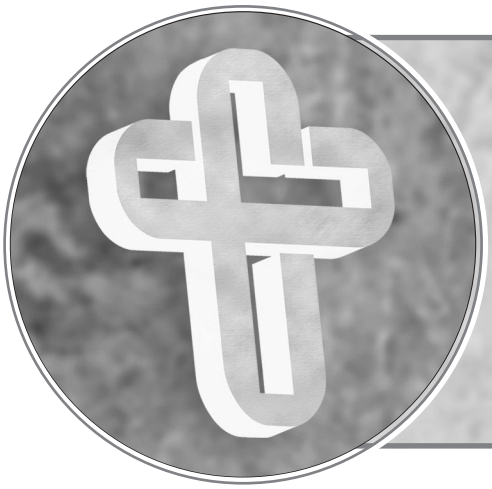


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
NOVEMBER 15 2025

trials

Scripture Story: Luke 23:1-25.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 75-77.
Key Text: Luke 23:20-23.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The night Christ was betrayed, He endured six trials in which He was questioned, beaten, accused, and condemned to death. The Jewish portion of the trial was a gross betrayal of its legal system, and the Roman part of the trial an even sadder display of cowardice and corruption. The fact that the Jewish leaders would violate their own legal process is a testimony to their hatred of Christ. Trials typically have at least two purposes: to discover the truth and to establish justice. The truth about everyone was exposed in these trials. Jewish leaders were corrupt and hypocritical in the worst way. Pilate was revealed as a coward. Herod was a fool. The masses and the crowds were weak and mindless. The disciples had abandoned Christ. The leaders thought they were getting justice by their schemes, but their depravity was exposed and the glory of Christ was unmistakable.

One of the lessons in this story is how character is not only developed in trials but revealed by them. Students will benefit from being reminded that their inward person is exposed by challenges. This may be a good opportunity to discuss how we all may desire truth in the inmost places but need to also practice it in life. Another truth is that Jesus let it happen. He was in complete control—from the betrayal in the garden to the nails at Calvary. Christ laid down His life purposefully. If we learn anything from this event it is that Christ chose to redeem us because He believed we could live for greater purposes than ourselves.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Witness how humans can be so wrong while thinking they are right. *(Know)*
- Sense that God is in control even in the worst of situations. *(Feel)*
- Decide to let the inward desire for mercy and truth live on the outside. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 11: "By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. . . . In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. . . . (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

The ranking activity helps students prioritize their values and experiences. In this activity they must consider the attributes of each experience and then make a decision as to the order, according to their perceptions. Some students will feel betrayal more than others. There may be young people who feel misunderstood, or are victims of hatred. Everyone will feel these emotions keenly, but differently. It is important to emphasize this dynamic. Another way to approach this activity is to have them choose a side on the following either/or exercise:

Which emotion do you think is more extreme: anger at those who cause injustice, or sympathy for those who are mistreated by injustice and endure the experience alone?

Invite students to explain, but to also listen for another person's perspective.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

At a juvenile court hearing, a young man was ushered in and sat in a chair. He had been caught stealing from homes, and capped off his conquests by stealing a car and accidentally crashing the stolen vehicle into a police car. The judge read the reports and asked a few questions trying to find a way to understand the young man's behavior. After Michael thwarted his every attempt, the judge said to the counselor appointed to Michael, "Would you mind taking a moment and explain to Michael what I'm doing by all these questions?"

The counselor knew. Quietly he said to Michael, "The judge is asking you these questions because he is hoping that you will give him the tiniest reason to help you. You see, he wants to extend mercy in some way to you if he sees that you will try to make better choices. He is begging you to give him something so he can help you."

Michael finally began to understand the basic nature of the legal system: innocent until proven guilty was an attempt to protect the innocent and compel the guilty to change their ways.

What is your perception of the legal system of your government? Do you feel that it is too harsh or too lenient? Explain.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

While Michael learned that the basis for law is restoration, the Jews suspended practically every rule that was meant to safeguard their justice system when they decided to put Christ to death. It is clear that the Jewish leaders were desperate to kill Jesus. They stopped at nothing to make sure this happened. But remember, Jesus could have stopped the proceedings at any point. You will also notice that it was Jesus who was vindicated, not maligned, by this trial.

