

What does the Bible Say?

Lesson 7: God's Plan: Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection

In the last lesson, we learned that God put his Word in the man Jesus and called this man his Son. We learned that since Jesus is God's living Word of God, he is God because God and his Word are One, just as we are one with the words we speak. Because God has preserved his Word in the Bible, we can learn all about who God is through Jesus and know through the Bible how God speaks to us today. In the last lesson, we read about Jesus's life, teachings, miracles, forgiveness, and love. We learned that Jesus's greatest desire and requirement for us to follow him is to love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love all his children as we love ourselves. I John 4:1 says, "God is love." Everything God does and did always points to love. This week, we're going to experience God's greatest expression and proof of his love through his Son Jesus. Through his death on a cross, Jesus paid the price for our sins and removed our sin forever, taking away its guilt and shame in our lives. Through his resurrection, Jesus gives us a new life and the power to overcome sin and enables us to live a life of love.

Love in Jesus's death

According to Jewish law in the first century C.E., Jesus was crucified for his claim of being the Son of God and for false accusations against him. The Jewish leaders believed that this claim was a form of blasphemy that gave them a legal reason to have Jesus crucified under their own laws, a form of capital punishment during the Roman Empire. Since they had no legal right to execute a person, they sent Jesus to Roman leaders to have him crucified (Matthew 26:57-68, 27:11, 26; Mark 14:55-65, 15:15; John 19:7). God's plan was not to justify the accusation of the Jewish leaders by this punishment but to fulfill through Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection all that the Law required and all that the Prophets had spoken about the Messiah.

Even though Jesus was God, Jesus was human, and his death came with much physical pain and suffering. After praying all night with his disciples sleeping nearby, Jesus was captured and subjected to another sleepless night with hours of interrogation by Jewish and Roman leaders. From there, Roman soldiers beat him, mocked him, spit in his face, and beat into his head a crown of long thorns. They beat his face so badly that he was hardly recognizable as human (Isaiah 52:14). According to C. Truman Davis, who studied Roman punishment, the Roman soldiers flogged Jesus, using a whip of leather strips with small balls of lead, sharp objects, and glass tied to the ends. With this whip, they beat Jesus again and again across the back, shoulders, and legs. After thirty-nine lashes, Jesus's back hung like ribbons of bloody skin. With his raw back, bleeding and open, the Roman soldiers nailed Jesus's wrists and ankles with long, thick nails against a splintered wooden cross. Wearing only a small cloth to cover his private parts, Jesus hung on this cross struggling for air. To breathe, Jesus pushed his body against the nails in his ankles. With every breath, the splintered cross scraped his raw, torn back, while the nerves in his feet and wrists shot pain through his body and exploded inside his head. Up and down against the splintered cross, Jesus fought for every breath, dying for our sins (Matthew 27:27-50, Mark 15:16-38, Luke 23:26-46, John 19:17-37).¹

The greatest testimonies that Jesus's death is our only hope for salvation are his own words: "28 You heard me say, 'I am going away, and I am coming back to you.'... 29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.... 31 But the world must learn that I love the Father and that I

¹ C. Truman Davis, *The Medical Account*, 1965 *Arizona Medicine*.

do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:28-31, NIV). In this, Jesus predicted his own death and full obedience to the God the Father. Again, he said, “¹⁸No one takes [my life] away from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again...” (John 10:18, NET). Jesus laid down his life completely on the cross and didn’t try to save his life or escape the pain. While being tortured, Jesus could have said, “There’s another way! You don’t have to kill me!” He could have said, “I am not the Son of God! You’ve misunderstood!” This would have ended the accusations against him and saved his life. But Jesus knew who he was, and out of love for each of us, he chose to obey God’s plan. This is the greatest testimony that Jesus was and is the Messiah.

How did Jesus show us love through his death?

Does Jesus’s death increase your faith in him as the Messiah? Explain.

What sins did Jesus die for in your life? How does his love and sacrifice make you feel? How do you want to respond to Jesus’s sacrifice for you?

In the same way that Jesus laid down his life by his own free will, Jesus wants us to respond to his sacrifice out of our own free will. Just as God gave Adam and Eve a choice to trust his commands and obey him, Jesus out of his love for us gives us that same choice. He wants us to understand that his sacrifice was God’s plan from the beginning: Just as God sacrificed an animal and used its skin to cover Adam and Eve’s shame and guilt, he sacrificed his Son Jesus as an eternal covering for our sin. His longing and hope is that we understand the cost of that sacrifice and never want to sin and be separated from our Father again. Instead, he wants us to turn away from our life of sin, idols, and self-glory and receive Jesus’s sacrifice as full payment for the punishment and justice we deserve. God loves us that much, and he’s willing to erase and remove every sin we’ve committed against him and everyone else in our lives. Now that we know his love for us, God’s deepest desire is that we would follow Jesus and long to live a life of love *with* him and *for* him for eternity. Paul describes this response: “¹⁴For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (II Corinthians 5).

