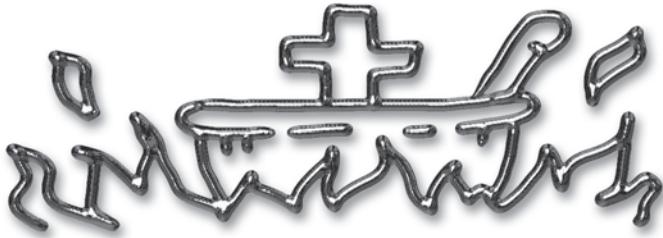


Christ in the Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 2:1–18; 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22–24; 22:41–44; John 8:58, 59; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.*

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (*Matthew 27:46*).

Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: They arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, “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 intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God agreed to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see that suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity.

The Week at a Glance: What did Christ suffer in our behalf? What can we learn from His suffering?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.*

The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about those conditions and the kind of world the Savior entered.

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

Of course, Jesus was not the first person to live in poverty or to face those who wanted to kill Him, even from an early age. There is, however, another element that helps us understand the uniqueness of what Christ suffered from the earliest times.

Read John 1:46. What element does this add to help us understand what sufferings the young Jesus had faced?

With the exception of Adam and Eve before the Fall, Jesus was the only sinless Person who ever lived on the earth. In His purity, in His sinlessness, He was immersed in a world of sin. What a torture it must have been, even as a child, for His pure soul constantly to be in contact with sin. Even in our hardness because of sin, we ourselves often shrink away at sins and evil that we find repulsive. Imagine what it must have been like for Christ, whose soul was pure, who wasn't the least bit tainted by sin. Think of the sharp contrast between Christ and others around Him in that regard. It must have been exceedingly painful for Him.

Ask yourself, "How sensitive am I to the sins that exist all around us? Does it bother me, or am I hardened to it?" If you are hardened to it, could it be because of the things you read, watch, or even do? Think about it.

Despised and Rejected of Men

Read the following texts, keeping in mind the whole time the fact that Jesus was divine, the Creator of heaven and earth and that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (*Matt. 12:22–24; Luke 4:21–30; John 8:58, 59*). **How do these texts help us understand the sufferings that Jesus faced here on earth?**

Whether by leaders, or even by the common people, Jesus' life, acts, and teaching were constantly misunderstood, leading to rejection and hatred by people He came to save. In a certain sense it must be like a parent who sees a wayward child in need of help, and though the parent is willing to give everything for that child, the child spurns the parent, heaping scorn and rejection upon perhaps the only person who can spare that child from utter ruin. That's what Jesus faced while here on earth. How painful it must have been for Him.

Read Matthew 23:37. **What does that tell us about how Christ felt about the rejection? As you read, ask yourself, too, "Was He feeling bad for Himself [as we often do when facing rejection], or was it for another reason?" If for another reason, what was it?**

We've all felt the sting of rejection, and maybe our pain was similar to Christ's in that it was unselfish: We were pained not because we were rejected but because of what the rejection would mean for the one who was rejecting you (perhaps someone you care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, what it must have felt to Jesus, who was fully aware of what He was to face in order to save them, and at the same time fully aware of what the consequences of their rejection would be. "It was because of His innocence that He [Christ] felt so keenly the assaults of Satan."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.

What can you learn from Christ that can help you better cope with the pain of rejection? What does His example show you? How can you apply it to your own life?

Jesus in Gethsemane

“And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch” (*Mark 14:34*).

Whatever Jesus suffered through His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He started to face in the last hours before the Cross. From the eternal ages (*Eph. 1:1–4*; *2 Tim. 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 coming to pass.

What do the following texts tell us about Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane? *Matt. 26:39*, *Mark 14:33–36*, *Luke 22:41–44*.

“He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

“Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.’ *Zech. 13:7*. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

Dwell upon what was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane. Already the sins of the world were starting to fall upon Him. Try to imagine what that must have been like. No human being 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 draw from this for yourself?

The Crucified God

Death by crucifixion was one of the harshest punishments the Romans meted out to anyone. It was considered the worst way to die. Thus, how horrific for anyone to be killed that way, much less the Son of God! Jesus, we must always remember, came in human flesh like ours. Between the beatings, the scourgings, the nails hammered into His hands and feet, the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, and the physical pain must have been unbearable. This was harsh, even for the worst of criminals; how unfair, then, that Jesus, innocent of everything, should face such a fate.

Yet, as we know, Christ's physical sufferings were mild in contrast to what was really happening. This was more than just the killing of an innocent man.

What events surrounding the death of Jesus showed that more was going on than most people there understood at the time? What significance can we find in each of these events that can help reveal what happened there?

Matt. 27:45

Matt. 27:51, 52

Mark 15:38

Clearly, something much more was happening here than just the death, however unfairly, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God's wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered not sinful humanity's unjust wrath but a righteous God's righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience.

As you go through whatever struggles you are facing, what hope and comfort can you draw from the reality of Christ suffering for you on the cross?

The Suffering God

We might as well get used to it: As long as we are here, in this world, we are going to suffer. It is, as fallen creatures, our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything differently. On the contrary . . .

What do the following texts have to tell us about the topic at hand? *Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Yet, in the midst of our suffering, two things we should keep in mind.

