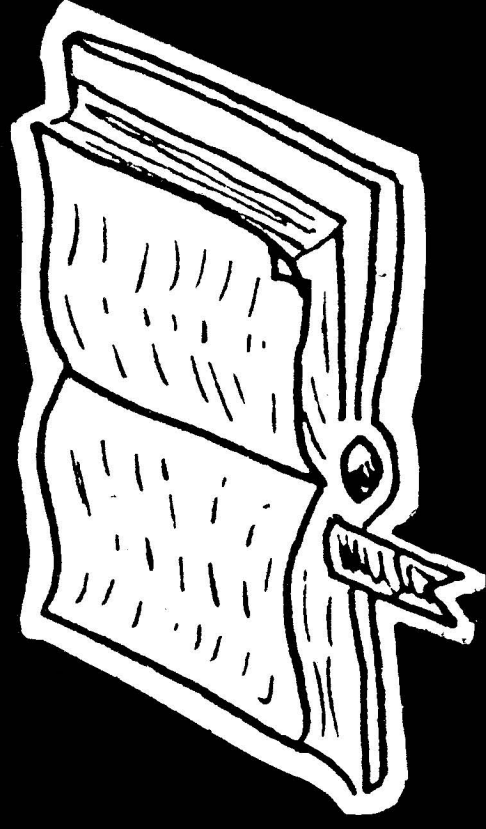


THE LIVING GOD SEEKS MAN



Published and Printed by
BAPTIST PUBLISHING HOUSE
P. O. Box 31995
Lusaka, Zambia

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8:18-25, and the third will tell how these Scriptures apply to our lives. You as teacher will act as the leader of the panel. Tell the students to use their pupils' books and their Bibles. If it is convenient, share your book with them as well.

At the class meeting, tell the students that today you will have a panel discussion. Say: "I have asked three people to serve as panel members." Introduce the three to the class, and have them come forward to sit in the chairs you have placed in front of the group. You sit in the fourth chair.

Begin by asking the first student to explain Romans 5:1-5. Ask questions and allow the class to ask questions so a clear meaning of these verses is gained.

Continue with Romans 8:18-25 in the same way with questions after the student has finished the explanation.

Ask the third student to tell why these Scriptures are important to us.

Conclude the panel by asking if there is someone who wants to add anything to what has been said. Following this, thank your panel members, and let them return to their seats in the group.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "We Christians continue to hope. The precious promises God has made to us will be fulfilled. We need to remind ourselves every day that what we experience at this present time is not what we will experience one day. In future we will share God's glory."

Conclude the session with prayer

THE LIVING GOD SEEKS MAN

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Verse 23. Not only nature, but Christians also groan as we await our renewing.

Verse 24. Our salvation lies in this wonderful hope that God will fulfil his promise to us. The hope is for something none of us has ever seen.

Verse 25. We continue to hope for this as yet unseen thing with great patience. The patience mentioned here is the same as the endurance spoke of in Romans 5:3.

First Thessalonians 1:1-3 is Paul's greeting which recognizes the undying hope of the church.

Revelation 21:1-7 is a picture of the new heaven and the new earth. This is the time when Christ will be enthroned and will claim Christian as the sons of God.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Have someone tell (or read) the story at the end of the lesson in the pupils' books. It is in the What This Means To Me section of lesson 13. The story is about a visitor in a potter's place of work.

Say: "This is a picture of what man has done to God's creation. God made a perfect world. But sin came in through Adam and Eve. Every person since then had decided to sin. Sin has ruined much of God's perfect world. But God still loves us and the rest of creation. When the time is right, Jesus will return; and God will remake his creation. It will be perfect again."

INTERPRETATION

During the week ask three of your students. Serve on a panel for the next time the class meets. They will sit in chairs in front of the group. You will ask one of them to explain Romans 5:1-5. Another will explain Romans

God. At present and as long as we are in our mortal bodies, it is only hope, not reality. But the hope is certain and sure. It will come.

Verse 3 is an assurance that we will suffer. But our sufferings will produce endurance. This endurance is much more than humbly bowing our heads and accepting the stresses and pressures of life. Instead, this endurance is reaching out toward life and pressing forward even though troubles are present.

In verse 4, Paul told us this endurance would produce character. He meant all the parts of who we are. He went on to say this type of character would produce hope in us. The more we endure, the greater our expectation of future glory with God.

Verse 5 assures us once again that this hope will become reality because God has loved us and promised us an eternity with him.

Romans 8:18-25 is a continuation of Paul's thoughts concerning the hope that Christians hold.

Verse 18. While it is true that we suffer in the present life, these sufferings are nothing when compared to the glory that will be our reward.

Verse 19. All creation, all nature, everything God made looks forward to the time when God will transform or change our bodies. We are not told what our bodies will be like. We just know they will not be subject to decay.

Verse 20. When man sinned, he brought evil into all of nature. God cursed the ground because of Adam.

Verse 21. Even nature itself will be remade at the time man is remade. This glorious new creation is the new heaven and new earth mentioned in Isaiah.

Verse 22. If we look around us, we know that the whole world is in agony. This agony will end with its recreation.

CHAPTER 1

LOOKING FOR A NEW BEGINNING

AIM: I will learn that God used the Old Testament law to prepare the world for a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Isaiah 40; Galatians 4:1-6

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Isaiah 40:27-31; Galatians 4:1-6

MEMORY VERSE: *"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope." Psalm 130:5*

Joseph slumped behind the steering wheel of the taxi he had driven every day for more than a year. Soon the taxi would be full, and he would be on his way 135 kilometres to the little town at the other end of his route. This was Joseph's third trip for the day, and his shoulders ached.

How had Joseph got involved in such business? Most of the work was uninteresting and boring. His body was always tired from the long hours he sat behind the steering wheel. He did not like the things he had to do to stay in business either. There were people he had to pay, quotas he had to fill. He hated all of it. But how could he get out now? He owed too much money and too many favours.

Many of us are like Joseph. We want to start over. In a world full of sin and bitterness, we look for hope and joy. Only in God can we find a new beginning.

A DESIRE FOR FREEDOM

The people of Israel wanted a new beginning. They had been slaves in a foreign land for many years. They wanted to return to their own land and be free. Perhaps God had forgotten them!

GOD DOES NOT FORGET

The words in Isaiah 40 told the people that God had not forgotten them. They had forgotten God. This had happened many years before when they still lived in their own country. They had started worshipping idols, false gods, like their neighbours did.

God was patient with them for many years. He hoped they would repent and turn back to him. But they would not.

God allowed them to be taken captive to a foreign land. It was their punishment for their sins.

Now the time was drawing near when he would lead the Israelites back to their own land. But God said they must be patient until that time. He would set them free when the right time came. They must remain faithful to God. Isaiah promised the people that those who would wait for the Lord would receive strength from him.

He also said they were not to sit and wait for the Lord. They must do all they knew how to do while they waited. They must obey the Law that they had.

God knew the people had many needs. Even the strength of the young people would not be enough. They would need God's strength to do all he wanted them to do.

This was not the first time the people of Israel had been in slavery. Do you remember when they were in Egypt as slaves? The king of the Egyptians did not want to let the people go. They were not strong enough to make him change his mind. It seemed impossible to win their freedom. Then God began to act. Through his strength, the people were set free.

Tasks can be too great for a man. They can be too great for a large group of men or even a nation. But nothing is too hard for God!

CHAPTER 13

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-25; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3; Revelation 21:1-7

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-25

MEMORY VERSE: "*But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence*" (1 Peter 3:15).

CENTRAL TRUTH: We can be sure of our salvation when we have trusted Jesus as our Lord.

TEACHING AIM: I want to remind my students that, if they are Christians, they can be sure of their salvation.

TEACHING AIDS: Place four chairs at the front of the meeting area.

PREPARING TO TEACH

BACKGROUND STUDY

Romans 5:1-5 tells us that Christians have confidence that they will share God's glory. This is our assurance that we will spend eternity with God.

Verse 1 says that since we have been justified by our faith, we have peace with God. When we receive Christ in faith, this peace began. This peace is like a safe haven or harbour where the storm winds are unable to touch us. We do not have to continue our struggle. We can rest in safety.

Verse 2 tells us we have been brought in to grace. It is like grace is the temple of God, and Christ is the doorway to God. We rejoice in our hope of spending eternity with

Jesus will return; and God will remake his creation. It will be perfect again.