Love in Jesus’s Burial

Just as we see God’s love through Jesus’s death, God shows his love for us through Jesus’s burial. After Jesus hung on the cross for six hours, two Jewish leaders, Nicodemus [nih-ko-DEE-mus] and Joseph of Arimathea [ayr-ih-muh-THEE-uh] wrapped his body in linen and placed him in a tomb with a large stone over the entrance (John 19:38-42, Matthew 27:57-60). Why did Jesus have to be buried? Why didn’t God take Jesus straight to heaven? Jesus’s burial is an important part of our understanding of God’s plan of love for us and evidence of his power and anointing of Jesus as the Messiah.

Why do you think Jesus needed to be buried? What do you think this burial symbolizes for us?

Jesus’s burial shows us that he was fully human and was treated as a human by his friends who buried him with a proper Jewish burial. This burial also assured all his followers of his death. These witnesses touched his dead body, wrapped his body in a cloth, and laid him inside a tomb. Could Jesus have been

asleep? The answer is no: Roman soldiers had pierced Jesus's body with a spear to make sure he was dead before anyone removed him from the cross (John 19:31-34). Even after Jesus was buried, Nicodemus and Joseph covered his tomb with a stone that would have been too heavy for one man to move. Since Jesus predicted his resurrection publicly, the Jewish leaders had Pilate seal the tomb completely and post guard to ensure that no one attempted to steal Jesus's body and claim that he had risen (Matthew 27:62-66).

Jesus also showed the world through his death and burial that our sins will be buried and forgotten by God when we place our faith in his sacrifice. Over 500 years before Jesus's death, the prophet Jeremiah [jayr-ih-MY-uh] spoke about this promise: “³¹ The time will surely come when I will make a new agreement with the people... ³² It will be different from the agreement I made with their ancestors.... Although I was their God, they broke that agreement. ³⁴ I will forgive their sins and forget the evil things they have done.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34, CEV)

Think back to the sins you saw in yourself in Lesson 2. What does it mean to you that Jesus has buried your sins to be forgotten forever?

Knowing that we have received full payment and forgiveness for our sins, we might feel a deep sense of peace and gratitude for God's kindness and be excited to have a new life. This is exactly what Jesus wants us to feel! He wants us to feel a sincere devotion to him and a genuine desire to keep our old sins buried in the grave, remembering the cost of this burial. As Peter put it so beautifully, “¹⁹ You were rescued by the precious blood of Christ, that spotless and innocent lamb” (1 Peter 1, CEV). For this reason, Jesus tells us to put to death our old life of sin and imitate his example: ““Whoever wants to be my follower must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me”” (Luke 9:23). He knows denying sin and choosing love daily will be hard, but he calls us to crucify ourselves for him and others, the same way he did for us. From these studies, we also understand that this is something we cannot do by ourselves, but as we come into agreement with Jesus's will, his power begins working in our lives. Paul teaches us in Romans 6 that when we put our faith in Jesus, he frees us from the power of sin: “⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.” Jesus too declared, “If the son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36, NIV).

Do you feel like you are ready to crucify your old life of sin and commit your life to loving the Lord with all your heart and loving others as you love yourself? Talk about what that will look like.

How will this be difficult? Do you have faith that Jesus will help you?

When we truly realize what Jesus did for us on the cross and that God is so willing and eager to forgive us, our hearts no longer desire to live the way we were living. We want to honor God with the way we live by putting to death our sins each day and living the way Jesus lived. Peter said it this way: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). As we continue to grow in Jesus, we will experience this healing. In John 12, Jesus explains through a parable, or story, this hidden joy and hope we will find as we die to our sins: “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (12:24). We know from science, that when a seed falls from a plant, or the wind

blows it to another field, the seed becomes extremely dry and goes into a phase called dormancy [DOR-man-see], or long period of sleep. This period of dormancy is very important to the seed and is required for the seed to grow into a plant. The seed that survives dormancy develops the ability to endure difficult conditions and to wait for the right conditions that it needs to grow. Sometimes this period lasts for months or even years and is required for the seed to mature. Water and light are two of the main elements required for the seed to grow into a plant. This process is called germination. In a sense, the seed dies, yet through difficult conditions, perseverance, and sacrifice, the seed matures and is finally made alive again through light and water.² Once the seed comes to life, it can produce more seeds!

