

Sunday School Lesson for the Month of April, 2017

The Joy of the Cross

Hebrews 12:2

Sunday, April 2, 2017

We have heard many sermons on Christ's suffering on the cross. Words do not have the capacity to communicate the suffering He experienced as He died for our sins – The loneliness of the cross was terrible. Jesus was forsaken by His friends. In the midst of His agony, He felt forsaken by God and cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

The shame of the cross is frequently forgotten by modern day Christians. Crucifixion was the ultimate insult and public contempt for a criminal. We cannot even begin to understand the horror of the cross to the sinless, innocent Son of God.

The writer of Hebrews injects into our thinking an idea that appears to be contradictory. He makes much of the fact that a part of our Lord's motive for enduring the agony of the cross was because of "the joy that was set before Him." Is it possible that one could endure such agony, such suffering, such loneliness, such shame, such horror and yet experience joy in doing so? The writer of Hebrews said yes.

There were three joys that lead Jesus Christ to the cross.

I. The Joy of Glorifying God

In His great prayer, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1). To glorify means to "make known." Jesus came to the earth to make known God's nature, character, and purpose. The devil has misrepresented the nature and character of God from the beginning of time. People resent God and try to evade Him because Satan has slandered His character with malicious falsehoods. By Jesus' death on the Cross, He refuted Satan's lies and glorified God, revealing Him as the God of love, mercy and grace.

II. The Joy of the Highest Possible Personal Achievement

Could Jesus have escaped the Cross? Satan thought that He could. Satan offered Him the kingdoms of this world if He would but fall down and worship him. Jesus rejected the suggestion of Satan and endured the cross because there was no other way to save people. In doing so, He was to achieve the highest possible destiny for His life apart from the suffering of the cross there would be no resurrection from the tomb.

III. The Joy of Saving Souls

Jesus endured the cross to experience the joy of saving you and I from sin. We were slaves and He came to set us free! We were guilty, and He came to cleanse us. We were helpless, and He came to rescue us. We were in a hopeless condition, and He came and gave us life. Jesus died for our sins. He makes forgiveness possible. He gives new, divine, and eternal life. What a joy! I have been saved! I have been set free!

Lesson for Sundays, April 9, 16, 23, 30

How will you treat the King?

(Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-11)

Sunday, April 9, 2017

On this Sunday before Easter, we see our Lord making His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, offering Himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy and as the King who alone can bring peace and harmony to human hearts. How have you treated the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Matthew's gospel presents Jesus Christ, the Savior, as the King whom the people of God had been expecting as the fulfillment of messianic prophecy.

I. **Christ was born to be a King [Matthew 2:2].**

The three wise men from the East came seeking a mysterious baby, "born King of the Jews." As a baby, our Lord was recognized as a king by these mysterious wise men and He was treated as a King by the wicked Herod. Herod saw Christ as a rival for the throne and plotted to bring about His death [Matthew 2:13].

II. **Christ was anointed to be King.**

At His baptism, the heavens opened, revealing the King's realm of authority.

III. **Christ explained the principles and the program of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5 - 7].**

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IV. **Christ died as a King.**

In satire and cruelty, the Roman soldiers arrayed our Lord with a purple robe and bowed before Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" [John 19:3]. Pilate instructed those who crucified Jesus to put the superscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" [John 19:19] on His cross to indicate the crime

of which He was accused and for which He was dying. Pilate spoke great words of truth when he recognized Jesus Christ as “the King of the Jews.”

V. **Christ conquered death as a King.**

Christ’s death at the hands of wicked men appeared to be a great triumph for the forces of evil, but in reality it was a conquest of evil by the powerful King of love and grace. Death could not hold Him and the grave could not conceal Him.

VI. **Following His resurrection, our Lord assumed kingly authority on a universal scale [Matthew 28:18-20].**

Jesus said that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him. We need to recognize and respond to His authority – as believers in Jesus Christ, as followers of the Lord and as children of the King we need to treat Him as the King who alone can bring about peace, purpose, power and plenty in our lives.

Sundays, April 23, 30

VII. **How have you treated the King?**

We can be grateful that we have not treated Him as did Herod. We can rejoice that we have not treated Him as did the soldiers. We can find peace in the fact that we have not mistreated the King as did Pilate.

One day the King will return in all His glory and power for those who have trusted Him and who love Him. Today, we would be wise to receive Him as the King and treat Him as an honored guest in our hearts and lives. We would be wise to listen to Him and to heed His teachings as our most precious friend. We should obey Him as the Lord of unquestioned and immeasurable love. We should follow Him as our divine and infallible leader. He can bring peace and joy into our hearts only when we make Him Sovereign Lord and King in every area of our lives.