First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered worse than any of us ever could. At the Cross, He “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4, NKJV*); what we know only as individuals, He suffered corporately, for us all. He, who was sinless, became “sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21*), suffering in a way that we, as sinful creatures, couldn’t begin to imagine.

But second, as we suffer, we should remember the results of Christ’s suffering; that is, what we have been promised through what Christ has done for us.

Read *John 10:28, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, and 1 John 2:25. What are we promised?*

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. We have the promise that because of what Christ has done, because of the fullness and completeness of His perfect life and perfect sacrifice, our existence here, full of pain, disappointment, and loss, is no more than an instant, a flash, here and gone. In contrast to this, there is the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heavens and a new earth, one without sin, suffering, and death. And all this is promised to us and made certain for us only because of Christ and the crucible He went into so that one day, coming soon, He would see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).

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

“Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life. He has left the courts of heaven, where all is purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that has fallen by transgression. And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: ‘If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690, 693.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does it help us in our own sufferings, this knowledge that God Himself, in the person of Christ, suffered worse than any of us ever could? What should the sufferings of Christ in our behalf mean to us? What comfort can we draw from this amazing truth? As you think about your answer, keep in mind the following statement from Ellen White: “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.
- 2 As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ looked at in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own; in what ways are they different? What can we learn from how He handled these challenges that can help us amid our own crucibles?
- 3 What are some of your favorite Bible promises, promises that you can cling to amid sorrow and pain? Write them out, claim them for yourself, and share them in class.
- 4 Write out a summary paragraph, highlighting whatever few main points you got from this quarter’s lesson. What questions were resolved for you? What issues still remain unanswered? How can we help each other work through those things that still greatly perplex and trouble us?

Surprised by the Spirit

by GILBERT CANGY

A couple of years ago, God showed up in a mysterious way while I was ministering to young people. I had been invited to be the evening devotional speaker for a regional youth congress on Ambrym, a remote island belonging to Vanuatu, an island republic in the South Pacific.

Although Ambrym is halfway between Australia and the island nation of Fiji, it is still entrenched in its traditional village life. When we arrived, we were greeted by the village chief, who offered us a giant yam, a baby chick, and beautiful coconut juice—traditional welcoming gifts for visitors, as he gave us permission to enter his territory.

Soon the evening meetings began. I was surprised to find a large number of older village folk coming to the meetings. I knew most of them did not speak English, but Bislama, their traditional language. Because the young people attending the youth congress all speak English, no translation had been provided. I decided that these older folks had come to hear the music and to support the youth in attendance.

The week of meetings went well, and toward the end of the week, I invited the youth to give their hearts to the Lord. Again I was surprised—this time at the number of older people who responded to the call. Later I expressed my appreciation for the support of the older folks, in spite of the fact that they could hardly understand what was being said.

“Oh, no,” the man responded. “They have understood every word. Perhaps we should have told you that after your first night’s message, some of the local elders came to ask us where you had learned Bislama. They were pleased that you were preaching in their language.”

I paused in humility and praise as I realized that I was seeing God working as He had during Pentecost. God knew that these older people needed to hear His message of love and salvation, just as their youth needed to hear.

Mission is not dead. In some places it is as new as it was 2,000 years ago when everyone heard God’s message in their own tongue. Your mission offerings make outreach to the farthest corners of the world possible.



GILBERT CANGY is the youth director in the South Pacific Division, headquartered in Australia.

Next quarter's Bible study guide will look at discipleship as the experience between Jesus and those He called to apprenticeship with Him. *Discipleship* by Bertram Melbourne will explore the process of becoming a disciple, and what the major characteristics of discipleship are.

Lesson 1—An Overview of Discipleship

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Discipleship, Historical and Personal (*Matt. 4:18–22, John 1:40–42, Acts 11:26*)

MONDAY: Who Is a Disciple? (*Luke 14:25, 26*)

TUESDAY: How Does One Become a Disciple? (*Matt. 4:18, 19; Mark 1:19, 20; 2:13, 14*)

WEDNESDAY: Requirements of Discipleship (*Matt. 16:24, 25; Mark 8:34, 35; Luke 9:23*)

THURSDAY: The Essence of Discipleship (*Matt. 10:32, 33; 22:37–40*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 4:18, 19*

Sabbath Gem: Those who accept Christ and commit to the task of discipleship are called to live under complete surrender to His lordship in their lives. There is no room for retreat. It is a call to move “Forward ever, backward never.”

Lesson 2—Discipleship Then and Now

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Discipleship Among the Greeks (*John 12:20, 21*)

MONDAY: Discipleship Among the Jews (*Acts 5:34–39, 22:3*)

TUESDAY: Discipleship With John the Baptist (*John 3:21–30*)

WEDNESDAY: Discipleship With Jesus (*Matt. 4:18–20*)

THURSDAY: Contemporary Discipleship (*Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12*)

Memory Text—*Mark 16:20*

Sabbath Gem: Discipleship goes back to before the time of Jesus' earthly ministry in Greek, Jewish, and other ancient cultures. There are great lessons that can be found there and from the life of the Great Teacher that can help us to live more fully for Christ today.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired: The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.