

LESSON 12 *March 13-19

Jesus Lays Down His Life for His Friends



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.

The 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?

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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *John 15:13*

Teachers Aims:

1. To grasp the value of the human person to God, as exemplified by the sacrifice on the cross.
2. To understand that God is in control, even when the opposite seems the case.
3. To perceive God's ultimate purpose for humanity, as revealed in the Crucifixion.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Value of Life (*Rom. 8:39*).

- A. Human life finds its true value in relationship with God.
- B. God's character is revealed in His regard for His creatures.
- C. God's will is found in the ultimate well-being of His creatures.

II. God in Control (*John 16:28*).

- A. The Crucifixion was not an unfortunate accident but rather Jesus' purpose, without which the rest means nothing.
- B. Jesus was not only in control of His own fate but that of His followers.
- C. Human nature, as exemplified by Peter, finds it hard to recognize divine order working in chaos.

III. The Meaning of the Cross (*Gal. 6:14*).

- A. The Cross honors both the justice and the mercy of God.
- B. The Crucifixion exposes the falseness of Satan's view of reality.
- C. The sacrifice of Jesus, who is God, testifies to the infinite value of each human person.

Summary: God values His creation more than we can imagine. He shows this not only by His choice to bring us into being but also by the sacrifice of His infinitely worthy Son, Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY.

To some, it is foolishness or scandal. To Nietzsche, a German philosopher, it is weakness at its worst. To the Christian, it is the "power of God" unto salvation (*1 Cor. 1:18*). The Cross is the great divider of history: between life and death, faith and unbelief, the god of self and the God of eternity.

At the foot of the Cross stood a divided humanity. Treachery, religious bigotry, and political opportunism had a field day. Struggling faith, search for meaning, and quiet acceptance of a great victory were slowly emerging. The Man on the cross revealed the "why" of the greatest event in divine-human history.

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 taking abuse.

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

This week, we will consider the primary cast of the Calvary drama.

I. Around the Cross: Treachery in the Open.

Judas is an example of Satan taking over when one's commitment to God is weak or rooted in self-centeredness. So, the serpent found Eve; Esau lost his birthright; Saul lost his moorings; and Ananias and Sapphira were killed by their own words. With Satan taking control of Judas (*John 13:27*), one of the most brilliant disciples became a child of darkness (*vs. 30*) and treachery.

Annas and Caiaphas were the religious leaders of the temple, guardians of the law and mediators between people and God. But they preferred position and power over justice and truth (*John 11:48-51*), and they sought a Messiah for their own convenience. To them, Jesus was a nuisance who needed to be put away. Treachery has no need for honesty.

Herod, a coward and a Roman stooge, sacrificed his soul at the altar of curiosity. Instead of seeking to know Jesus, he sought for signs, equating the Messiah with a magician. Such indifference to matters of spirit is treachery indeed.

Pilate had power but no conviction. Power without conviction to do what is right turns one into a coward. Hence, the governor of Jerusalem had Jesus scourged, passed the buck to Herod, found an innocent Man guilty, found a guilty man innocent, and finally washed his hands of the entire mess. But the washing of hands without cleansing the soul could not save the governor from treachery.

II. At the Cross: Faith, Search, and Acceptance.

Peter's faith in Jesus was genuine but struggling. He accepted Jesus as the Son of God (*Matt. 16:16, John 6:68*) and pledged his life to defend Him (*John 13:37*). At Gethsemane, he even drew his sword to prove it (*John 18:10*). Self-confidence has its virtues, but it also has its limits when it comes to fulfilling God's plan. God has His own way, and self must subordinate itself to that way. Courage is good, but it must not be allowed to misread one's strength. Walking on rough seas, swearing that he is beyond the capacity to deny, or drawing a sword show that Peter had a long way to go to maturity. But the crowing of the rooster, the loving look of Jesus, and the remorse of His broken heart turned Peter into a man of faith.

John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, stood by the cross. Grief stricken, but not broken, Jesus paid them special attention. A new relationship, so typical of what the Cross is meant to establish, emerged. At the Cross, family and community take on new meaning.

Nicodemus and Joseph openly accepted the call of the Cross (*John 19:38, 39*). The amazing love Jesus exhibited brings closure

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

to the internal struggle of undeclared believers. Silence breaks forth into singing, and faith turns into discipleship.

