

Christ in the Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (*Matthew 27:46, NKJV*).

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 chose to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see this 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, September 24.

The Early Days

Scripture gives us little information about the early years of Jesus. A few verses, however, tell us something about the conditions He lived under 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 exceptions 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 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 from exposure to 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 Himself 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? Do they bother me, or am I hardened to them?" If you are hardened to them, 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, all the while keeping in mind 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 from 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 it 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 us (perhaps someone we care about who refuses to accept salvation in Christ). Imagine, though, how 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 throughout His 33 years here on earth, nothing compared to what He began 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 or since. 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, in particular 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, and the harrowing weight of His own body tearing at the wounds, 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 really was 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 unfair, of an innocent man. According to Scripture, God's wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered 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. As fallen creatures, it is our fate. Nothing in the Bible promises us anything different. 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, we should keep two things in mind. First, Christ, our Lord, has suffered more 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 for us all corporately. 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 the eternity that awaits us, an eternity in a new heaven 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 will see “the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (*Isa. 53:11*).

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685–697, and “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 more 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.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 129.
- 2 As a class, go over the sufferings of Christ examined in this week’s lesson. What were the crucibles that Christ faced? In what ways are they like our own, and 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 main points you got from this quarter’s lessons. 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?

Part 13: Preparing to See Jesus

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The evil spirits have fallen silent. Father believes Christ won a victory over Satan with the baptism, and that is why the devil tried so hard to prevent it.

Peace has filled the family home. Mother is a church deaconess, and she still sings in the choir. Junior is 17 and finishing high school.

Father, who is 43, has shared his incredible story in churches around Brazil, and many of those who have heard it have committed their lives to Jesus. In Coari, where Father decided to follow Jesus, 16 people gave their hearts to Christ after hearing his testimony.

Father credits the Holy Spirit, not his story, for changing hearts.

“My experience is shocking, but I see the Holy Spirit working in their hearts as they listen,” he said.

In addition to sharing his story, Father sells Bibles and has presented them to his mother, his older sister, and his two younger brothers. He is praying for them. His mother stopped worshiping in the Candomblé temple long before his baptism. When she learned that evil spirits were trying to kill him, she resolved to have nothing more to do with them.

While Father is rejoicing in his new life in Christ, he remains watchful by praying and reading the Bible every day. He remembers 1 Peter 5:8, which says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (NKJV). He also is mindful of the warning in Matthew 12:43–45, where Jesus said, “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (NKJV).

But Father is not afraid. “Even now, the devil has no power over me,” he said. “That’s what I preach in every church that I visit.”

He dreams of the day when he will meet Jesus face to face. “I pray that the Lord will never give up on me. I also pray not to give Him up,” he said. “I pray that I remain faithful and persevere until the end. I have hope that I will see Him. That is my hope.”



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) lives with Mother and Junior (pictured).

Key Text: *Matthew 27:46*

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

Part I: Overview

The greatest point of biblical religion is that sin and suffering were generated by us but were borne by our God. There is no other divinity in the religions of the world who would condescend to make such a sacrifice. That is why biblical Christianity is called the religion of love and grace, from Creation to salvation. God created us by grace (and without our contribution) because He loved us, and God saves us by grace (without our contribution, as well) because He loved us.

In both cases (Creation and salvation), however, we have a choice to accept or reject His action of grace. After being created by grace, Adam and Eve made the decision to reject God's act of creation and chose the path of rebellion that leads to annihilation or death. After being saved by grace through Christ's death on the cross, each one of us has a choice to accept God's sacrifice in our place and return to His kingdom of light, grace, and love, or to reject His great salvation and disappear into eternal nonexistence. Choose today. But choose love, choose grace, choose life. Choose God's love, God's grace, and God's life. This will make you happy, this will make your loved ones happy, and this will make God happy.

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Jesus Christ's suffering does not represent merely the suffering of another being. Rather, His suffering is the essence of God's love and salvation for us. Jesus Christ suffered for us and in our place to rescue us from the power of sin, suffering, and death forever.
2. What Jesus suffered in Gethsemane and what it means for us.