We who are Christians will be made perfect, too. We do not know exactly when that day will be. We do not know exactly what we will be like. We have a certain hope, however, based on faith in God. He has promised us perfect bodies in a perfect heaven. We cannot see it with our eyes yet, but we can believe it will happen. We have a certain hope because we have a faithful God.

Every Christian knows people without hope. The ones you know may not find this certain hope unless you tell them about Jesus. Only in Christ are we free from the effects of sin. Only in Christ can we have a certain hope for a new and perfect body. Only in Christ can we know we will live forever in a perfect heaven with him. We must tell people without hope about his certain hope. The Holy Spirit will help us as we tell people about our hope in Christ.

THE LIVING GOD SEEKS MAN

SLAVES UNDER THE LAW

In Galatians 4:1-6, Paul told the Christians that the Law is like being in slavery. The Old Testament Law directed all of a man's life. A man could please God only by obeying the Law.

In Paul's day, the Jews had a custom when a man died. His oldest son received all that had been his father's property. If he was a child, he was not able to be in charge of the property. He owned it, but he was not free to do with it as he pleased.

Others took care of the property for him. They also taught and prepared him to manage it for himself. When he became old enough, he would be able to take care of his own affairs. He would be "free."

Paul compared those people to little children who had a great inheritance, but they could not yet enjoy it.

THE SON MAKES US FREE

When God knew the time was just right, he sent his Son, Jesus. The Law had prepared the way. It had taught them much about God. It taught them what was wrong or sinful to do.

But the Law was not complete by itself. Jesus had to come to redeem (buy back) people who were enslaved under the Law. Those who accepted Jesus and trusted him could call God their Father. (Read Galatians 4:6.) The whole world could look for a new beginning.

WHAT THIS MEAN TO ME

In today's world, sin is everywhere. Many people suffer greatly because of personal sin, because of sins of their family or because of sins of their friends. People suffer because of the sins of the leaders of nations. It is true that we need to start over.

God gave us a beautiful world to live in. Sin has changed that beauty to ugliness. God knew us, though, before we were born. He knew what we would to his beautiful plan. He provided a new plan so each man and woman, each boy and girl could start over.

If you are a Christian, if you have not accepted Jesus as your Saviour, do it now. Start over. Start believing God and trusting him. Stop depending on your own strength. Depend on God's strength. He will never leave you, and he will supply your needs.

If you are a Christian but you feel defeated, trust God. Wait for him and he will renew your strength until you can overcome the difficulties. Humble yourself before God, and you will run and not grow weary. You will walk without fainting.

God is ready to give a new beginning to anyone who will come to him.

God created Adam and Eve as perfect creatures. He created the Garden of Eden, and it was perfect. All the animals lived together in peace. Everything was good.

But Adam and Eve decided to sin. As a result, they had to fight against thorns, thistles and weeds. They could no longer just gather what God freely provided. Then pain, disease and death came into the world. The animals of the earth no longer lived in peace. Everything was changed because of sin.

NEW CREATION

Is there hope for all of creation? Paul said yes. We may be suffering now, but someday God will make it over again. Someday everything will become good and whole again. We can have a certain hope in this because God has promised it.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Have you ever seen anyone making pots out of clay? Those who are skilled in making pots can make them round and beautiful.

One day a man was visiting a potter and thought that work was very easy. Surely he could do it too.

When the potter had to leave for a few minutes, the visitor picked up the almost finished bowl. He soon had pushed it out of shape. He had it too flat on one side, and it no longer looked pretty.

Then the guest decided the problem was that the clay had gotten too dry, so he added some water. Then it was ruined. He could not get it to hold its shape at all. Now it was only an ugly lump of clay.

This is a picture of what man has done to God's creation. Sin has ruined much of God's perfect world. But God still loves us and all of his creation. When the time is right,

ourselves. If a person has faith in himself, then he cannot be certain about the future. He will wonder if his life has been good enough or not.

A Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ into his heart. Jesus has died for our sins. He has paid the price. We are unable to pay this price ourselves. The best man who ever lived is unable to pay the price. The Bible says, "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) The person who hopes in his own good deeds has no hope at all. He will "fall short of the glory of God."

GRACE UNDESERVED

Christians have received grace through Jesus Christ. We do not deserve to be forgiven by God, but he has forgiven us. We do not deserve to be loved by God, but he loves us. We do not deserve to be given eternal life, but he has given it. Because of his grace, the blood of his Son has covered over all our sins. Because of this grace, we have a certain hope in God.

GRATEFUL FOR SUFFERING

Paul says an amazing thing. He says we can be grateful for suffering. We can rejoice in times of suffering because of the results. Let us notice what these results are.

Suffering produces endurance. That means being able to continue working hard for the Lord. It produces good character, the kind of person we really are. Finally, it produces hope. This hope is certain because of the love of God. Could anything be based on a more solid and firm foundation? Suffering is a small price to pay for such a great reward.

In Romans 8, Paul said even more about suffering. Because of sin, the whole world is suffering. God created everything to be good. But not everything is still good.

CHAPTER 1

FOR THE TEACHER

CENTRAL TRUTH: God has prepared a way for people to begin again in Jesus, his Son.

TEACHING AIM: The students will learn that God used the Old Testament law to prepare the world for a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

TEACHING AIDS: Write the following unfinished sentence on the chalkboard or on a large paper: "If I could make a new beginning in my life, I would..."

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Isaiah 40 concerns events which took place in Babylon before 538 B.C. The Prophets' voice spoke to comfort the Jewish people. They were lonely and discouraged because they were in exile in a foreign land.

King Josiah began to reign when he was eight years old. He reigned for thirty-one years. His death marked the start of troubled time in Judah's history. Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, reigned only three months before he was exiled to Egypt. A second son, Jehoiakim, was forced to change his loyalty from Egypt to Babylon.

Then, in 601 B.C., Jehoiakim joined in a revolt against Babylon. This ended when Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, took over Jerusalem. Three thousand Jerusalem citizens including the king, the queen mother and the officials of the city were taken to Babylon. This was the first of three captivities to Babylon.

People are often sad when they are living in a country that is not their own. They want to see things they saw when they were children. They desire to be with the people they left behind.

When a person is forced to live in a foreign country, the sadness is even greater. He cannot return home for any reason. He must remain in a foreign land. Bitterness against the captors and the longing for home become very great indeed.

Some people have to leave their country and live in another as refugees. They have the same longing to return to their country, but they cannot.

The Jewish people, living in exile, experienced all these feelings of homesickness.

Then God spoke to the people in their captivity through his prophet. He told the prophet to comfort God's people. Nowhere else in the Bible are the prophets commanded to comfort the people. Usually they were told to condemn the people for their sin. This time, he was to comfort the exiles.

God told his people that their sin was forgiven. Then he went on to tell them who he was. This would remind them of who they were in God's plan.

In the verse in today's lesson, Isaiah 40:27-31, the exiles questioned God to see if he really cared about them. The prophet answered that their idea of God was far too small. They were to wait for the Lord until he renewed their strength.

To wait for the Lord means to wait anxiously. This is like waiting for the harvest to come, or like watchers waiting in ambush to begin an attack. The exiles were to wait to be returned to their homes until the Lord was ready. But they were to wait with eagerness. Waiting for the Lord in this way means responding to him in faith.

Galatians 4:1-6 describes a child who inherited from his father. He was cared for by guardians and others until he was old enough to care for himself and his property. Paul used this to show the people that they were like little

CHAPTER 13

A PEOPLE OF HOPE

AIM: This lesson will teach me that Christians have a sure hope of life eternal with God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-25; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3; Revelation 21:1-7

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-25
MEMORY VERSE: *"But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence."* 1 Peter 3:15

A pastor was talking to a neighbour one day. "Have you received Jesus as your Saviour?" he asked.

"I think so," the man replied.

"Do you know for sure you will live forever with God in heaven?" the pastor asked.

"I hope so," the man said.

This is the only kind of hope some people have. It is a very uncertain thing. They are not sure about the future.

The Bible does not speak of this kind of hope. It tells us about a certain hope. It tells us of a hope we can be sure about.

Paul wrote the church at Rome about a sure hope all Christians have.

