



05

SESSION FIVE

The King was Crucified

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will not only reflect upon the manner of Jesus' death, but also the meaning. Jesus' crucifixion was brutal and unjust, and yet, He willingly laid down His life in obedience to the Father and for the salvation of sinners. As the substitute sacrifice, Jesus died in our place. As the crucified King, He demonstrated the true wisdom and power of God. And as the forsaken Son, He endured the punishment of our sin so we could become the righteousness of God in Him.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 27:15-51

THE POINT

Jesus is the King who willingly took upon Himself the punishment for sin.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

What do you think of when you hear the word *sacrifice*? Maybe your mind goes to the game of baseball and an at-bat scenario that results in an out but moves a base runner into scoring position. Maybe you think of giving up social media around the season of Lent or sacrificing that planned outing with friends due to some unexpected family emergency. While all of these are sacrifices in some sense, none really convey the power of the biblical imagery of a sacrifice.

For most of the first-century world, the word *sacrifice* brought to mind blood. Sacrifice carried the image of a bull, a goat, or other such animal lying upon an altar and struggling as its life drained from its body.

Jesus was the perfect, once for all substitute sacrifice for our sins. He took the place of the bulls and goats—we would never need to sacrifice animals again. But His death was no less gruesome than theirs—His blood was spilled as He was beaten, crowned with thorns, and finally nailed to the cross.

- **Why is it important to not only stress the fact that Jesus died for our sins, but also the manner in which He died?**

Option 2

Have you ever seen a stalagmite? What at first appears to just be a rocky column that stretches from the floor of a cave upward is actually the result of mineralized water that trickles down from cracks in the cave ceiling. Over time, a carbonate mineral called *calcite* solidifies in the shape of a cone. Stalagmites look like they rise on their own from the floor, but in reality, they are formed from the dripping from above. Over time the stalagmite may rise to connect with the stalactite above to form a single column.

Like stalagmites, salvation always begins from above. Grace doesn't rise; it falls. According to the Bible, there is nothing we can do to rise up from the ground and stretch our way to God. The gravity of sin is simply too strong. No matter how many "good" actions we perform, how many times we go to church, or how good our intentions may be, we cannot get to the ceiling of God's love through our own means or in our own strength. Salvation falls in one direction—top to bottom. And we see this clearly in our session today as we look at Christ's atoning blood being poured out on the cross for our sins.

- **What are some ways we seek to make ourselves acceptable to God? Why are these ways doomed to failure?**
- **Why is it important to understand salvation as being top-down rather than from the ground up?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Jesus is the King who willingly took upon Himself the punishment for sin.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Pontius Pilate:** Roman governor of Judaea during Jesus' earthly ministry
- **Barabbas:** murderer and rebel who was set free from prison in exchange for Jesus' crucifixion

PLOT

After being arrested under the darkness of night, Jesus was then ushered off before an agitated judge and jury all seeking one thing—His immediate execution. However, as we have seen time and time again throughout Scripture, what man intends for evil God intends for good.

TIMELINE

THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.

HE IS RISEN

The resurrection of the Son of God.

HEARTS ON FIRE

All Scripture points to Jesus.

JESUS TOOK BARABBAS' PLACE

After being arrested and falsely accused by the chief priests and elders, Jesus was then taken to the governor, Pontius Pilate, for questioning and sentencing. What would seem like a strange series of events unfolded, which allows us to glimpse Jesus' innocent life being given for those who are guilty.

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. 19 Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" 23 And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" 24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25 And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. (Matt. 27:15-26)

Pilate was looking for a way out. He knew the priests and elders all too well and was not blind to the situation before him. He knew Jesus was undeserving of death, but he also knew that the chief priests would stop at nothing to silence any and all perceived threats to their position and privilege.

Knowing that personally confronting the priests and elders during the Passover would be politically dangerous, Pilate considered the potential of having the people put the pressure on their leaders. If the crowd were to excuse Jesus, then the elders and priests would have no recourse but to drop their accusation against Him. After all, they had been too concerned about the crowd's perception of Jesus as a prophet to make a public arrest (Matt. 21:46).

Barabbas was a murderer and rebel. He deserved the punishment that awaited him. Even if the crowd would not proclaim Jesus innocent, surely they would recognize His relative innocence when contrasted with a man like Barabbas.

Pilate's plan was brilliant, but it was doomed by the sinfulness of man and God's divine plan. On that day, the guilty would walk free while the innocent would walk to death.

In Barabbas' release, we see a picture of our own promised release. Like Barabbas, we are guilty of rebellion, but not against the Roman Empire. We have each conspired to commit cosmic treason against the Lord and rightly deserve death. If not for Jesus, we too would stand before the Judge's seat to be convicted. But as Jesus took Barabbas' place before Pilate, so He takes the place of those who love and trust Him before His Father.

JESUS WAS MOCKED, TORTURED, AND CRUCIFIED

As Jesus was tortured and prepared for the cross, He was treated with contempt and mocked as the Messiah. He was given royal robes and a crown (of thorns)—the entire display a mockery of justice. Take a look:

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. 28 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. 32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. (Matt. 27:27-44)

This passage of Scripture screams humiliation—torture, mockery, abuse, insults, and taunts. Jesus was a spectacle to be laughed at and disregarded by the soldiers and the spectators.