Part II: Commentary

The Early Days of Jesus' Ministry

Yes, from the first hours of His life, Jesus experienced, and was surrounded by, human tragedy and suffering: denial, rejection, poverty, and humility (born in a manger), physical suffering (circumcision), massacre, persecution, and flight. Throughout His childhood, Jesus continued to

experience human suffering. However, Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His ministry pointed to His entrance into the crucible He had come for, to the type of ministry He had come to offer. Why was He baptized if He did not have any sin?

Of course, He was baptized to set us an example. Ellen G. White notices that "Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt on His own account. He identified Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take, and doing the work that we must do. His life of suffering and patient endurance after His baptism was also an example to us."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 111. But there is more to Christ's baptism than it being an example.

The apostle Paul explains the meaning of baptism in terms of death and resurrection: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (*Rom. 6:3, 4, NKJV*). Elsewhere, Paul explains that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). Jesus came into the world to take our sins upon Himself and to die in our place, so that we, instead, could take upon ourselves His righteousness. Ellen G. White writes: "Upon coming up out of the water, Jesus bowed in prayer on the river bank. A new and important era was opening before Him. He was now, upon a wider stage, entering on the conflict of His life. Though He was the Prince of Peace, His coming must be as the unsheathing of a sword. . . . No one upon earth had understood Him, and during His ministry He must still walk alone. . . . As one with us, He must bear the burden of our guilt and woe. The Sinless One must feel the shame of sin. . . . Alone He must tread the path; alone He must bear the burden. Upon Him who had laid off His glory and accepted the weakness of humanity the redemption of the world must rest."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.

This exchange could be figuratively seen in baptism. When Jesus was baptized, He was not baptized for His own salvation: instead, He announced that He came to take our sins upon Himself and die in our place. When we are baptized, we die, together with Jesus, to our own sins, receive His righteousness, and then rise from the baptismal waters in the newness of life!

Jesus in Gethsemane

In *The Cross of Christ*, John R. W. Stott (1921–2011), the famous Anglican theologian and evangelist, attempts to understand Jesus' crucible in Gethsemane by comparing Jesus to Socrates, facing death. Socrates (470–399 B.C.), one of the founders of Western philosophy and worldview, was about seventy years old when an Athenian court condemned him to death for corrupting the youth and for impiety (rejecting

the gods of the city). Socrates was to die by drinking a cup of poisonous hemlock. Although Socrates could escape the trial and condemnation, he chose to remain in the city and face his death. At the place of execution, Socrates was surrounded by his supportive disciples, who were crying for their teacher. When handed the cup with the poison, the father of Western thought took it with all cheerfulness and confidence and courageously drank it to the bottom (for Plato's account of this story, see Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, translated by Harold North Fowler (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 393–403).

By contrast, Jesus Christ spent His last hours in the Garden of Gethsemane. When He asked His disciples to “‘stay . . . and watch’” with Him because His soul was “‘exceedingly sorrowful, even to death’” (*Mark 14:34, NKJV*), they fell asleep. In fact, one of His disciples sold Him for money, and the others fled the garden after the multitude arrived to arrest Jesus (*Mark 14:10, 11, 50*). But Jesus, unlike Plato, agonized over the cup He must drain to the dregs. Far from describing Jesus as cheerfully and courageously taking the cup, the evangelist Luke points out that “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (*Luke 22:44, NKJV*), while praying, “‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me’” (*Luke 22:42, NKJV*). Can Jesus, who is the incarnate God, really be the Savior of the world if He is so fearful of that cup and of death? Why does He seem weaker than Socrates? Or *is* He?

Stott asks similar questions and then hints at an answer: “What is this cup? Is it physical suffering from which he shrinks, the torture of the scourge and the cross, together perhaps with the mental anguish of betrayal, denial and desertion by his friends, and the mockery and abuse of his enemies? Nothing could ever make me believe that the cup Jesus dreaded was any of these things (grievous as they were) or all of them together. His physical and moral courage throughout his public ministry had been indomitable. To me it is ludicrous to suppose that he was now afraid of pain, insult and death. Socrates in the prison cell in Athens, according to Plato's account, took his cup of hemlock ‘without trembling or changing colour or expression.’ He then ‘raised the cup to his lips, and very cheerfully and quietly drained it.’ When his friends burst into tears, he rebuked them for their ‘absurd’ behaviour and urged them to ‘keep quiet and be brave.’ He died without fear, sorrow or protest. So was Socrates braver than Jesus? Or were their cups filled with different poisons?”—John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 74.

