

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: his death, burial, and resurrection that enables us to overcome sin and to live a life filled with his power and love.

Love in Jesus's death

According to Jewish law in the first century C.E., Jesus was crucified for his true claim of being the Son of God and for the false accusations against him. The Jewish leaders believed that Jesus's claim of being God's Son was a form of blasphemy, or speaking evil or disrespectfully toward God. According to the Law, the punishment for blasphemy was death (Leviticus 24:16). The Jewish leaders believed that Jesus's claim gave them the legal right to crucify Jesus, or nail him to a wooden cross, a form of capital punishment during the Roman Empire. However, under Roman law, the Jewish leaders had no legal right to execute a person, so they sent Jesus to the Roman rulers 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 this accusation or punishment against his Son but to fulfill all that the Law required for his children and all that the Prophets had spoken about the Messiah.

Even though Jesus was God, Jesus was also human, and his death came with much physical pain and suffering. The night before Jesus dies, he leads his followers to a garden and asks them to pray with him. While Jesus prays all night, crying out to God over what is about to happen to him, his friends all fall asleep, leaving Jesus alone in his suffering. Jesus could have run away or hid from those trying to kill him, but he knows that he was born to die for the sins of God's children. The entire night, he weeps so violently that he sweats drops of blood, hoping that God would save him from death. But when the time comes, Jesus faces the ones who come to kill him, that even they might turn from their sins one day and be saved. Yet, when the Jewish leaders capture Jesus, his friends desert him and flee to protect themselves. (Matthew 26:36-56).

Recall the Garden of Eden. What happened in that garden? What does this garden represent?

Roman soldiers then beat Jesus, 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

Jesus predicted his own death so that we would know that his death was God's plan to save us from eternal punishment and death. Before he died, Jesus said, "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" (John 14:28-29, NIV). 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. Jesus obeyed God's plan, but he did this willingly, not out of duty or force. He laid down his life completely on the cross and didn't try to save his life or escape the pain. Again, he said, "18 No 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's own testimony and actions prove that Jesus is the promised 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?

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 choose a life of 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: "14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And 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). Yet, just as Jesus laid down his life by his own free will, Jesus wants us to respond to his sacrifice out of our own free will. In the same way that 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.

Love in Jesus's Burial

God also 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

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

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 [jer-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. If you have already done this, what are some areas where you want to grow?

What challenges will you face in this decision? How can you depend on Jesus and others to 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 live 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 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 water and light have to do with our spiritual growth and ability to produce more seeds?

Dormancy is a period of suffering and sometimes waiting that the seed must endure to grow. 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, time, and patience. But as we continually soak in Jesus’s light through reading the Word of God, learning more, and communing with Jesus in prayer, we begin to know him better and grow to become more like him. When we are 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. Jesus knows we will never be perfect, but as we grow in faith, love, and obedience to his way of life, we become a stronger plant that can produce more seeds and more plants! This too is God’s plan for us and for our world.

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 feel distant and disconnected, which makes us 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! In all this, Jesus gives

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/>.

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). Loving Jesus and his teachings are like fuel that keeps us going! 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...¹⁴For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Hebrews 10).

When you feel distant from God and discouraged, how do you respond naturally? (Examples: sleep more, scroll online, isolate yourself, watch videos, eat more, drink more, etc.) What can you do to get strong again?

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. Three days after Jesus died, he was resurrected and appeared to over five hundred people (Matthew 28:1-20, I Corinthians 15:6) . Many who witnessed Jesus were tortured for their claim that they had seen him, showing their certainty in what they had seen and heard. God raised Jesus from the dead as a sign to all of Jesus’s follower that we too will be raised from death. Today, Jesus’s resurrection power also transforms our lives, gives us a new purpose in life, and seals our place in heaven. Jesus’s sacrifice 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?” (I Corinthians 15:55).³

One thousand years earlier, David, an Old Testament prophet and king, spoke about his hope in the resurrected Messiah when he said, “⁸I 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 secure ¹⁰because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your holy one see decay” (Psalm 16:8-10). During his life, David saw suffering, death, and the power of sin destroying his world. He too struggled with sin during his life. So, who is the “holy one”? David is speaking about the Messiah! David knows that because of Jesus’s resurrection, he will not be abandoned by God. As we recall, David confessed his sin to God and others. He then returned to God with all his heart, and the Lord forgave him. Just like king David, we too can have this hope if we put our faith in Jesus and surrender our lives to him.

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.
- 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.

