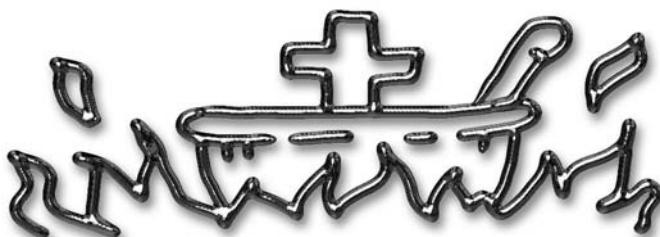


# Christ in the Crucible<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 22

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 2:1–18; Matthew 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22–24; Luke 22:41–44; John 8:58, 59; Romans 6:23; Titus 1:2.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “About three o’clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice. He said, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*’ This means ‘My God, my God, why have you deserted me?’ ” (Matthew 27:46, NlrV).

**EVERY TIME WE STUDY THE ISSUE OF SUFFERING**, the question is How did sin and suffering first come up? From God we have good answers: They came up because humans (people) abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know ahead of time that these humans would fall? Yes! C. S. Lewis, a famous Christian writer, wrote that God thought it was “worth the risk.”

Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His created beings (people) was so important that God agreed to accept and carry most of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see that suffering in the life and death of Jesus. Through His suffering as a human, Jesus created ties between heaven and earth that will last forever.

**THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE:** What did Christ suffer for our sake? What can we learn from His suffering?

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1. crucible—a boiling pot for purifying metals. A crucible also represents a testing time, or time of suffering, that strengthens character, or who we are.

**SUNDAY—DECEMBER 23****THE EARLY DAYS  
(Luke 2:7, 22–24)**

The Holy Bible gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. But a few verses tell us something about the kind of world the Savior entered.

**Read Luke 2:7, 22–24 and Matthew 2:1–18. What do we find in Luke 2:7, 22–24 that gives us an example of the kind of life Jesus faced from the start? (Read also Leviticus 12: 6–8.)**



**Jesus left the riches of heaven to live on this earth as the son of a poor man.**

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty.<sup>2</sup> He was not the first to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. But there is something that helps us understand

<sup>2</sup> poverty—the condition in which poor people live.

the special conditions in which Christ suffered from the earliest times.

**What do we read in John 1:46 that helps us to understand what sufferings the young Jesus faced?**

Except for Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. Jesus was pure and sinless, but He was placed in a world of sin. What suffering it must have been for His pure soul to always be dealing with sin. We may be hardened by sin. But we ourselves often try to avoid sins and evil that we find disgusting. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure and sinless. Think of the sharp difference between Himself and the sinners around Him. It must have been very painful for Jesus.

**Ask yourself, “How sensitive am I to the sins that are all around me? Do they bother me? Or am I hardened to them?” If you are hardened to sin, could that be because of the things you read, watch, or even do?**

**MONDAY—DECEMBER 24****HATED AND UNACCEPTED BY  
PEOPLE (Matthew 12:12–24)**

**Read the following verses. Keep in mind as you read the fact that Jesus was God and the Creator of heaven and earth. Remember that**

**He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice<sup>3</sup> for the sins of the whole world (Matthew 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59). How do these verses help us understand the sufferings Jesus faced?**

Leaders or even the common people often misunderstood Jesus' life, acts, and teachings. This led to unacceptance and hatred from people He came to save. In a way it is almost the same as a parent who has a disobedient child in need of help. The parent wants very much to give everything good to that child, but the child does not accept the parent. Instead, the child rejects (refuses) perhaps the only person who can save him or her from complete ruin. That is what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Jesus!

**What does Matthew 23:37 tell us about how Christ felt about the people refusing to accept Him? As you read, ask yourself, too, “Was Jesus feeling bad for Himself? Or did He feel bad for another reason?” If for another reason, what was it?**

We all have felt hurt by rejection (refusal). Maybe our pain was almost the same as Christ's in that it was unselfish. We probably were not hurt because we were rejected. We were hurt because of what would happen to the one who was rejecting us. (Perhaps someone you care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ.)

Imagine how it must have felt to Jesus. He fully knew what He had to face so that He could save the people. And He fully realized what the results of their refusal would be. “It was because Christ was so innocent that He felt the attacks of Satan.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

**What can you learn from Christ that can help you deal with the pain of being unaccepted? What does His example show you? How can you use it in your own life?**

## TUESDAY—DECEMBER 25

### JESUS IN GETHSEMANE<sup>4</sup> (MARK 14:34)

“‘My soul is very sad. I feel close to death,’ he [Jesus] said to them [Peter, John, and James]. ‘Stay here. Keep watch’ ” (Mark 14:34, NirV).

Jesus suffered much through His 33 years here on earth. But nothing compared to what He started to face in the last hours before the cross. From the very beginning (Ephesians 1:1–4; 2 Timothy 1:8, 9; Titus 1:1, 2) the sacrifice of Jesus as the offering for the world's sin was planned. And now it was all beginning to happen.

**What do Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:33–36; and Luke 22:41–44 tell us about Christ's suffering in Gethsemane?**

3. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as a life, to save or help someone or something.

4. Gethsemane—the name of the garden on the Mount of Olives where Jesus spent His last night on earth.

“He went a little way from them. It was not so far but still where they could both see and hear Him. And He fell flat upon the ground. He felt that He was being separated by sin from His Father. The separation was so wide, so black, so deep, that His spirit



**Nothing Jesus suffered in His life on earth was as terrible as what He faced in the last hours before the cross.**

shook before it. Jesus knew that He must not use His godly power to escape from this suffering. As man He must suffer the results of our sin. As man He must endure [go through] the anger of God against sin.