Stott concludes that “the cup from which he [Jesus] shrank was something different. It symbolized neither the physical pain of being flogged and crucified, nor the mental distress of being despised and rejected even by his own people, but rather the spiritual agony of bear-

ing the sins of the world, in other words, of enduring the divine judgment which those sins deserved.”—*The Cross of Christ*, p. 76. Indeed, Socrates died the death of the common, sinful man. And, as Stott points out, the Christian martyrs had a seemingly much more heroic death than Jesus when they died on the pyre. The death of Jesus, like His baptism, was unique. While all humans who die will experience death as sinful human beings, Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died the death that represents God’s judgment on sin. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is the most singular, extraordinary event in the history of the universe. No human—Socrates included—could die that death and live again. No human could die that death and become the Savior of the world.

Ellen G. White describes the content of the cup, as well: “As He [Jesus] neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation and prayer; but never with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night of His last agony. Throughout His life on earth He had walked in the light of God’s presence. When in conflict with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29. But now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God’s sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father’s love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages* (1898), p. 685.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Recollect the experience of your baptism. How do you perceive your baptism in light of Jesus’ baptism? How does your perception help enrich your experience of death to sin and coming alive for the kingdom of God? How does this perception deepen your covenant with God and your commitment to God’s cause, no matter what?**

2. The section on Sabbath afternoon of this week's lesson gives an amazingly beautiful explanation of why God created the universe and the intelligent beings, even though He knew that evil would emerge out of His creation: it was worth it! It was worth it for Him, but it also was worth it for us. Otherwise, we would have never existed. But there is more: God could afford to decide that it was worth it because He not only had the power of creation, but in the case of the Fall, He also had the solution (to take our sin upon Himself), which is the power of salvation and the power of resurrection! How does this understanding change your perspective on God, on His creation and salvation?

The adult Bible study guide for next quarter, *Life Everlasting: On Death, Dying, and the Future Hope*, by Alberto Timm, deals with the subject of the great controversy between good and evil from two perspectives. One is the origin and ongoing existence of sin and death. The other is God's enduring work to solve these problems and bring the world back to its original perfect condition. Special emphasis is given also to the mortal nature of human beings and how the resurrection is the condition for immortality. In reality, we should not fear death because Christ died for us and overcame the power of death. Actually, we are assured that He holds "the keys to death and to the place of the dead" (*Rev. 1:18, NCV*).

With the fall of Adam and Eve, death engulfed not only the human race but all life as well. Expressions of death can be seen all around us. Our world is full of suffering and tears. We need assurance in the present and hope for the future. Next quarter, we will explore the painful subject of death, but through the lens of the hope offered us through Jesus.

Lesson 1—Rebellion in a Perfect Universe

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Creation: An Expression of Love** (*1 John 4:8, 16*)

MONDAY: **Free Will: The Basis for Love** (*1 John 4:7–16*)

TUESDAY: **Mysterious Ingratitude** (*Ezek. 28:12–19*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Price of Pride** (*Isa. 14:12–15*)

THURSDAY: **The Spread of Unbelief** (*Revelation 12*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 14:12*

Sabbath Gem: Genesis 3 tells us that the fall of Adam and Eve brought sin, evil, and death to our world. But even before the Fall, evil already existed, manifested by the "serpent," who deceived Eve (*Gen. 3:1–5*). So, we need to go back before the Fall to find the source and origins of the evil that so dominates our world.

Lesson 2—Death in a Sinful World

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Statements in Tension** (*Gen. 2:16, 17*)

MONDAY: **Deceived by the Serpent** (*Gen. 3:1–7*)

TUESDAY: **"You Will Not Die"** (*Gen. 3:4*)

WEDNESDAY: **Consequences of Sin** (*Gen. 3:7–19, Rom. 5:12*)

THURSDAY: **The First Gospel Promise** (*Gen. 3:15, 21*)

Memory Text—*Romans 5:12*

Sabbath Gem: With the fall of Adam and Eve, sin and death took over our world, but God planted a seed of hope for humanity even back in Eden.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: info@christianrecord.org; website:www.christianrecord.org.