FAITH IN GOD

Read Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-25. Paul says faith makes us right with God. That is why we can be sure we have eternal life if we are Christians. We have faith in God, not in

lives before we become Christians. All we have to do is accept Jesus and our lives are instantly freed from the all the sins they had in them. God is ready to reconcile any man to himself and to cover his sins."

Close the meeting with prayer, asking God to help all of you to be bold in the ministry of reconciliation.

children living under the law until Jesus came. Through Jesus, the law was fulfilled and man became free.

Verse four of this passage tells that when the time was fully come, God sent Jesus. All of history was ready. Israel had waited for the Lord for four hundred years between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. The Roman government had built fine roads. The gospel message could be carried easily to all nations. When the time had fully come, the angel spoke to Mary. Jesus was born.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Point to the words on the chalkboard and say: "Here is a sentence that is not complete. Would one of you complete it for us?" Let the students share what they would do to make a new beginning in their lives. In some classes, the teacher may need to be the first one to share if the students are shy or easily embarrassed.

Allow each student who will share to do so. Encourage them and do not show any feeling about what they might change in their lives.

After they have told what they would change, say: "In each of our lives, there are things we would like to change so we can start over again. Our lesson today is about how we can start over, how we can find a new beginning."

Interpretation

Have the students open their Bibles to Isaiah 40. Say: "This chapter was written to comfort God's chosen people. They were in exile in Babylon, and they were longing for their own homes, their customs, their country. What does it mean to be in exile?" Allow students to dio Galatians 4:1-6. Ask one to read this Scripture. Use the material in the students' books and that in your Background Study to explain what these verses mean. Pay special attention to verse 4.

Say: "God sent his Son, Jesus, to be the Messiah. he was the one the people had waited for so long. He was the Ruler who would lead Israel. Before Jesus came, people found favour with God only through obeying the law. The men who interpreted the law had made it seem like slavery to the people. Every part of a person's life was dictated by law.

"When Jesus came, the law was fulfilled. No longer did the people have to follow it as the basis for pleasing God. They could find favour with him through trusting his Son, Jesus.

"In Jesus they could have a new beginning, a new life. They could be free."

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

Say: "Do you understand how you can have a new start?" Give the student time to discuss this. Say: "If there is one here who has not trusted Jesus as your Saviour and you want to do so, please stay a few minutes after the class is finished so we can talk together. If you are already a Christian, can you have a new start? How?" Let them discuss this. Say: "We can wait for the Lord, and he will renew our strength day by day. We can depend on God."

Close with prayer.

INTERPRETATION

Say: "Before we became Christians we must have looked terrible to God. Nothing covered us over. God could see every sin, every ugly thing we had ever done or said. God decide to reconcile man to himself. He was angry about man's condition, so he provided the means for reconciliation through the person of Jesus Christ. We will study 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 verse by verse."

Use your Background Study material and the discussion of the students to go through these verses. Make sure each person understands that God did the reconciling.

When you complete the study of these verses, ask someone to read Galatians 6:1-5 and verse 7. Again use your Background Study material to explain these verses. Guide the students help to see that they are responsible to us rest in a Christian. Who he fallen into sin.

Say: "Our Memory Verse tells us that God sees us through the blood of Christ. He cannot see any differences in us. He is completely impartial to us, after we have been reconciled to him."

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

Say: "When we understand that God can not see our sin any longer because of Jesus' blood, we can understand that everyone can come to him and be saved. It does not matter what sin has been committed, God can forgive it and cover it in Jesus' blood.

"Convicted killers have been able to read the Bible while they were in prison and have been reconciled to God. It does not matter how bad a man or woman has been, God can save him.

"Often when we witness to our friends and neighbours, they say they cannot be Christians because the sins they have done are too bad. Perhaps there is someone in this class who feels this was. It is not necessary to clean up our

Verse 21 shows that God put our sins upon Christ. The Holy One became the bearer of the sins of the world. The sight of Christ bearing our sins made God turn his eyes from him when he was hanging on the cross. Christ did all this so we could become righteous.

Galatians 3:27-29 says those of us who have been baptized in Christ have literally put on Christ. God sees us through the blood of Jesus Christ, and he does not care who we were before. We are all the same to him now, and we deserve the inheritance of eternal life.

In Galatians 6:1-7, Paul told us how to help our Christian brother. He said that if a man "is overtaken in a trespass" others should help. This means if a man sins, others should help him find forgiveness. The word Paul used here for someone who accidentally slips on a dangerous path. This is not willful sin that Paul spoke about. If a Christian sees a brother who has slipped, he must not condemn the brother, he must help him see his sin and ask for forgiveness.

In verses 3-5, Paul advised Christians to give up conceit.

In verse 7, Paul said the crop we reap is what we have sown. If we sow good seeds, we will harvest a crop of goodness.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Ask: "What does the word, reconcile, mean?" Point to the chalk board. Give time for the class to discuss this.

Say: "Often we need to be reconciled to different people in our lives. We have an argument or a difference of opinion. This leads to bad feelings. The only way to reconcile most difficulties of this kind is through forgiveness. Our lesson today is a special reconciliation. This is God reconciling man to himself."

CHAPTER 2

PREPARING THE WAY

AIM: This lesson will tell me who prepared the world for Jesus' coming and how he did it.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1-4; Matthew 3:1-12; John 1:6-8, 19-28

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:

Isaiah 40:3-5; Matthew 3:1-12; Revelation 20:11-15

MEMORY VERSE: " ...*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*" Matthew 3:3

If you wanted to build a house, where would you start? After the plans to build have been made, the first job is to clear the area. No big rocks, trees or bushes can stay where the house will be built. The builder must make the land level so the house will stand straight. Only when the area is prepared can the workmen actually begin to build the house itself.

God had a plan. His plan was to send Jesus, the Messiah to the earth. Before Jesus could come to the world, someone had to prepare the way.

God chose John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. God was ready to send his Son into the world. But the people were not ready for him. They needed to be prepared. This lesson is about John and what he did to prepare the way for Jesus' coming.

THE PROMISE KEPT

God always keeps his word. Through the prophet, Isaiah, God promised to send someone to prepare the way of the Lord. This promise was made nearly 700 years before it

came true. Read Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1-2. Then read Matthew 3:1-12 to see how God kept his Promise.

A SIMPLE MAN

John the Baptist did not pretend to be someone great. He lived a simple life. He had a simple message. "Repent," he said. "Change your ways. Turn from your sins. Go in the other direction. The kingdom of God is almost here."

John's message was for everyone. It was for the rich and the poor. It was for those who had gone to school and for those who had not. It was for the leaders. It was for the common people.

John the Baptist was not afraid of anyone. He said all people were sinners. He said all people needed to repent of their sins. The whole world needed to get ready for the coming of God's Son.

Great crowds of people came to the Jordan River. They wanted to hear John the Baptist preach. Many repented of their sins. They agreed that they were sinners. They confessed their sins to God. They told God they were turning away from their sins. They told God they were excited because the Saviour was coming. This was the best news they had ever heard.

EACH MUST REPENT

Matthew 3:9 tells us an important truth. It is not enough to have Christian parents. Each person must repent of his own sins. He must receive Christ into his heart for himself. It is not enough to have Christian ancestors. John the Baptist told the religious leaders that being descendants of Abraham was not enough to save them. Even though Abraham's faith was great, it could not save his children and his children's children. Each religious leader needed to repent of his own sin and change his own ways.

as the love gift God sent to the world. He saw him as the willing sacrifice for Paul's own sins.

In verse 17, Paul stated that at conversion men become new creations. They are in Christ, a part of his very being. The old man with his old ways of thinking and judging and living has gone away. A new man is left in his place. Paul was amazed that this was true, although he himself was an excellent example. The angry persecutor of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, became Paul, the man who said "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Verse 18 tells how this miracle was accomplished. Man as the old creation (before conversion) was away from God. God could not have fellowships with sinful man. But Christ, God reconciled man to himself. Notice that man did not reconcile God. He could not do such a thing. God had to do the reconciling. Man was not angry with God, but God was angry with man. When we think that Jesus had to die on the cross in our place, that we were supposed to suffer that bitter punishment, we see that God was very angry indeed with man.

The second part of verse 18 says that God gave the Christian the ministry of reconciliation. This reconciliation is not between man and man. This reconciliation is between God and man. We must be busy telling the world about Jesus Christ.

