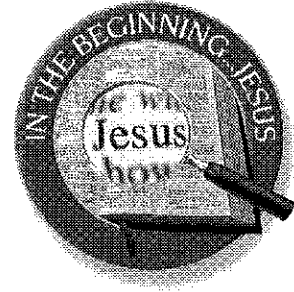


In the Beginning...Jesus



Lesson 40 A Story for You

Themes:

- God desires to save sinners through what Jesus has done on the cross.
- All people respond to Jesus, either in belief resulting in eternal life, or unbelief resulting in condemnation.
- God has written all people into the story of the Bible—it has a personal message for each of us.

Scripture:

Luke 23:32-33, 39-43; Romans 3:23; John 3:16-18a, 36

Visuals for Lesson:

- Bible.
- *In the Beginning...Jesus* poster.
- Resource Packet:
 - ?, CRIMINAL, A SINNER WHO DESERVES CONDEMNATION—
There are two copies of each of these signs on each page in the Resource Packet. Arrange them in two sets in the following order from the bottom of the stack to the top: A SINNER WHO DESERVES CONDEMNATION, CRIMINAL, ?. Use a paper clip to hold each set of three signs in order.
 - ME 1-2.
 - BELIEVE IN JESUS—NO CONDEMNATION—ETERNAL LIFE.
 - REJECT JESUS—CONDEMNATION—HELL.
- Two small (about 4" x 4") flat mirrors that can be attached to a wall surface—If this is not possible, use two pieces of heavy-weight aluminum foil. Cut each piece into a 4" square. Attach one mirror or piece of foil to the wall on the right side of the *In the Beginning...Jesus* poster and attach the other mirror or foil to the wall on the left side of the poster. Tape the two sets of signs (the two stacks of three signs each, mentioned above) on the wall, covering each mirror.
- Tape.

Lesson

Tell the children you have one final mystery for them to solve. Point to the two ? signs on each side of the *In the Beginning...Jesus* poster. Remind the children that in our very first lesson we briefly reviewed the events surrounding the death of Jesus. During the year, our goal was to search through the Bible for clues to find the answers to the questions: Who killed Jesus? and Why? These were the most important questions to answer. But something was left out of the picture. What was left out? [Allow the children to guess.]

Have the children turn to **Luke 23:32-33** and choose children to read the verses:

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left.

What was left out of our picture? The two men who were crucified along with Jesus—one on either side of Jesus.

Remove the ? signs to reveal **CRIMINAL**. Explain that both of these men were being punished for crimes they had done. Maybe they had hurt other people. Maybe they had even killed someone. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what their crimes were. However, they were both guilty of something much more serious and terrible than any crime they might have committed against another person. What would that be? [Allow the children to respond.] Remove the two **CRIMINAL** signs to reveal the two copies of **A SINNER WHO DESERVES CONDEMNATION**.

Emphasize that each man had a bigger problem. Each man had sinned against a holy God, and therefore deserved condemnation: God's righteous punishment of the sinner, who would experience God's fierce anger in hell forever.

These two men are also an important part of the story of Jesus' death on the cross. Why? [Allow the children to respond.]

Choose two children to come and remove both **A SINNER WHO DESERVES CONDEMNATION** signs to reveal the mirrors (or foil) underneath. Ask the children why there might be mirrors underneath. What do the mirrors hint at? [Allow the children to respond.]

Have a **Sword Drill** with **Romans 3:23**:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

When we look at the two criminals, what should we be seeing? [Allow the children to respond.]

Emphasize that when we look in a mirror, we see our own reflection. When we look at the two criminals who were crucified along with Jesus, we need to see ourselves. **Display** the two **ME** visuals and tape one on each mirror. We need to see that we have the same problem they had. Our problem is that we, too, are sinners—just like them—who deserve death and hell. **Display** the two **A SINNER WHO DESERVES CONDEMNATION** signs that have been removed and tape them below each of the **ME** visuals on the mirrors.

But is this the only thing we need to see in these two men? That we are guilty sinners also?

Point to the figure of Jesus on the cross. Ask the children if they remember *WHY* Jesus willingly died on the cross. *WHY* did God kill His one and only Son?

Have the children turn to **John 3:17**:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

What did Jesus not come into the world to do? [Condemn the world.] What does the word “condemn” mean? [To judge or punish. To send someone to hell.] Why did He come instead? [To save the world.] Does that mean God will save everyone?

Explain that the second thing we need to see in these two criminals is that there are two, and only two, responses to Jesus. What are these two responses? Why are they important? [Because it is by only one of these responses that a sinner can be saved.]

Have the children turn to **Luke 23:39-43**:

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And He said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

How would you describe the different way in which each criminal responded to Jesus? [Allow the children to respond.] What kind of attitude did the first one demonstrate? [From verse 39.] How was the attitude of the second criminal different? [From verses 40-41.] What did the second criminal recognize about himself? What did he believe Jesus was able to do for him? How did Jesus answer him?

