most prisoners. Then he was moved to another prison farther away. But God told me to go visit him. I went, and I met other prisoners there who needed help. Soon my husband and I were making regular trips to that prison, filling the car with clothing and supplies the prisoners needed.

I watched in amazement as Jamir's life changed dramatically. He found Jesus as his Savior and is leading other prisoners to Christ. He wants nothing more than to share God's love, which knows no boundaries, with those who need it most. What a change God has wrought in this monster of a man! What a change He has wrought in me!

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RUTH SCHNEIDER TESCHE lives in Maringá, Paraná, Brazil.