“Christ now experienced a different attitude [feeling] from what He had ever experienced before. His suffering can best be described in the

words of the prophet,<sup>5</sup> ‘My sword, wake up! Attack my shepherd! Attack the man [Satan] who is close to me,’ announces the Lord who rules over all’ (Zechariah 13:7, NIV). As the substitute for sinful man, Christ was suffering under God’s punishment.<sup>6</sup> He understood what this punishment meant. In the past He had been as an intercessor<sup>7</sup> for others. Now He wanted to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

**Think carefully about what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine how it felt to be there. No human (person) has ever been called to go through anything like this before. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? What hope can you get from this?**

### **WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 26**

#### **THE CRUCIFIED<sup>8</sup> GOD (Matthew 27:45)**

Death by crucifixion<sup>9</sup> was one of the cruelest punishments the Romans gave to anyone. People thought of it as the worst way to die. It was horrible for anyone to be killed that way. But for the Son of God to die on the cross was most horrible! Jesus came

5. prophet—men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

6. punishment—a penalty for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

7. intercessor—someone who goes to another person for us when we cannot.

8. crucified—being put to death by nailing or tying to a cross.

9. crucifixion—the death of Jesus on the cross.

in human<sup>10</sup> flesh just as we did. Imagine what Jesus went through. The beatings, the whippings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, and the weight of His own body tearing at the wounds! The physical pain must have been too great to accept. This was cruel, even for the worst of criminals (law breakers). How unfair, then, that Jesus, who was innocent of everything, should face such punishment.

But Christ's physical sufferings were mild in comparison to what was really happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

**What events surrounding Jesus' death showed that more was going on than most people understood at the time? What meaning can we find in each of these events in Matthew 27:45; Matthew 27:51, 52; and Mark 15:38 that can help show what happened there?**

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the unfair death of an innocent man. The Bible says that God's anger against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered God's righteous (holy and just) anger against sin. This means the sins of the whole world. Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human could ever know or experience.

**What hope and comfort can you**

**take away from the story of Christ suffering for you on the cross?**



**Jesus suffered something deeper and darker and more painful than any person could ever know or experience.**

**THURSDAY—DECEMBER 27**

**THE SUFFERING GOD  
(John 10:28)**

We might as well get used to it. As long as we are in this world, we are going to suffer. It is our problem because we are sinners. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything differently. But . . .

**What do Acts 14:22; Philippians 1:29; and 2 Timothy 3:12 have to tell us about the topic at hand?**

In the middle of our suffering, we should keep two things in mind.

First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered worse than any of us ever could. At the cross, He "suffered the things we

10. human—of, or referring to, men, women, or children.

should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours” (Isaiah 53:4, NIV). The suffering each person knows was suffered by Jesus for us all as a group. He, who was sinless, became “sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He suffered in a way that we, as sinners, could not begin to imagine.

But secondly, as we suffer, we should remember the eternal (forever) results of Christ’s suffering. The results are what God has promised us. They are what Christ has done for us.

**What promise do we have in John 10:28; Romans 6:23; Titus 1:2; and 1 John 2:25?**

No matter what we have suffered here, we should thank Jesus for accepting upon Himself the punishment of our sin. We, too, should be thankful for the teaching of the gospel (the good news). Through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now. We have the promise of eternal (without end) life. We have the promise that because of the perfect life and sacrifice that Christ has given, our life and suffering here on earth are no more than a second in time—a flash—here and gone. We may suffer much now. But eternity (time without end) waits for us, an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. God has promised all this to us. And Christ has

made this promise certain by going into the crucible.



Through faith we can stand holy in Jesus right now.

### FRIDAY—DECEMBER 28

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685–697; “Calvary,” pp. 741–757, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Three times has He [Jesus] said His prayer. Three times has the human [man] in Him wanted to avoid the last crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Savior. He knows that the lawbreakers, if left to themselves, must die. He understands the helplessness of man. He knows the power of sin. The cries of a doomed world rise before Him. He understands its end is coming, and His decision [choice] is made. He will save man at any cost to

Himself. He accepts His baptism<sup>11</sup> of blood. Through His dying millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is pure, happy, and glorious, to save the one lost sheep. He will save the one world that has fallen by sin. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the sacrifice of a people who have wanted to sin. His prayer now shows only surrender. 'Is it possible for this cup to be taken away? But if I must drink it, may what You want be done' (Matthew 27:42, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690, 693.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ We know that God Himself in the Person of Christ suffered worse than any of us ever could. How does this knowledge help us in our own sufferings? What should the sufferings of Christ for our sake mean to us? What comfort can we get from this wonderful truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind Ellen G. White's comment: "All the suffering caused by sin

was poured upon the sinless Son of God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

❷ As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ in this week's lesson. What were the crucibles (sufferings and troubles) that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own? In what ways are they different? What can we learn from how Jesus can help us through our own crucibles?

❸ What are some of your favorite Bible promises that you can use when you have sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them with the class.

❹ Write out a paragraph, making a few important points you learned from this quarter's lesson. What questions are important to you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly puzzle and bother us?

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11. baptism—when a person is put completely under water and brought back up out of it. Jesus' "baptism of blood" meant that He would take all our sins and guilt upon Himself. He did this by dying for our sins. The price for our sins is our own blood. But Jesus paid this price on the cross with His own blood. We do not have to die for our sins if we accept His death for us in our place.