Verse 19 makes the meaning of verse 18 clearer. Paul said God no longer sees the sins of man once he has been reconciled to God.

Verse 20 tells us that we are Christ's representatives here on earth. That means we are taking his place to show the world God's love. We are his ambassadors.

An ambassador must be very sure of the message he is giving. He cannot represent himself at any time. He must represent Christ. Through our message men will be reconciled to God.

CHAPTER 12

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Galatians 3:27-29; 6:1-7

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 6:1-5, 7

MEMORY VERSE: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28)

CENTRAL TRUTH: God wants man to have a perfect relationship with him. He made that possible in Jesus Christ.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to know that all men can be reconciled to God, no matter what sins they have committed.

TEACHING AIDS: Write RECONCILE on the chalk board or paper.

PREPARING TO TEACH

BACKGROUND STUDY

In the verses, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Paul wrote some very important truths. Each need to be studied carefully.

Verse 16 says that before we were converted, we regarded all men, even Jesus Christ, from a human point of view. That means we judged all men as the world judges. We did not have God's viewpoint. Paul may not have seen Jesus while he was alive. If he did, however, he thought of him as a trouble maker, a man who deserved death on the cross. After Paul's conversion, he no longer thought of Jesus in that way at all. Rather, he was able to see Christ

John the Baptist said the people who repented needed to be baptized. They were glad to do this. This act would show that they had really turned away from their sins.

But John refused to baptize anyone who had not repented. God showed him who he should baptize and who he should not. Many of the religious leaders wanted to be baptized too, but John refused. They had not really repented. They were still sinning as they had before.

God knows what is in our hearts. He knows if we have really repented or if we are only pretending. God does not want anyone to be baptized who isn't really a true believer.

THE JUDGEMENT DAY

One day a time of judgement will come. Everyone will stand before God. Each person will be judged on whether he has believed in God's Son or whether he has refused to believe in him. No one can help anyone else at that time. No amount of good works will be able to help. No amount of money can buy salvation. The only question is whether that person has believed in Jesus Christ and accepted him as Saviour or not.

Read Matthew 3:12. God will separate the saved people from the unsaved. The wheat shows the saved people. The chaff shows the unsaved. God will separate the two groups of people. Read Revelation 20:11-15 to learn where the unsaved will be put. The saved will live with God eternally.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Do you know which group you will be in on the day of judgment? The Bible says if you have repented of your sins and believed in Jesus, you will be saved. You have received Jesus into your heart, and you will be welcomed into his heaven. But if you refuse to repent and accept Jesus, you will be thrown into a fire that will never die. This fire is called hell. Hell is a place of eternal punishment.

There is no reason to be sent to hell. Anyone who comes to Jesus will be saved from that punishment. He will not refuse anyone. If you really repent, Jesus will save you and give you eternal life. Have you made your choice about where you will spend eternity?

The choice is a clear choice, heaven or hell. There are no other choices. Each person must choose for himself. Your parents, your grandparents, your friends cannot save you. They cannot choose for you. Every person must decide for himself.

The message of John the Baptist still prepares the way for Jesus. The message is that you must repent. This will prepare your heart so Jesus can come in.

We can settle differences between us and another brother or sister. We can ask for forgiveness if we have offended someone else. We can tell someone we forgive them if they have offended us.

Have you been reconciled to God? He has done all that is necessary to give you salvation. You must only accept his gift of his Son, Jesus. Jesus died on the cross for your sin. He wants to forgive you today. Will you pray now and ask him to come into your heart as Saviour and Lord?

All who have received Jesus can live every day knowing they are God's friends. We should use every chance God gives us to tell others about his great love.

God has made each of us a new person and has given us a new task. God wants each of us a new task. God wants each of us to tell others about this good news. What an important task! God has given us the job of being his messengers to the whole world.

Paul wrote a letter to the Galatian Christians, too. He told them God has something else he wants each Christian to do. Read Galatians 6:1-5,7.

Paul says we should notice when other Christians are having problems. We should do all we can to help them. Sometimes the problem may be a sin problem. We should not criticize or condemn the one who has sinned. We help him by showing love and concern. We should remember that even strong Christians have weaknesses in their lives.

Paul says we must not expect others to help us in everything. Each Christian has a job God has given him to do. It is a lazy Christian who wants help all the time. We are to work hard at doing our own job. We are to carry our own load. But we must remember we cannot do it in our own strength. Christ is always able and ready to help us.

REAP WHAT WE SOW

A person who works hard for God will succeed. One who is lazy and runs from problems will only get more problems. One who plants seeds of hate will get back hate. One who plants seeds of love will get back love.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

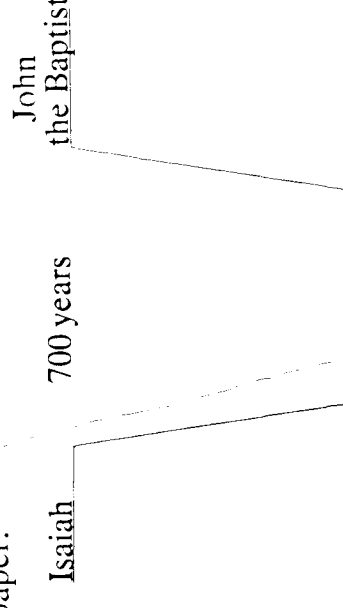
God wants us to plant seeds of love and kindness. All who have received Jesus as their personal Saviour have been reconciled to him. He wants us to plant seeds of reconciliation too. We can do this by telling others how they can be reconciled to God.

For the Teacher

CENTRAL TRUTH: God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to understand that each person must personally accept Jesus as his Saviour.

TEACHING AIDS: Make this picture on the chalkboard or on paper:



PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Isaiah 40:3-5 is part of the Scripture studied in the last lesson. It was written to comfort the Jerusalem exiles in Babylon. These three verses assured the people that their way home would be made easy. These verses also told of a messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

The Messiah is mentioned throughout the Old Testament as the Redeemer, the one who would come to restore the chosen people to their rightful place. The word, Messiah, has the same meaning in the Hebrew language as the word, Christ, has in Greek. At the close of the Old Testament, Jewish people were anxiously waiting for the Messiah. They thought he would overthrow the Roman

government and set up a new Jewish kingdom upon the earth. Before the Messiah came, a messenger would come to get things ready for him.

Malachi 3:1-4 was written by an unknown prophet during a period of spiritual depression. People were discouraged at that time. The book was written to remind the people of all God's promises to send a messenger, a redeemer, a refiner, a Messiah, the Christ.

All four Gospels (Matthew 3:3, 11:7-10; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23) identify John the Baptist as that messenger whom God promised to send to prepare the way for the Messiah. Hundreds of years had passed since God had promised to send the messenger. Then, God fulfilled his promise by sending John the Baptist.

By the time that John the Baptist appeared, the Jewish people had begun to realize that the time of the prophets was over. No prophet's voice had been heard for 400 years. Then, from the quietness and loneliness of the wilderness, came John's voice calling the people to repentance. He recognized himself as the messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord. He came dressed in simple garments, eating simple food, but preaching a mighty message.

The preparation John was to make was in the hearts of the people. It did not matter to John who the people were. He called them all to change their ways and repent of their sins. There were none who were sinless. Even the religious leaders were filled with sin. For this reason, John the Baptist did not participate in the usual Jewish religious observances. He kept himself apart. The people had to go out to the Jordan River to hear his message.

When the religious leaders wanted to be baptized, John refused. He said they could not be baptized until they repented. They could not claim to be without sin simply because they were of the Levite tribe or were descended from Abraham.

This is called sin. When we decide to disobey God, we sin against him. Everyone is a sinner. Everyone has disobeyed God. This makes God very sad. Sin separates us from God.

God has no sin at all. He cannot bear to be in the presence of sin. When we are sinners, we cannot come to God as his friends.

What can we possibly do? We could try to be very good. We could try to avoid sinning. But we cannot live without sin. We are not able to live a perfect life. Even if we could stop sinning now, that would not do away with the sin we have already done. We would still have the same problem. How can we get rid of our sins? How can we have a good relationship with God?

THE ANSWER

Paul tells us the answer. The answer is the person, Jesus Christ. God knew we could never be good enough to come before him. He knew we could never do enough to pay for the sins we have already done. So God sent his own Son to die for our sins.

