Jesus Dies on the Cross

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: The cross is the greatest proof of God's love: Jesus, who did nothing amiss, gave Himself for sinners and forgave those who crucified Him.
Bible passage: Matthew 26:36–27:61 and Luke 23. Students read Matthew 26:36–56 and Luke 23:33–49 out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." *Romans 5:8 (KJV)* and "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." *2 Corinthians 5:19 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Matthew 26–27 and Luke 23. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Could You? (5–10 minutes)

Name one side of the room "I could" and the other side "I couldn't." Read each situation. Students walk to the side that's honest for them. 1) Forgive a friend who said sorry. 2) Forgive a friend who never said sorry. 3) Pray for someone who is laughing at you right now. 4) Take the blame for something you didn't do, so someone else goes free. Ask: *Which was hardest? Why?* Say: "Jesus did every one of these on the cross."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Matthew 26:36–56. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **exceeding sorrowful, even unto death** (26:38): so full of sorrow it felt like dying
- **let this cup pass from me** (26:39): the "cup" is the suffering ahead; **not as I will, but as thou wilt**: Jesus chose God's will
- **tarry** (26:38): stay; **staves** (26:47): wooden clubs; **forthwith** (26:49): right away
- **twelve legions** (26:53): a Roman legion was thousands of soldiers; Jesus could have been rescued, but He chose not to be
- **forsook him** (26:56): left Him alone

Tell the middle part in your own words: The night before, Jesus had said His blood was "shed for many for the remission of sins" (26:28). After the arrest, the council looked for false witnesses (26:59–60), and Peter denied Jesus three times (26:69–75). In the morning they bound Jesus and took Him to Pilate (27:2). Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4), sent Him to Herod, and said it again (23:7–15). Pilate's own wife called Him "that just man" (Matthew 27:19). The crowd chose Barabbas, a man in prison for sedition (rebellion) and murder, and shouted, "Crucify him" (Luke 23:18–21). Pilate washed his hands and gave in (Matthew 27:24–26). Soldiers mocked Jesus with a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns (27:28–29). Simon of Cyrene carried the cross after Him (Luke 23:26).

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Read out loud: Luke 23:33–49. Old words in this passage:

- **Calvary** (23:33): the place where Jesus was crucified; Matthew calls it Golgotha, "a place of a skull" (Matthew 27:33)
- **malefactors** (23:32–33): criminals; **parted his raiment, and cast lots** (23:34): divided His clothes by a kind of drawing straws
- **derided** (23:35): made fun of; **superscription** (23:38): a written sign
- **railed on** (23:39): insulted; **nothing amiss** (23:41): nothing wrong
- **paradise** (23:43): the place of God's presence and rest
- **the sixth hour ... the ninth hour** (23:44): about noon to three in the afternoon
- **the veil of the temple was rent** (23:45): the great curtain before the holiest place was torn, Matthew says "from the top to the bottom" (Matthew 27:51)
- **commend** (23:46): hand over, entrust; **gave up the ghost**: died (ghost = spirit)
- **centurion** (23:47): Roman officer over 100 soldiers; **smote their breasts** (23:48): beat their chests in sorrow

Finish in your own words: That evening Joseph of Arimathaea, a counsellor who had not agreed with the council, laid Jesus' body in a new sepulchre cut in stone and rolled a great stone to the door (Luke 23:50–53; Matthew 27:57–60). The chief priests remembered Jesus' words, "After three days I will rise again," and had the tomb sealed and guarded (Matthew 27:63–66). Next week: the third day.

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. In Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39), and later said He could call twelve legions of angels (26:53). What do these two verses tell you about whether Jesus was a victim or chose the cross?
2. Pilate, Pilate's wife, Herod, the thief and the centurion all said Jesus was innocent or righteous (Luke 23:4, 23:15, 23:41, 23:47; Matthew 27:19). Why does Luke make sure we hear that so many times?
3. Jesus prayed "Father, forgive them" while it was happening (Luke 23:34). What is the difference between forgiving someone later and forgiving while you're still being hurt?
4. Peter denied Jesus and all the disciples ran (Matthew 26:56, 26:69–75). How do you think they felt that night? What does it mean that Jesus died for people who failed Him, including us?
5. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us "while we were yet sinners," not after we cleaned up. How does that change how you see God?
6. The veil that kept people out of the holiest place was torn from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). What might it mean that it tore from the top, God's side?

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4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **commendeth** means proves or shows. In 2 Corinthians 5:19, **to wit** means "that is"; **reconciling** means bringing back together as friends; **not imputing their trespasses unto them** means not counting their sins against them; **the word of reconciliation** is the message that people can be made right with God. **God was in Christ** means the one God was in Jesus: the cross was God Himself making a way back to Him. Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Romans 5:8 this week; keep working on 2 Corinthians 5:19 next week too.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "On the cross, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). Jesus said His blood was shed 'for the remission of sins' (Matthew 26:28), and Peter preached how we receive that remission: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies, crucified with Him (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, 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.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Romans 5:8 says God's love came first, "while we were yet sinners." Write what that means to you in your own words.
2. Who do I need to forgive, the way Jesus forgave on the cross (Luke 23:34)?
3. Write a short prayer thanking Jesus for the cross.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence. Early finishers can do the **Jesus dies on the cross crossword** (vbshq.com/puzzles/the-cross-crossword) or word search (vbshq.com/puzzles/the-cross-word-search).

This week: read Luke 23 again at home, and pray for one person who has hurt you, by name, every day.

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7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that while we were yet sinners, You loved us, and Jesus died for us. Thank You that You were in Christ, making a way back to You. Help us forgive the way You forgave, and live for You. In Jesus' name, amen."

What this lesson leaves out on purpose: the scourging and beating (Matthew 26:67, 27:26, 27:30), Judas's death (27:3–5), the opened graves (27:52–53) and the cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (27:46). Read them before class. If a student asks about the cry, say it is the first line of Psalm 22 (Psalm 22:1), and encourage them to ask the pastor about it.
If a student asks who Jesus was praying to ("Father, forgive them," "Father, into thy hands"): Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16), fully God and fully man. As a man He prayed to the Father, the one God who dwelt in Him: "the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (John 14:10), and "God was in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is one God, not two.

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