Out of the Story *for Teachers*

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

For a step-by-step description of the six trials of Christ, follow the sequence:

1. Before Annas, John 18:12-23
2. Before Caiaphas and the elders, Mark 14:55-65
3. Before the Sanhedrin, Matthew 27:1, 2
4. Before Pilate, Luke 23:1-7
5. Before Herod, Luke 23:8-12
6. Before Pilate, Luke 23:13-25 (also John 18:28–19:45)

- *Circle* the names of individuals and groups mentioned in this passage that were part of the trials of Christ. Compare the attitudes of the religious leaders to Pilate and Herod. What do you know about these people, and what is revealed about them as Christ is tried?
- As you read through this portion of the trials, *underline* every phrase or sentence that conveys accusations or the stubborn intent to execute Jesus. How would you describe their mind-set as they try to convict Christ?
- What one verse or phrase seems to summarize the meaning of this event? Explain.
- Christ seems to be alone during His trials. What do you think was going through His mind? What thoughts kept Him so composed?

- What are some unanswered questions you wonder about as you read the story of Christ's trials?
- How do you think the trials are part of the plan of redemption? How are all the events that lead up to Calvary related to each other?

Extra Questions for Teachers

- When have you witnessed someone suspending their beliefs and values because they desperately wanted something to happen. How do you see this taking place in the trials of Christ?
- Discuss what you think is the motivating emotion for the religious leaders?
- What type of leaders were Pilate and Herod.

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Acts 6:7; John 7:45-53; Matthew 27:19; John 8:1-11; Acts 16:35-40.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The setting up of the trials of Christ occurred even as Judas left the table and settled his deal with the religious leaders to hand over Jesus. While Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Temple guards came with key religious leaders to arrest Him on Thursday night. Enduring essentially six different trials before sentencing might seem to have sapped Jesus of His will, but the opposite was true: Christ became more glorious as His enemies sank deeper into their darkness.

In order to understand the trial of Christ it is important to know the background of the Jewish legal system. Under Roman rule, the Jews lost their capacity to try capital cases on their own. Jesus' trial was not only unfair, it was blatantly unlawful. Notice the simple description for capital cases:

"The provisions relating to criminal trials, and especially to those in which the offence was punishable by death, were very stringent and were all framed in the interest of the accused. Among them were the following: The trial must be begun by day, and if not completed before night it must be adjourned and resumed by day; . . . a verdict of acquittal, which required only a majority of one, might be rendered on the same day as the trial was completed; any other verdict could only be rendered on a subsequent day and required a majority of at least two; no prisoner could be convicted on his own evidence; it was the duty of a judge to see that the interests of the accused were fully protected" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved).

The Jewish law was designed to make certain no one was ever falsely punished, even at the risk of letting the guilty go free. No night courts. No hasty judgments. Two or three eyewitnesses were required. Furthermore, to ensure no dubious witnesses were procured, the death sentence applied to those who falsely testified. If one person felt the accused was not guilty—they were acquitted. One could not be condemned based on one's own testi-

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Application

All the information in the world is relatively useless if never put into practice. One of the foundational principles of learning is that you really know something when it is applied from your head to your life. It is likely the hardest part of the learning experience to facilitate. But as Jesus said, everyone who hears His words and *does them* "is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24, NIV).

There are three qualities that can be used when trying to apply a biblical truth to life . . .

It must be:

1. *Personal* (The individual needs to see this as something for them to do.)
2. *Practical* (The individual needs to choose something to do that is doable, within the sphere of their capacity to make it happen.)
3. *Provable* (The individual needs to make the action so specific that they know when they have done it.)

mony to avoid someone admitting to a crime they did not do or to prevent a judge from tricking the defendent into saying something they didn't mean to say. No trials during the Passover. No trials close to the Sabbath. You can see how desperately the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus dead.

The entire intent of legal procedure in Jewish law was to give the greatest opportunity for mercy to prevail. Even today, the notion of "innocent until proven guilty" is derived from the ancient practice of "above all—let mercy prevail."