Jesus did not sin, not even once. He was completely perfect. Because of this he was able to be the sin offering for us. His perfect blood paid the price for our sins. His perfect blood covers up the sins of those who believe in him as their Saviour.

After a person believes in Jesus as his Saviour, he is in Christ. He becomes a part of Christ. He is in Christ and Christ is in him. A person who is in Christ becomes a new person inside. It is as though the old person died. A new person is created. This new person has been forgiven of all his sins. The perfect blood of Jesus is covering all of them. So this new person is able to come before God. He is able to be God's friend. He has been reconciled to God.

Read Romans 5:8-10. The Bible says every sinner is God's enemy. God did not want it to remain like this. Christ died to reconcile us to God.

CHAPTER 12

A RECONCILING PEOPLE

AIM: Studying this lesson will help me understand how man can be reconciled to God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 3:27-29; 6:1-7

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 6:1-5, 7

MEMORY VERSE: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* Galatians 3:28

Have you ever been angry with a friend? We all have. We feel badly about it until things are made right. We may go to the friend and ask him to forgive us. Or, he may come to us and ask us to forgive him. Or, someone else may help us be friends again. Things have been made right. We can feel happy again. We say we have been reconciled with our friend.

Can a person be reconciled to God? Our lesson will tell us.

OUR NEED

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Why do we need to be reconciled to God?

We need to be reconciled to God because we have sinned against him. God is holy. He is without sin. He is love. He loves each person. He could never hurt us or do something bad to us. But we have hurt him. Each person has chosen to disobey God.

In Matthew 3:12, John told his listeners what the end result of their decision would be. Those who had repented would be gathered into the storehouse as wheat. This meant they would be safe in God's hand throughout eternity. Those who failed to repent would be like the chaff to be burned.

The two Scriptures from John 1 tell who John said he was. He had come to light the way for the Messiah. He was not Elijah, but his work was like Elijah's.

Revelation 20:11-15 tells about the day when everyone will be judged. This judgement will come and those who have accepted Christ after repenting of their sins will find their names written in the book of life. Those whose names fail to appear in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire and burned forever.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Use the picture you have drawn as you say the following: (Point to the word Isaiah and say:) "When Isaiah lived, he was a prophet for the people of his time. But he was a prophet for later times as well. He told the world in Isaiah 40:3-5 that one would come to prepare the way for Jesus."

(Point to the gulf of space where the words, 700 years, are written and say:) "After Isaiah spoke, a great many years went by. The people waited for God to make his promise come true. They had nothing but their faith and God's promise to depend upon."

(Point to the name John the Baptist and say:) "It was 700 years before God fulfilled his promise. Then he sent John the Baptist to the world to prepare it for the coming of the Saviour."

Say: "Our lesson today is about this man, John the Baptist. We will learn what work he did and why that work was so important."

Interpretation

Tell the students to open their Bibles to Matthew 3:1-12. Read the passage to the students. Let one of them describe John the Baptist. Encourage members to add to the description until you have a clear picture of the man. You will want them to say more than that John wore a garment of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. Ask them if they think he was wild looking, if he was strong or weak, if he was timid or bold, if he was someone they themselves might want to see and hear. You are doing a character study with the students so John the Baptist will come alive for them in their thoughts. This is not a fairy tale. John the Baptist really lived and preached. You want the students to get an idea of the influence this man had on the people. They not only came to see him, but they did what he told them to do.

Now ask: "What was John the Baptist's purpose in asking the people to repent?" Allow enough time for discussion. Make sure the students see that he came to prepare the way for the Lord. Let one read Isaiah 40:3-5 and another read Malachi 3:1-4.

Ask: "Did John the Baptist make the way in the desert straight? Did he lift up the valleys? Did he make the rough places plain? Lead the students in discussing that John the Baptist did these acts in the hearts of the people. He had them prepare their hearts for Jesus to come in. Then when it was time, he stepped aside and pointed the way for men to follow Jesus.

Say: "When the Pharisees and Sadducees who were the religious leaders came to be baptized, John refused. Why?" Lead the students to understand that these had refused to repent. They only wanted to please the people by doing what John asked. John knew they had not repented.

noticed several benches that needed repair and made plans to do that work the next week."

Give the papers back to the students. Ask them if they would like to add to their lists. Talk together about activities they might want to add. Ask the students to try to do at least one act of service this week.

Close the meeting with prayer.

"'Never mind,' said Anna. 'I will go over to her house and take her the food I prepared this morning.' Anna spent three hours with the sick woman, talking with her as she cleaned the small house. As she left, she gathered up the dirty clothes and bed linens to take home to wash. Ezekiel spent his day of rest feeding the children and caring for them in Anna's absence.

"On Monday, Ezekiel stopped by Mama John's house to visit with her. He learnt that Anna had already been there, bringing back the clean clothes and more food. The old woman was feeling much better.

"On Tuesday, terrible news went through the village. One of the teachers at the local school had been killed as he crossed the busy highway. His wife and children had seen the accident and were in shock. As soon as Anna heard the news, she hurried to the teacher's home where she spent the rest day cooking food and comforting the family. That night Ezekiel helped the other men build the coffin.

"On Wednesday, the family made several trips to the teacher's house, bringing plates, food and bedding to care for the guests coming in.

"Thursday was the day Anna helped clean the little church. Sometimes she was the only person who came to clean, but she always got there to make sure the church would be clean for worship services on Sunday.

"On Friday, Ezekiel received his salary. He remembered that the teacher's family would need money now. He took out a portion of his salary and gave it to the teacher's wife when he went by on his way home. That night several guests were at Ezekiel's home because the funeral was to be on Saturday.

"On Saturday after the funeral, Anna went home with the teacher's wife to be with her during the first lonely hours. Ezekiel stayed at the church to help clean it since the funeral service had made it necessary to clean again. He

Application To Our Lives

Have one student read Matthew 3:12 and another read Revelation 20:11-15. Say: "This is a picture of what happens as a result of our decision to choose Jesus. If we accept him as our Saviour, we are the wheat, and we will live eternally with God. Our names are written in the book of life. If we refuse Jesus, we are the chaff which will be burnt forever in the lake of fire. Each of us must make the decision for ourselves. Many people think that because they were born into a Christian home, they are Christians. This is a terrible untruth. Others think they are saved because their parents are saved. This also is untrue.

"Each person must decide whether he will choose Jesus or not. Our families cannot save us. Only Jesus can save us, and he does that only after we have consciously decided to choose him as our Saviour." Ask if there are any questions about any of the lesson.

Close with prayer.

CHAPTER 3

CELEBRATING THE PROMISE

AIM: Studying this lesson will help me see that God uses Christians who are willing to be used.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-55; John 1:1-5, 9-18

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 1:39-55

MEMORY VERSE: "*For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*" Luke 1:49

People enjoy celebrating. When a student finishes a certain level of education, his family and friends want to celebrate with him. When a new baby is born, friends will visit the parents to celebrate with them. When someone gets a new job or is promoted to a better one, we want to help him celebrate. Many events in our lives call for celebration.

Some people celebrate by eating roasted meat. Others celebrate by having a party in their home. Some celebrate by laughing and talking with their friends. Still others celebrate by buying new clothes and going to worship. Some celebrate by singing songs. Mary did. Mary's song was a praise song to God to thank him for choosing her to do a very special work.

The Scriptures we read today tell us about Mary and her cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. They were celebrating the promise of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. This was the most wonderful promise of all. It was a promise from God who always keeps his promises. This promise meant freedom from eternal death for those who believed in him.

this was the reason they were able to give with such a free hand. They knew all they had belonged to God.

"the Christians at Corinth had wealth. It would be easy for the to give, especially if they remembered that Jesus Christ himself had given his life for them. However, Paul knew that it is sometimes harder for the wealthy to give than for the poor to give from the little they have. This church had already started to collect this offering once, but it had stopped before the collection was complete."

Have a third student read James 2:14-17. Say: "When we say we have faith, it is easy for people to believe us if we prove our faith by good deeds. The man in the Introduction in your books said he had faith. The people doubted that he did have faith, though, because his life showed no good deeds. There are few people more unhappy than Christian people who neglect to do good for others."

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

Say: "I want to tell you a story about a man and his wife. This story is about their activities during one week of their lives.

"Ezekiel and Anna had been married for ten years. They had three children. Ezekiel worked in a quarry. His work was hard and sometimes dangerous. Anna cared for the home, the children and farmed some land near their home. The family did not have much money, but they were able to take care of their needs.