Who could endure such torture, especially when the endurance is a matter of choice and not a necessity? At any point Jesus could have resisted; at any point He could have fought back. His resistance is never futile, and yet, He endured.

This passage also screams humility—patience, love, grace, and mercy. Jesus on the cross was a spectacular drama showing just how far the Son of God was willing to go in perfect obedience to His Father, and we are encouraged to share in that same humility (Phil. 2:5-11).

The irony in this passage is thicker even than the blood. The King of kings was mocked by being called a king. He was told to display His glory by coming down from the cross, when doing so would have undone all that He was accomplishing for His glory. By saving Himself, He would sacrifice others. So, He stayed on the cross and endured the pain, the shame, and the wrath, and we are the heirs to the benefits of His endurance.

JESUS SERVED AS THE SUBSTITUTE LAMB

How does a Father sacrifice His Son, especially when we know that this Father is good and loving? Precisely because He is good and loving, as is the Son. This sacrifice was planned before the foundation of the world, and this sacrifice had a holy purpose (Acts 2:23,36).

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. 51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. (Matt. 27:45-51)

Jesus’ cry should have resonated in the minds of the onlookers, but they missed His reference. These are the opening words of Psalm 22, a psalm dripping with messianic meaning (especially verses 1-2,6-8, and 12-18). Jesus was not calling upon Elijah, as the crowd supposed. He was identifying Himself as the One to whom the Psalm pointed and demonstrating the horror of feeling forsaken by His Father.

TIMELINE

JESUS SENDS

The disciples witness the risen Christ and receive the peace He brings.

OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas’ doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.

FOLLOW ME

Jesus’ forgiveness and the call of every Christian.

Then, with another cry, Jesus yielded up His spirit in death. In that moment, heaven and earth could take no more. A creation subjected to futility began to quake, and earth and rock split. With it, the veil in the temple that separated heaven and earth was split from top to bottom, signifying that this act was accomplished from above.

In the torn curtain, a message was proclaimed. A Son was rejected so that the Father would have many more sons and daughters. The Father forsook His only Son that He might extend forgiveness to a great many children. A Son's sacrifice was accepted in the holy of holies, so that all who trust in Him might be accepted before the very throne of God.

- **How does it affect you to know Jesus was forsaken and rejected so that you could have forgiveness for your sins?** (p. 36, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Substitute (p. 35, PSG)

At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind, yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Unjustly condemned to death, Jesus willingly took up His cross and suffered the judgment our sins deserve. At the moment He died, the curtain in the temple sanctuary was torn in two, signifying the truth that sinners have access to God through the blood of Christ. Jesus' crucifixion is the center of history, revealing God's holiness and justice, our sinfulness and unrighteousness, and Christ's humility and love.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How do you think Barabbas responded to this turn of events in his favor? How should we respond to Jesus taking our place?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can be guilty of choosing something or someone over Jesus?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do the details surrounding Jesus' physical torture and crucifixion affect you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the fact that Jesus' friends abandoned Him in His greatest need add to Jesus' suffering?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Before God spoke light into existence, there was darkness. Before the Israelites' redemption from Egypt, the plague of darkness covered the nation. And at the crucifixion, darkness swallowed the whole land for three hours as a marker of the moment's cosmic significance.

- **What do the events at Golgotha demonstrate about the love of the Father and the love of the Son?** *Answers will vary.*
- **If a non-Christian asked you why Jesus died, how would you respond?** *Answers will vary, but should include something like: Jesus not only chose to bear the consequences that our sins deserve, but He also gives us His righteousness so that we can be in a right relationship with God as a result.*



HEART

The narrative of the events leading up to and including the crucifixion certainly does not do justice to the full horror on display. Black print on a Bible's pages can never fully express the scarlet blood flowing from a wounded back and pierced brow. A few paragraphs read in a matter of seconds cannot adequately convey the dread and shock of hours of torture Jesus experienced for the guilty. As Jesus marched to Golgotha, He did so not only in Barabbas' place, but also for all who would believe. He was crucified and condemned so that we might be ransomed and redeemed. He became sin so that we might become the righteous of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

- **How does knowing the extent of Jesus' sacrifice increase your love for Him?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does it affect you to know Jesus bore the punishment our sin's deserve?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the King who willingly took upon Himself the punishment for sin. In light of this, we don't need to be afraid of talking about sin and calling people to faith. Our Father does not abandon us on our mission to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, through His Holy Spirit, He strengthens our faith and fuels our worship and witness.

- **How does the reality of what Jesus endured for us protect us from viewing evangelism simply as an obligation?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important for Christians to first talk about sin when sharing the good news of what Christ has done for us?** *The bad news of our sinful condition and our need for a Savior must always precede the good news of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus. Without mention of sin, people will no necessarily understand what they are being saved from and so forth.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #7, which contains a quote poster related to the session.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPRisenFAL17)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject