Preschool–Grade 6

Jesus Dies on the Cross

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: God loves us so much that Jesus, who had done nothing wrong, gave His life for our sins, and He forgave the people who hurt Him.
Bible passage: Matthew 26:36–27:61 and Luke 23. Read them before class.
Memory verse: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." *Romans 5:8 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board. Read the whole passage yourself, including the parts this lesson leaves out (see the note at the end).

1. Opening game: Fair or Not Fair? (5–10 minutes)

Name one side of the room "fair" and the other side "not fair." Read each situation, and kids walk to the side they choose. 1) You broke a window, and you have to help pay for it. 2) Your brother broke the window, and you get punished. 3) You did nothing wrong, but you offer to take your friend's punishment so they can go free. Ask: *Would anyone really do number 3? Why would they?* Say: "Today we will read about Someone who did nothing wrong and took the punishment for us."

2. Bible story: Jesus Gives His Life (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words, reverently.

The night before. At supper Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). **Remission** means sins taken away. Then Jesus went to a garden called Gethsemane and prayed three times while His disciples kept falling asleep (26:36–44). **Look up Matthew 26:39.** Jesus said, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt": He chose to do what God wanted.

The arrest. Judas, one of the twelve, came with a great crowd carrying swords and staves (sticks), sent by the chief priests. He kissed Jesus as a signal, and they took Jesus (26:47–50). One disciple drew a sword, but Jesus told him to put it away (26:51–52). **Look up Matthew 26:53.** A **legion** was thousands of soldiers. Jesus could have called more than twelve legions of angels, but He did not. Then all the disciples ran away (26:56).

No fault. That night the high priest's council looked for false witnesses against Jesus (26:59–60). Peter, waiting outside, said three times that he didn't know Jesus (26:69–75). In the morning they took Jesus to Pilate, the governor (27:2). **Look up Luke 23:4.** Pilate sent Jesus to King Herod, who sent Him back (23:7–11). Pilate said again that he found no fault in Him (23:14–15). Every year Pilate set one prisoner free, and the crowd chose Barabbas, a man in prison for murder, and shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him" (23:17–21). Pilate gave them what they wanted (23:24–25). The soldiers mocked Jesus. They put a scarlet robe on Him and a crown made of thorns, and they bowed and called Him "King of the Jews" to make fun of Him (Matthew 27:28–29).

The cross. Simon, a man from Cyrene, was made to carry the cross after Jesus (Luke 23:26). At the place called Calvary they crucified Jesus, with two **malefactors** (men who had done evil), one on His right and one on His left (23:32–33). **Look up Luke 23:34.** Jesus prayed for the very people who put Him there. Over Him was written, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (23:38). One malefactor mocked Him, but the other said, "This man hath done nothing amiss" (nothing wrong). **Look up Luke 23:42–43.** Jesus promised him paradise that very day.

Darkness. From about the sixth hour to the ninth hour (about noon to three in the afternoon) there was darkness over all the earth, and the sun was darkened (23:44–45). The **veil** of the temple, the great curtain in front of the holiest place, was torn in two from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). **Look up Luke 23:46. Gave up the ghost** means He died; here **ghost** is an old word for spirit. The earth shook (Matthew 27:51), and the centurion (a Roman captain of 100 soldiers) said, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). The women who had followed Jesus from Galilee watched from far off (Luke 23:49).

The tomb. That evening Joseph of Arimathaea, a good man who had not agreed with what the council did, asked Pilate for the body (23:50–52). He wrapped it in linen and laid it in a **sepulchre** (tomb) cut in stone, where no one had ever been laid (23:53), and rolled a great stone to the door (Matthew 27:60). Even Jesus' enemies remembered that He had said, "After three days I will rise again" (27:63). Next week we'll see that He did.

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3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. Jesus could have called more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). Why didn't He?
2. Pilate said three times that Jesus had done nothing wrong (Luke 23:4, 23:14, 23:22). Why does it matter that Jesus was without sin?
3. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them" while they were hurting Him (23:34). Who is hard for you to forgive? What would it look like to pray for them?
4. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us "while we were yet sinners." What does that tell you about God's love?
5. The thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him (Luke 23:42). What does Jesus' answer show you about Him?

Recall questions

1. Who carried the cross after Jesus? *(Simon, a Cyrenian, Luke 23:26)*
2. How long was it dark? *(From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, about three hours, 23:44)*
3. Who laid Jesus in the tomb? *(Joseph of Arimathaea, 23:50–53)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain: **commendeth** means shows, and **sinners** are people who have sinned, which is all of us (Romans 3:23). Read the verse on the board together, then erase two words at a time and read it again, until the board is empty. Then kids say it to a partner.

5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "Jesus had done nothing amiss, but He gave His life for our sins. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Jesus said His blood was shed 'for the remission of sins' (Matthew 26:28). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.
This week: think of one person who has hurt you. Pray for them by name every day, like Jesus did on the cross.

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6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Matthew 26:36: What was the name of the garden where Jesus prayed? *(Gethsemane)*
2. Matthew 27:15–16: What was the name of the prisoner the crowd asked for? *(Barabbas)*
3. Luke 23:26: Where was Simon from? *(Cyrene; he was a Cyrenian)*
4. Luke 23:33: What was the place called where Jesus was crucified? *(Calvary)*
5. Luke 23:38: In which three languages was the writing over Jesus? *(Greek, Latin and Hebrew)*
6. Luke 23:45: What happened to the sun? *(It was darkened)*
7. Luke 23:47: What did the centurion say? *("Certainly this was a righteous man")*
8. Luke 23:53: What did Joseph wrap Jesus' body in? *(Linen)*

   Or choose the **Jesus dies on the cross word search** (vbshq.com/puzzles/the-cross-word-search), crossword (vbshq.com/puzzles/the-cross-crossword), maze (vbshq.com/puzzles/the-cross-maze) or worksheet (vbshq.com/worksheets/the-cross-worksheet).

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for loving us while we were still sinners. Thank You, Jesus, for giving Your life for our sins. Help us forgive the people who hurt us, the way You forgave. In Jesus' name, amen."

What this lesson leaves out on purpose: the scourging and the beating (Matthew 26:67, 27:26, 27:30), Judas's death (27:3–5), and the details of how a crucifixion was done. If kids ask, answer briefly and gently, without detail: it was very painful, and Jesus chose it because He loves us (Matthew 26:53; Romans 5:8).
If a child asks who Jesus was praying to: Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16), fully God and fully man. As a man, He prayed to God, His Father, the one God who dwelt in Him: "the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (John 14:10).

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