"On Sunday while they were at church Ezekiel and Anna heard that Mama John was sick again. The old woman had been ill for almost a year now, and most of the church members were tired of hearing about it. As they walked home, Ezekiel told Anna, 'I wish I had money to take her to the doctor.' Anna was sorry to hear his words because she too was hoping they would have money to pay for the doctor.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Give the paper and pencils to the students. Tell them to write all the ways they can think of to serve others. If you have class members who are unable to write, you will need to have another student write for them, or you may do it yourself. Have each student write his name on his paper and give it to you.

Read these lists aloud without telling who wrote each one. Read them as if they were just one long list.

You will probably be surprised that the lists are very short. Most Christians never really try to think of ways they can help others.

INTERPRETATION

Ask a student to find and read 1 Peter 2:9. Using their Bibles and their pupils' books, allow the students to tell you what this verse means.

Ask a different student to find and read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. Say: "Paul was asking the Christians at Corinth to take up an offering for the Jerusalem church. We are not sure why the church in Jerusalem was lacking funds, but they were. To encourage them to give, Paul told them about how generously the Macedonian church had given. The Macedonians were very poor indeed. They had been persecuted, and most of them had had their property taken away. Because of their extreme poverty, Paul had not asked them to give. Yet they had begged to be allowed to participate in the offering."

"One very strong statement that Paul had made about the Macedonians was that they had first given themselves to God. If we give ourselves to God, that means we have given him all our possessions as well. Paul suggested that

AN IMPORTANT TASK

Read Luke 1:26-55. Gabriel brought a message to Mary from God. She had been chosen to bear a son, God's Son. If she agreed to do what God asked, she could change the history of the world.

Mary could have said no to Gabriel. She was engaged to be married to Joseph. She was a virgin. She could have said, "I am too young. Ask someone else." Or she could have said, "I cannot do that. Joseph will have me stoned to death." That was the usual penalty in Israel for a girl who became pregnant before marriage.

But Mary said, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it happen exactly as he has said."

THE VISIT

This was an exciting but puzzling event for Mary. She needed time to think it over. She needed someone to talk with about it. She said, "I will go visit my cousin, Elizabeth." The angel, Gabriel had told Mary that Elizabeth would also have a son. Elizabeth was long past the childbearing age; and so this was a miracle of God also.

When Mary arrived, she greeted Elizabeth. It was not an ordinary greeting, though. We do not know what words she said, but it caused two important things to happen. First, Elizabeth's unborn baby leaped for joy. God caused this to happen to show the special relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. John's special work was to prepare the way for Jesus. Now they were meeting for the first time before either was even born.

The second important thing that happened was that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. At once she knew that Mary, her cousin, was going to be the mother of the Messiah. How could Elizabeth have known this? God revealed it to her!

THE LONG HOPE

The Jews had longed for the Messiah for many years. Thousands of Jewish women had hoped to be the mother of the Messiah. They thought it would be a great honour. They expected to have a son who would lead the Jews in battle. This would win freedom for their country from the Romans whom they hated.

Jesus, however, was to be a spiritual leader, not an earthly ruler. He would die on a cruel cross. People would talk about Mary and her Son in bad ways. They would not know for some time that Jesus was the Son of God. He did not have an earthly father. All this would bring pain to Mary, not honour. God, however, honoured Mary by saying through Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women."

This is often true of God's servants today. They get no honour from the world. Many times there is suffering and persecution. People say bad things about them or make fun of them. But it is what God says that is most important. His servants want to hear him say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.*" Matthew 25:21)

GIVING THANKS

Elizabeth was very thankful to God. He had given her a son after she had grown old. She had prayed often for this son. God had answered her prayers, and he also allowed her a visit by the mother of the Messiah. God had done more than she had asked him to do.

Mary was very thankful to God also. She was so full of thanks that she began to sing to God. Mary thanked God for choosing her. She praised God for his mercy, strength and love. She thanked him for keeping his promises.

collection and send it on to Jerusalem. He gave two examples to encourage them.

First, he cited the Macedonians. Because of their extreme poverty due probably to persecution, Paul had not asked them to give to the collection. But they had begged for the opportunity to give and had found great joy in doing so.

The second example Paul used was Jesus Christ himself who gave up his place in heaven to die on a cross to save all mankind. Jesus had given his life for others.

Then, Paul said the Corinthians had always done an outstanding job at everything they had set out to do. He recognized that their failure to be generous would lead to dry and dead spirits. He wanted them to be generous because there might come a time when they, too, would be in need.

In Titus 3:8-14 Paul urged the people to do good deeds for others. He warned against people who talk, talk, talk without taking any action. If these refused to stop their talk, Paul said they were to be ignored because their purpose was not to glorify God. Paul encouraged the Christians to do enough work not only to take care of their own needs, but to have enough extra to help others.

In James 2:14-17, we have James' warning that faith which does not result in action is a dead faith. He said that a Christian response to another's need is to take care of the need, not just to pray for God to fill the need.

First Peter 2:9 states that Christians are priests. We are to represent God to mankind and bring them to God even as the priests had done. Christians are a special people, chosen to do good work.

CHAPTER 11

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 2 Corinthians 8; Titus 3:8-14; James 2:14-17; 1 Peter 2:9

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; James 2:14-17

MEMORY VERSE: "*And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful*" (Titus 3:14)

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians serve God by serving other people.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to be able to name specific ways they can serve others.

TEACHING AIDS: Pencils and paper for each student.

PREPARING TO TEACH

BACKGROUND STUDY

The Jerusalem church was the first church and has been called the mother church. 2 Corinthians 8 was written to encourage the wealthy Corinthians church to take up a collection for the church at Jerusalem. We are not told why this was necessary. Perhaps it was because Jerusalem was the centre for the Jewish religion, and many people travelled there to worship. Among them may have been many poor people. Whatever the reason, the Jerusalem church needed money to give to the poor.

The Corinthians had begun taking up money a year before, but it had stopped. Now, Paul urged them to complete the

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

God has a job that each of us can do for him. For some the job will be very difficult. It does not matter how big or how small the job is. When God asks us to do a job, he always provides the way for us to do it.

Our responsibility is to be ready when God is ready. He can use us if we are willing to be used. That means we must spend time with God every day. We must listen to his voice and know him. Unless we have time to talk to God every day, we will not recognize his call when he has a job for us to do.

Being ready to do work for God does not mean that we must clear our calendars and sit quietly doing nothing. God usually chooses people to do special jobs for him who are already very busy. He chooses businessmen, pastors, mothers and young people. When God has a job to do, he already has chosen the person he wants to do the job.

Of course, we have the right of choice. God does not force any of us to do anything. He did not force Mary to be the mother of Jesus. He let her choose. God calls preachers, but he does not force them to preach. God calls teachers, but he does not force them to teach. God calls us all to witness for him, but he does not force us to witness.

Had God called you for a special job? Are you willing to do it? If you are, then you can thank God for blessing you, even as Mary did.

CHAPTER 3

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Luke 1:26-55; John 1:1-5, 9-18

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 1:39-55

MEMORY VERSE: “...*he who is mighty had done great things for me, and holy is his name.*” (Luke 1:49)

CENTRAL TRUTH: God can use his children to do his work when they are willing and ready to be used.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to be ready to do God's will.

TEACHING AIDS: Chalkboard and chalk.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Today's lesson is about the joy that both Mary and Elizabeth felt when they learnt they were to have parts in the greatest drama known to man, the birth of the Messiah. Their joy brought them to celebration, and that celebration continues today. All Christians celebrate Christ!

Luke 1:26-55 begins with the sudden appearance before Mary of the angel, Gabriel. Knowing the Jewish customs of the time Mary lived will help you understand the importance and deep meaning of this appearance.

The Jewish world had waited for their Messiah, their Deliverer, for hundreds of years. They lived under the rule of the Roman government, as did most of the known world at that time. Rome had conquered the land and could demand what they wanted from the people. Taxation by the rulers was heavy and **burdensome** for the people.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

When people need help, they need more than words. They need action. God is looking for Christians who will help others. We can give our money through our churches. This money will help many people. But we must give ourselves to God. Then God can use us to help others. Money will not help some problems. Sometimes the help needed is a Christian friend to listen, to pray, and then work with them to solve the problem.