Why do you think Jesus uses this process of dormancy to describe our spiritual life?

What do you think water and light have to do with our spiritual growth and ability to produce more seeds for God's glory?

Dormancy is a period of suffering that the seed must endure to be made alive again. In other words, our daily struggle of denying our old self, choosing to love Jesus and others daily, and following Jesus's lifestyle takes sacrifice that is sometimes painful! But as we continually soak in Jesus's light through reading the Word of God and communing with Jesus in prayer, we grow to become more like him. When we begin to serve Jesus by being light to others, we also grow and fulfill our destiny of becoming "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). In other words, receiving light and being light are both necessary to grow in Christ. So, what about water? Water can represent baptism, which launches the beginning of our journey, as well as cleansing and purification. As we purify ourselves from the sins that pull us back into the world, Jesus continues to purify us. We'll discuss this more when we study baptism, but this water plays a significant role in our purification before God. Jesus knows we will never be perfect, but as we give our hearts and lives to him and grow in faith, love, and his way of life, we become a stronger plant that can produce more seeds and more plants! In the same way, through Jesus's willingness to die and leave his life behind, he continues to see more people become his followers.

In all this, Jesus gives us this promise: "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Yet, like the seed, we may see ourselves falling asleep for a time and then growing again. We might decide to die to our sins, but we can still get weak. Yet God uses these dark seasons away from his light to show us how much we need him. We begin to want to grow again. We may even face challenges and suffering as his followers, but these times are from God and can make us stronger. If we drink his living water and walk in his light, we *will* grow! If we persevere through suffering and continue to die to ourselves and our old way of life, we will overcome! The writer of Hebrews encourages us that even though we struggle, we still have hope:

¹⁰We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Hebrews 10).

² Campbell, Neil A. and Jane B. Reece, Biology, 7th Ed., (San Francisco: Pearson, 2005), 779-780, 798. See also Bentsink, Leonie and Maarten Koornneef, "Seed Dormancy and Germination," The Arabidopsis Book, Dec. 30, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3243337/>.

How were the sacrifices made by Old Testament priests different from the one sacrifice Jesus offers for us? How can this passage encourage us when we struggle?

Love in Jesus's Resurrection

It's good news to know that God buried Jesus to forget our sins and remove our guilt, but Jesus's resurrection power gives us even greater news! Since Jesus was not just a prophet, but God's Son, his body is no longer in the tomb. After three days in the tomb, Jesus was resurrected and appeared to over five hundred people (Matthew 28:1-20, 1 Corinthians 15:6). Many who witnessed Jesus were tortured for this claim, showing their certainty in what they had seen and heard. God raised Jesus from the dead as a sign to all believers that he is God's Son, and if we put our faith in him, we too will be raised with him. Today, Jesus's resurrection power helps us to overcome sin, transforms our lives, gives us a new purpose in life, and seals our place in heaven. Jesus's sacrifice also makes us holy, and his resurrection is proof of God's power to help us overcome sin and make it to the end! As followers of Jesus made new through his power, we can now rejoice in this power, have peace in life, struggles, suffering, and even death. For this reason, Paul asks the questions, "Where, O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).³

One thousand years earlier, David, both prophet and king, spoke about this hope in the resurrection of the Messiah when he said, "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.⁹ Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." (Psalm 16:8-10). During his life, David saw suffering, death, and the power of sin destroying our world. He too struggled with sin during his life. As we recall, David confessed his sin to God and others, returned to God with all his heart, and the Lord forgave him. So, where was David's hope? This section of David's prayer is a Messianic prophecy that the Messiah would one day never "see decay." As we know from scripture, David's body lay in a tomb through the time of the first followers of Jesus (Acts 2:29). In this way, we can see that David found his hope in Jesus's resurrection, knowing that his own body too would one day be resurrected and fully restored to God in heaven. Now we've also seen this hope, we can be certain that our hope will be fulfilled.

How does Jesus's resurrection give you hope? What does this hope inspire you to do?

This Week:

Write in your journal:

- Take time to write about how the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus gives you hope in light of your sin.
- Keep reading a chapter in the Gospels every day and spend time praying in Jesus's name. Pray over your decisions and what living for Jesus means to you. Write about what following Jesus will look like in your new life. Pray over the challenges you know you will face.
- For your next lesson, you will watch *The Passion of the Christ* and discuss how the movie impacts you.

³ For more evidence about Jesus's death, you can study "The Evidence for Jesus" found in the Explore page of connectthenations.com.