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Divide the students into groups of two or three and share the following experiences:

- Share a time in your life when you were falsely accused of doing something wrong.
- Share a time in your life when you were treated with mercy, although you did not deserve it.
- Share a time in your life when you struggled to give someone else the benefit of the doubt.
- Students can share one or all of the experiences as they have time. You might want to extend the discussion by asking the class to answer: What did you learn about mercy and justice? How does adversity reveal who we really are inside?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

As always, adversity exposes who we really are. Christ, fresh from His choice to surrender Himself to the plan of salvation, stood before men pretending to have authority; He remained noble. His character stood tall while priests were screaming and ripping their clothes, guards were slapping Jesus, Pilate was quaking, and Herod was partying. The Jewish leaders mocked their own rules in order to put this penniless teacher to death. Everyone in the scene became small, petty, and wrong. And the accused, Jesus Christ, emerged as true, good, and righteous. Keep in mind, at any moment Christ could have called down angels and they all would have been wiped out. But Jesus was clear about His purpose: His Father's will was to send His only Son to die, so that even His accusers would have a chance at life.

The real question to ask is: What is inside of you? Are your aspirations about eternal things or temporary stuff? What's on the inside will be revealed.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages (*or *Humble Hero*), chapters 75-77.

Humble Hero is book 3 in a special adaptation of the Conflict of the Ages series, created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Read more about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

STUDENT LESSON

NOVEMBER152025

Scripture Story: Luke 23:1-25.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 75-77.

trials



Photo by Colleen Cahill

keytext

"Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!'

. . . They were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed."

(Luke 23:20-23, NKJV)

flashlight

"Standing behind Pilate, in view of all in the court, Christ heard the abuse; but to all the false charges against Him He answered not a word. His whole bearing gave evidence of conscious innocence. He stood unmoved by the fury of the waves that beat about Him. It was as if the heavy surges of wrath, rising higher and higher, like the waves of the boisterous ocean, broke about Him, but did not touch Him. He stood silent, but His silence was eloquence. It was as a light shining from the inner to the outer man" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 726).

what do you think?

Rank the following emotions from the most extreme to the least (1—least extreme, 5—the most):

____ feeling hated
____ feeling alone
____ feeling betrayed
____ feeling abandoned by friends
____ feeling falsely accused

Describe the emotion you feel is most painful or extreme. Explain your answers.

_____
_____
_____
_____

INTO THE STORY

"Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.' Then Pilate asked Him, saying, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' He answered him and said, 'It is as you say.' So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no fault in this Man.' But they were the more fierce, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.' When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. . . . Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, 'You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him' (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). And they all cried out at once, saying, 'Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas'—who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' Then he said to them the third time, 'Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go.' But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will."

(Luke 23:1-25, NKJV)

did you know?

The Sanhedrin was a 71-member supreme court comprised of scribes, rabbis, Pharisees, priests, Sadducees, and elders presided over by the high priest. The constitution of the Sanhedrin held by law: it could not convene at night—only by daylight and only in the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple courts. Also, you could condemn someone to death based only upon the testimony of two witnesses—never by their own testimony. Furthermore, a death sentence was never to be carried out on the same day as the trial or during the Passover, in order to give time for the court to make sure they were not making a big mistake. These rules were always strictly adhered to—except for one case.

OUT OF THE STORY

For a step-by-step description of the six trials of Christ, read the following sequence:

1. Before Annas, John 18:12-23
2. Before Caiaphas and the elders, Mark 14:55-65
3. Before the Sanhedrin, Matthew 27:1, 2
4. Before Pilate, Luke 23:1-7
5. Before Herod, Luke 23:8-12
6. Before Pilate, Luke 23:13-25 (also John 18:28–19:45)

Circle the names of individuals and groups mentioned in the passage (Luke 23:1-25) that were part of the trials of Christ. Compare the attitudes of the religious leaders to those of Pilate and Herod. What do you know about these people, and what is revealed about them as Christ is tried?

_____

_____

As you read through this portion of the trials, *underline* every phrase or sentence that conveys accusations or the stubborn intent to execute Jesus. How would you describe their mind-set as they try to convict Christ?