If a person is a Christian in name only, he cannot help others with their problems. He has problems of his own. What kind of Christian do you want to be? Let us prove our faith by our actions.

has chosen us! We are his people! He loves us and we belong to him!"

ENCOURAGED TO BE FAITHFUL

Peter wrote to one church. Paul wrote to another church. They were separated by many miles. The letters were written at different times. But the churches had many of the same problems. Both churches were being persecuted. Many Christians were suffering. Both Peter and Paul wrote to encourage them. They wanted these Christians, their friends, to stay strong in their faith. They wanted them to be faithful to God.

Paul encouraged the church at Corinth by giving them an example. "Look what God has done in the churches near you. They have been suffering, too. But look at their reaction. Look how they have responded to their persecution and suffering. They are so happy in Jesus they are giving more than they have ever given before."

These Christians were very poor. They did not have much money, food or property. They had heard that other Christians were in need. They remembered how much Jesus had given to them. He had given his life. They wanted to give all they could to help other Christians.

They gave their money and possessions because they had already given themselves to God. They belonged to God, and all they had was his also. They knew that real faith and real love show themselves in action. Paul asked the Christians in Corinth to do like these other Christians had done.

Read James 2:14-17. James says the same thing: real faith shows itself in actions. Some people say they have faith but do not prove it by their action. James says this is not real faith. It is a dead faith. This kind of faith cannot save a person. **It is not a living faith.**

Decrees and demands from Rome had to be obeyed. One example of these decrees was the one which caused Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem to be counted on the eve of Jesus' birth.

As the Jewish people remembered the prophecies about a Messiah, they connected them with the situation that existed. It was quite natural, then, for them to expect their Deliverer to overthrow the tyrant, the Roman government. Nothing in the Old Testament said anything about the Messiah setting up an earthly kingdom, but this was the belief most of the Jews held.

Many Jewish women prayed that they might be the mother of the Messiah. What an honour that would be! Their son would rule the Jewish world, and they would benefit greatly.

A Jewish woman was betrothed or engaged to be married for one year before she was really married. This betrothal was as binding as marriage and could be ended only by divorce. A woman found pregnant during this betrothal was stoned. She was to keep herself for her husband.

When Gabriel came, Mary was certain to have known what the possible results would be. She would almost certainly be divorced by her husband to be. She might be stoned. Everyone would talk about her for as long as she lived if she was not stoned. Yet, Mary accepted what was offered to her. She only asked that she be told as much as possible about what was to happen. She did not demand a sign from the angel.

When Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth would also bear a son, she decided to travel to see her. Elizabeth lived about 113 kilometers from Mary, and Mary made the trip by walking. When she saw Mary, Elizabeth's child within her leaped with joy.

Read Mary's praise song to God for choosing her to be the Messiah's mother. It is in verses 39 through 55.

Mary's song can be compared to Hannah's song in 2 Samuel 2:1-10. She recognized that she would not only be remembered throughout all time, but she would be remembered as one who blessed the world. She was amazed that God has chosen her to be his Son's mother.

John 1:1-5, 9-18 tells who Jesus is. He is called the Word which was with God from before the beginning of time. He was Creator with the Creator, he was Light with the Light. He came to the Jewish people who rejected him. His wider task was to give power to those who received him to become the children of God. He was fully and wholly God, but verse 14 tells us that he was wholly man. He came to the world so we could know God.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Say: "In the first lesson of this book we studied the way God used the Old Testament law to prepare the world for a new beginning in Jesus Christ. We saw that the Old Testament looked forward to Jesus. The second lesson was about the way God used John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus to come into the world. Our lesson today is about a celebration, the celebration of God's promise to send the Messiah. God used two willing women in his plan to send his only Son into the world."

Interpretation

Tell the students to open their Bible to Luke 1:26. Read verses 26 through 38 aloud. Ask the following questions to lead the students through these verses. They may answer in their own words or read a verse or two of Scripture to answer the questions. If they cannot answer a question, use your Background Study to answer the question fully.

1. What is the sixth month named in verse 26? (They may need to read the verses before verse 26 to answer this question.)

believed in Jesus as their Saviour. At first, the gospel was preached only to Jews.

The Jewish people did not like Gentiles (all those who were not Jews.) They knew Gentiles did not worship God. They felt Jesus had come to save only Jews. God had to change their minds. He showed Peter in a vision that he loved Gentiles, too. He told Peter that he shows no partiality. (Acts 10:34) God loves all people the same amount, in the same way.

Peter and others, like Paul, began to preach to the Gentiles. Many believed in Jesus. After a few years; most of the churches had some Jewish Christians and some Gentile Christians. God wanted them to know that they were all the same in his eyes. He still did not show any partiality.

So Peter wrote to them under the leadership of God. he told them all that they were no longer Jews or Gentiles. They were part of a new race. They were part of the Christian race. This new race was especially chosen by God.

A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

Peter said they were a royal priesthood. This means each person serves as a priest in the kingdom of God. Each Christian is a priest for himself before God. He prays to God for his own needs. He is also a priest for every other believer before God. He prays to God for the needs of other Christians.

GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

Many of the Christians to whom Peter was writing were being persecuted. There were other people who did not like Christians. They hated God and hated his people. Peter said, "Do not worry. Do not give up. It is not important what others do or say to you. What is really important is what God says and does. God has said that he

CHAPTER 11

A SERVING PEOPLE

AIM: I will learn that Christians are to give themselves in service to others.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 8, Titus 3:8-14; James 2:14-17; 1 Peter 2:9

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; James 2:14-17

MEMORY VERSE: *"And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful."* Titus 3:14

Two men were talking. One asked, "Are you a Christian?" "Of course!" The other man replied. "I am a member of the church near here."

But he had not attended a church service in many years. He did not like the pastor. He did not like the church members. He never helped anyone. He never gave anything to those in need. He said bad things about many people. He never tried to witness to anyone. He did not act like a Christian at all. People doubted that he was a Christian.

People can claim to be anything they want to be. People can claim to be Christians, but their actions will show if they are or not.

A NEW RACE

Read 1 Peter 2:9. Peter was writing to Christians who were Jews and Gentiles. Jesus and his apostles were all Jews. The first Christians were Jews, descendants of Abraham. They had followed God all their lives. When Jesus came to earth, they believed he was the Son of God. They

2. Who was Gabriel and what work did he do?
3. Who was Mary?
4. What does "betrothed" mean?
5. How did Gabriel greet Mary, and how did that affect her?
6. What assurance did Gabriel give Mary to calm her fear?
7. Who was to be Mary's Son?
8. What question did Mary ask Gabriel?
9. How did Gabriel explain to Mary the way she would be able to bear God's Son?
10. What proof did Gabriel offer that he was telling the truth?
11. What was Mary's answer to Gabriel?

Say: "God asked Mary to do a very difficult job. She agreed to do this job, although she knew it might cost her greatly. In the days Mary lived, it would have been expected that she would be stoned to death if she became pregnant before she was married. Her betrothed could divorce her quietly and send her away if he did not want her killed. What Mary was agreeing to do was a very difficult thing to do. But she chose to do as God asked. This must have taken great courage."

Tell the students to look at Luke 1:39-55 while someone reads these verses. Then say: "Mary must have decided to leave Nazareth right away. Her journey was a long one of 113 kilometers to her cousin Elizabeth's house. She walked all the way. When she arrived, her cousin greeted her in such a way that Mary's faith in what the angel had told her was made stronger." Have a student read verses 42-45. Say: "When Mary heard these words, her heart was filled with joy, and she praised God in the song recorded in verses 46-55."

"All of these verses prove to us that Jesus was completely human. He was born of woman, just as we were. Now let us look at John 1:1-5 and 9-18." Have these verses read aloud, or you read them. Ask the students what John was saying in these verses. Make certain they understand that the Word is Jesus and that he was completely God. He was with God and was God in the beginning and before the

beginning of time. He took on flesh and lived on the earth for awhile to fulfil his own plan to reveal himself to mankind. Ask the students if they have questions about these verses. Answer these questions if you can, or tell the students you will have the answer the next time you meet.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "God chose Mary to do a very hard job. He still asks people to do jobs for him today. Some of these jobs are easy to do, others are very hard. Let us think of some of the things God might ask us to do, or has already asked us to do. We shall write these jobs on the board as we name them. I shall be first." Write: Teach a Bible class. Then let them name jobs and write them on the board. Let them see that God has work for us to do.