III. At the Cross: The Great Why.

While treachery and faith, mockery and acceptance, observed the events of the Cross, the only Person who fully understood what was

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Luke 24:46, 47; John 16:17; 18:17, 18, 36; Romans 5:8*

- ① How do you explain the contrast between Peter's impulsiveness in John 18:10 and his willingness to deny Jesus later in John 18:17, 18? When, in our time, do we see people protecting God on the one hand yet denying Him on the other?
- ② Even at this late date, Jesus' disciples apparently had failed to grasp Jesus' mission. This was something they shared with people such as Judas and the religious leaders. Were they also following Jesus for the wrong reasons? Why and how were they different? What lessons are in this for us?
- ③ John and the other Gospels repeatedly emphasize the way in which Jesus' life and death follow Old Testament prophecy. But was it necessary that His sacrifice happen precisely that way? Can you imagine it being different if the human actors had made other or better choices? Explain your answers.
- ④ The events of John 18 and 19 take place in darkness. Consider the following people who took part in those events: Judas, Peter, the high priest, Pilate, the crowds. What do their actions show us about the dark nature of sin and motives? How are this nature and the motives manifested today?
- ⑤ Christ's sacrifice was necessary to fulfill the law of God. Would God want to forgive humanity without a sacrifice? If so, is God bound by His own law? Why could He not change His law?
- ⑥ The Cross is both good and bad news to the human ego. On one hand, we are infinitely valuable to God. On the other, everyone else is just as valuable. The desire to distinguish oneself from the herd is a core motivation of many admirable human actions. What other sources of motivation exist? How valuable are they in the process of becoming a mature Christian?

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

happening was the One suspended between heaven and earth (18:37).

All through the Gospel, John portrays Jesus as being conscious of the fact that His death was part of God's redemption plan. (For example, see *John 1:29, 36; 2:4; 3:14, 15; 6:51-57; 7:6, 8; 8:20, 28; 10:11, 18; 12:27, 31-33; 13:1; 15:13; 17:1; 18:32.*)

Thus, to the beloved apostle, the question, Why did Jesus die? had only one answer: He died for the sins of the world that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life. And the cry "It is finished" (*John 19:30*) had only one meaning: The Son of God had accomplished the redemptive mission for which the Father had sent Him (4:34). Satan stood defeated. Victory over sin was assured.

The Cross is thus the center of the gospel message and the hope of the believer. "He who beholds the Saviour's matchless love will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. The more we contemplate the cross of Christ, the more fully shall we adopt the language of the apostle when he said, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' [Gal. 6:14]."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 29.

Witnessing

The Lord confused the language of Babel when the people tried to build a tower to heaven. He stopped fiery flames from consuming His three faithful servants. He caused Peter to walk on water. He opened sightless eyes and quickened lifeless bodies. He who had the power to do all this, and more, could have saved Himself from the hands of those who came to crucify Him. But He freely gave His life for His friends. That is the only way they could have taken Him.

When Jesus knew His prosecutors were approaching, He went to them and asked, "Whom are you looking for?" They replied, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I am He," He responded. At that moment they fell backward to the ground (*John 18:4-6*). "Jesus made this inquiry that they might witness His power and have evidence that He could deliver Himself from their hands if He would."—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 211. However, even after this revelation, they did not understand that Christ had the power to free Himself but chose not to.

The world often determines what people are worth, based on their wealth or earthly possessions. But what is the real value of human life? Jesus paid the price of His own life for ours. In our witnessing, we can tell others how much the Lord values them. When they understand and accept the value He has placed on them, they will be more inclined to change their lifestyle and live for Him.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Jesus did not only choose us for a series of tremendous privileges. He called us to be his partners. The slave could never be a partner. He was defined in Greek law as a living tool. His master never opened his mind to him; the slave simply had to do what he was told without reason and without explanation. But . . . Jesus has given us the honour of making us partners in his task. He has shared his mind with us, and opened his heart to us. The tremendous choice laid before us is that we can accept or refuse partnership with Christ in the work of leading the world to God.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 2*, pp. 178, 179.

Thought Questions:

- 1 Barclay continues the thought introduced in the “Icebreaker” by saying that Jesus has chosen us to be ambassadors and advertisements for Him. List some tangible ways that your class can do this for the One who laid His life down for each of us.
- 2 Paul says that the closer he comes to God, the more sinful he sees himself. If this is the effect of the grace and glory of God, can we truly be friends with Him? Will not our awareness of our wretchedness cause us to feel unworthy of His friendship? Explain.

Application Questions:

- 1 Jesus has invited us to be His friends. List the things that you do with your very best friend that make your friendship so closely knit. Then ask yourself if you have the kind of relationship with Christ that gives this intimacy with Him. What is the ammunition that Satan uses to make us lose confidence in our Friend? How can we guard ourselves from Satan’s insinuations?
- 2 Had Peter, like the other disciples, fled when Jesus was arrested, he may not have been stuck in a situation where he felt he had no choice but to deny his Lord. Similarly, one day your love for Christ may lead you into the pit of faith testing. What can you do now to prepare yourself for that time? For this preparation, what role do you expect the church to play in your life? What role do you expect your family or your friends to play?

FRIDAY *March 19*

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*).