_____

What one verse or phrase seems to summarize the meaning of this event? Explain.

_____

Christ seems to be alone during His trials. What do you think was going through His mind? What thoughts kept Him so composed?

_____

_____

What are some unanswered questions you wonder about as you read the story of Christ's trials?

_____

_____

How do you think the trials are part of the plan of redemption? How are all the events that lead up to Calvary related to each other?

_____

_____

_____

_____

punch lines

"Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.' . . . So from that day on they planned together to kill Him" **(John 11:47-50, 53, NASB).**

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?" **(Isaiah 53:7, 8, ESV).**

"A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you" **(Deuteronomy 19:15-19, NASB).**

further insight

"He suffered in proportion to the perfection of His holiness and His hatred of sin. His trial by men who acted as fiends was to Him a perpetual sacrifice."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 700

Sabbath

Read Isaiah 53.

Read and respond to the voting question in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson. The trials of Christ demonstrate the supreme hatred that the Jewish leaders felt for Christ, the ambivalence of leaders such as Pilate and Herod, and the absence of the disciples and the loyalty of people who previously adored Jesus.

What is the greatest tragedy of the trials: the injustice, or the loneliness, or something else? Explain. According to Isaiah 53, what are the trials that Christ suffered in light of the plan of redemption?

_____

_____

_____

Sunday

Read John 11:47-53.

Read the *Into the Story* section and use the *Out of the Story* questions to guide your study. Take a moment to scan through the sequence of Christ's six trials and indicate which encounter was the most frustrating for you to read. Do the trials tend to stir up anger as well as sympathy? As you answered the questions in this week's lesson, what do you think is the message God has for you in the story?

_____

_____

_____

Monday

Read Luke 23:20-23.

The *Key Text* in this week's lesson conveys the conflict between what Pilate knew was right and the unbridled hatred of the Jewish leaders and the riotous crowd. Read the text and think of how you get torn between what is clearly right and what others want you to do that is wrong. Often, the everyday decisions we make are not as life-changing as Pilate's, but they are complicated. What specific areas of your life do you feel torn between right and wrong? Like Pilate, we all hear voices that pull at us. These voices come from inside as well as outside from others. Whom do you know that stands for what is good and true, no matter what they face? Ask them about the voices they hear and the voices they choose to listen to. Model their courage and make the decision ahead of time to stand.

Tuesday

Read Deuteronomy 19:15-19.

Read the quote from *The Desire of Ages* in the *Flashlight* section and try to imagine the scene. During high-pressure moments, such as the trial, everyone's colors are more clearly seen—including Christ's. Try to picture Christ the way Ellen White portrays Him in this passage. Think of some biblical characters who have made their stand. Notice how as they choose to be true, no matter what the result, their character shines clear. For Christ, this had to do with letting what was on the inside become visible on the outside. What part of your inner character do you want to show on the outside? Honesty? Kindness? Your devotion to God? Share with someone this week what is on the inside.

Wednesday

The *Punch Lines* texts in this week's lesson feature large portions of Scripture that relate specifically to Christ's trial or to the larger themes of truth and justice. Look for a couple of specific themes in the *Punch Lines:* identify a verse that speaks to you personally and offers a challenge for you to live differently, from the inside out. Identify a passage that informs your understanding of what happened to Christ in a way you might not have thought of before. Which verse of all the *Punch Lines* challenges you the most? Why?

_____

_____

_____

Thursday

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Clearly, Jesus was falsely accused and grossly mistreated. Christ is innocent, but humanity is guilty of sin. Paul states: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV). Write on a card or piece of paper the verdict: guilty or not guilty. Condemned to death or set free for eternity. Make a list of similar phrases that describe what Christ experienced and what you experience as a result. You will notice that such a list reminds you of what matters most. Place this paper or card out in the open where you can see it every day.

Friday

Read Isaiah 53:7, 8.

What do you think is the most God-honoring response to the way Christ was mistreated during His trials? Worship? Gratitude? Surrender? Belief? Devotion? Praise? Reflect and write out a prayer to God using one or more of the responses you feel are most relevant to you today.

_____

_____

_____

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages or (*Humble Hero*), chapters 75-77.

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.