Explain that God sent Jesus into the world to save sinners—people just like us. But as the two criminals demonstrate, there will be two different responses to Jesus. The one criminal rejected Jesus and mocked Him. He did not believe Jesus was who He claimed to be. The other criminal recognized his own sin and guilt, and he believed in Jesus for who He is and what He is able to do for sinners. Which criminal was saved in the end? Which criminal was promised eternal life in paradise (heaven) with Jesus? [The one who believed.] Why does this matter?

Read **John 3:17-18a, 36**:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Display the two signs: **BELIEVE IN JESUS—NO CONDEMNATION—ETERNAL LIFE, REJECT JESUS—CONDEMNATION—HELL**. Emphasize that these are the only two responses to Jesus. Just as each criminal on either side of Jesus demonstrated one of these responses, you and I will do the same. Tape the **BELIEVE IN JESUS—NO CONDEMNATION—ETERNAL LIFE** sign above one of the **ME** signs and tape the **REJECT JESUS—CONDEMNATION—HELL** sign above the other **ME** sign.

Hold up your Bible. Explain that the story of the Bible is different than any other story. It is God's story and every word is true. It is a story with an important message—the most important message of all. It is all about Jesus and who He really is. It is all about Jesus and what He did on the cross to save sinners. It is all about Jesus and what He has promised for sinners who believe in Him. This story is about the greatness and worth of Jesus.

And there is also something else amazing about this story. The Bible is also about each of us. You and I have been written into the story. And God has said that your part in the story will be decided by your response to Jesus.

Tell the children you are going to ask them some very important questions. You do not want them to answer out loud. You just want them to think about the questions. Ask the following questions slowly, pausing for a few moments after each:

What is your response to Jesus?

Who do you believe He is?

What does His death on the cross mean to you?

*Which of the two criminals best describes your attitude toward Jesus?
Do you believe Jesus will do all He has promised to do?
Will your part in the story have a happy ending?
Here is what Jesus says to you,*

Read **John 3:16**:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Application

- Review **John 3:16-18**, and **36**. How many responses are there to Jesus? What might rejecting Jesus look like? Read and talk about the following five examples. Emphasize that unbelief and rejection of Jesus takes many different forms.
 - A boy says he is not interested in the Bible—it's boring.
 - A girl says she will wait until she is older to decide.
 - A woman says the Bible is just a make-believe story.
 - A man says Jesus is okay for some people—those who think they need help.
 - A boy says he is sort of interested in Jesus, but he is interested in other things too, like sports—and those things are really important.
- Ask: *Do any of these examples sound like you? Are you believing in Jesus right now? If you are, how is this shown in your life? Who do you believe Jesus is? Are you depending on Him to forgive all of your sins and make you right with God? Do you believe with all your heart that He will give you eternal life in heaven? Do you feel at peace with God, or do you feel as if He is angry at you?* Read and discuss **2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2**.
- Read one or more of the following verses: **Mark 1:15**; **Acts 3:19**; **20:21**; **Romans 2:4**; and **2 Peter 3:9**. What is repentance? Read **2 Corinthians 7:10**. Explain that repentance is "godly sorrow." Review the story of the lost son from **Luke 15:11-24**. Verses **17-20** demonstrate a repentant heart. True repentance involves understanding that you are a sinner and deserve God's condemnation. It involves understanding you are completely helpless to save yourself. Ask: *Do you have a repentant heart? Is your own sin a big deal or do you believe you are "okay"? Do you think being good, reading your Bible, memorizing verses, and going to church will make your heart right with God?*
- Read and discuss **Ephesians 2:1-9**. What does it mean that we were all "children of wrath"? What does it mean to be "made alive"? How does this happen? Is it something we work at? Does a person have to become good before Jesus saves him? Why is grace and mercy a gift from God? When

a person responds in faith to Jesus, what will be the result? Do these verses describe you?

- Read and discuss **Colossians 1:19-23a**. Be sure to define words such as: *reconcile*, *alienated*, *hostile*, and *above reproach*. Point out that many times we read verses about enemies of God and think of people who have bad behavior like the criminals who were crucified along with Jesus. We might also think of bullies, terrorists, murderers, and other mean people. Whom are these verses referring to as evil? [You!] According to the verses, are the people in these verses still enemies of God? Why not? Was it because they now are working hard at being good?
- Read the story of the rich young ruler from **Matthew 19:16-22**. Point out that Jesus knew the heart of this young man—just as He knows our hearts. This man thought he could do something to earn eternal life. He also thought he was a good person. But what happened when Jesus commanded the young man to give up everything else and follow Him? In the end, did his choice make him happy? Ask: *What do you treasure most? Is there anything you hold on to that prevents you from trusting in Jesus and following Him? What do you think will make you most happy? Do you believe God wants you to be happy?* Read and discuss **Psalms 16:11** and then **John 14:6**. *What is the way to true happiness?*
- Are there things that look better and more exciting to you than Jesus? Do other things in the world tug at your heart and seem more enjoyable than believing and following Jesus? Read **Revelation 3:20**. *Have you felt Jesus knocking on the door of your heart? Is there anything preventing you from opening the door to receive Him? What does He promise to do when the door opens?* Read and discuss **John 10:7-9, 14-15, 27**.

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- Parent Resource Page