Say: "When God calls us to do a job, sometimes we fail to do the job because we were not listening when God called. We need to listen to God every day. We need to have some time with him every day when we can talk and listen. When God asks us to do a job and we do it, we are blessed and our faith and strength is increased. I will pray this week that God will give each of you some special work to do and that you will say yes to him."

Tell the members to think about the gifts they have this week and plan one way to use their gifts during the week for the good of another church member.

students name each of the characteristics. Use your Background Study of these verses to complete the list if the class fails to do so.

Say: "This is a good list of characteristics. Now let us think about our own church and each of these characteristics. Let us see how we compare to that early church." use some time doing this activity. If your church fails to measure up to these characteristics, discuss the reasons.

Say: "Let us make another list. Let us decide on some things we can do as a class so our church will become more like the early church." Let the students make suggestions. You may have things like: invite church members to our homes for meals, pray for each church member by name, make up a prayer list of all the church members so we can remember them and pray for each one at least once a month, visit people who have been absent to see why they are not coming to church, etc.

Ask: "What shall we do with our list?" Perhaps the members will say to give it to the pastor. Help them to see that it would be good to share it with the pastor, but the work will have to be done by class members. They may want to present the list to the whole church at a business session.

Have someone read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Ask the class what kind of gifts God gives us. Discuss this for several minutes. Say: "We need to use our gifts for the good of others in the church since the church is the body of Christ. I want each of you to think about which gift you think God has given to you."

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

Ask the students if anyone will name the gifts they think God has given to them. When we think we have a certain gift, others who know us well may recognize it and agree that we do not have that gift. They may show us other gifts we have also.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROMISED ONE ARRIVES

AIM: This lesson will show me that God always keeps his promises.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:17-26

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 1:17-23

MEMORY VERSE: "*Blessed be the Lord...not one word has failed of all his good promises.*" (1 Kings 8:56)

Have you ever waited and waited for someone to arrive at your house? When Samuel was a little boy, the family received wonderful news. Samuel's grandparents lived a long way away, but they were coming to visit! In one month they would be there.

How slowly the days passed. Many times Samuel asked, "How many more days until they come?" It seemed that the month would never pass. But finally the day arrived and late in the afternoon, the grandparents arrived. They had come as they had promised. How happy Samuel and his family were to see them! What fun they had during those days they were able to stay!

Many years ago the most important person who ever lived came to earth. The world had been expecting him to arrive for many hundreds of years. God said his Son, would be the Saviour of the world. Some people had given up hope. They had stopped looking for him. Others had forgotten the promise. But God had not forgotten. When the time was just right, the promised One arrived.

A SPECIAL REASON

Jesus came into the world for a special reason. Do you know what the reason was? It was to save people from their sins.

The coming of Jesus into the world is a beautiful story. The last lesson was about how an angel appeared to Mary. The angel told her she would be the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Naturally this was hard to believe. But Mary believed the angel, and God was able to use her to provide salvation to all people.

JOSEPH'S PROBLEM

When Joseph learnt that Mary was pregnant, he was very disappointed. They were engaged to be married. Now the marriage would be impossible. Mary had shamed him by being untrue to him, he thought. Did she not know the usual penalty for this was to be stoned to death? How could she do such a thing? Joseph was thinking all of these thoughts, but he was not a harsh man. He decided to divorce Mary quietly. In Jewish custom, an engagement was as binding as marriage. Mary and Joseph did not live together as husband and wife yet, but they were promised to each other. Death or divorce were the only ways to break an engagement.

AN ANGEL APPEARS

The angel, Gabriel, then appeared to Joseph also. He told Joseph to go ahead and marry Mary. The baby was of the Holy Spirit, not another man. He told Joseph to name the baby Jesus because "*...he will save his people from their sins.*" (Matthew 1:21) In Hebrew, the word, Jesus means Saviour.

Joseph believed what the angel said. He remembered the promise God had made in the Old Testament. Read Matthew 1:23 again, then read Isaiah 7:14. Joseph believed that God was ready to fulfil his promise.

First Peter 4:7-11 also points to the activities of Christians. As we wait for Jesus to return we must remain sane and sober in our praying. This means we must stay in control when we pray. We need to keep loving those around us and show them hospitality as often as we can. (Hospitality is sharing our homes and our blessings with others.) Each of us must use our God-given gifts for the good of others.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Tell this story: "There was a young man named John. His parents did not know Jesus. They fought and argued a lot. They never showed John that they loved him. As he grew up, he stayed by himself most of the time. He was afraid to like people. He was afraid they would not like him."

"John was lonely and did not enjoy living. One day he met a Christian young man. This man tried to be his friend. He talked to John. He did good things for him. The young man was friendly and joyful."

"After several weeks, John asked the other young man a question, 'How can you be so happy all the time?' He replied, 'It is easy. I have the love of Jesus in my heart. Jesus loves you too, John. He died for you because he loves you so much.'"

"John accepted Jesus as his Saviour. Then he had love in his heart for the first time in his life, he had real happiness."

"When we live the love of Christ before other people, we can see the same results this young man saw."

INTERPRETATION

Tell the students to open their Bibles to Acts 2:42-47. Tell one student to read this passage. Have another to use his pupil's book to explain what the early Christian church was like. When he finishes, say: "Let us write the characteristics of the early church on the board." Let the

to try to help those around us find salvation. Fifth, we need to live Christ-like lives so other may copy what we do.

Colossians 3:12-17 might be called "things Christians need to start doing." Being holy or good is more than just not being bad. Being holy and Christian means to be actively involved in doing things. We must be compassionate, kind, lowly, meek, patient and forgiving. We must allow the peace of Christ to be the ruling factor in our lives. We must let the word of Christ live in us richly. Unless it does, we cannot teach or help another. We need to give glory and thanksgiving to God continually.

In James 2:1-4, we see that partiality and faith in Christ do not belong in the same life. It was quite common during the times when this letter was written to treat the rich people better than the poor people. It was not unusual for people to be reseated at a meal because someone of higher rank came in. The higher rank ate near the host close to the head of the table. The poor ate near the foot of the table. It must have been embarrassing for the poor people to be asked to move down to allow a better dressed person to take their seat. The writer of this letter says we must not judge people according to what they look like outside. All are the same before God.

Acts 2:42-47 shows nine characteristics of the early church (Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles) 1. The church was a learning church. It spent much time in learning about God. 2. It was a fellowshiping church. They ate together and prayed together. 3. It was a praying church. Everything was determined by prayer. God was consulted before action was taken. 4. It was a reverent church. The fear that was present was reverence for God. 5. It was an active church. Miracles took place and signs of great wonder were often seen. 6. It was a sharing church. Each helped the others as he could. 7. It was a worshipping church. They attended the temple services daily. 8. It was a happy church. They showed their joy. 9. It was a church full of likeable people who were able to draw others to Christ.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISE

Both Mary and Joseph believed what God said to them. Because of this, they found favour with God. They were able to be used by him.

Baby Jesus was born to Mary. She and Joseph cared for him and taught him well.

God provided for their protection and all their needs during those days when enemies wanted to kill the baby.

His life and work are described well in the New Testament. Some people have wondered, "But what good is the Old Testament? Is it not enough to have the New Testament?"

Paul answered these questions for us in Galatians 3:23-26. Read those verses now.

John the Baptist came to get the people ready for the coming of Jesus. In the same way, the law was to prepare the people for Jesus' coming. But it was even more than that. It was also to keep the people on the right path. It was to keep them headed toward God.

What must a farmer do if he wants to get water from a river or well over to his fields? First he must dig a ditch. The ditch directs or guides the water in the right direction.

God gave the people the law of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament to guide them from losing their way. Then he sent his Son, Jesus, to live in the hearts of his people. Now he has become our Living Guide!

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Today we are able to read all about the miracles in the Bible. We can see the great influence on all history by Christianity. We can see the changes in people's lives after they accept Christ as their Saviour. Do you think it strange that some people today have trouble believing God? We

CHAPTER 10

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Colossians 3:12-17; James 2:1-4; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 4:7-11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 4:7-11

MEMORY VERSE: *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).*

CENTRAL TRUTH: A Christian church works, serves and worship together.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to see the Christian love each other and work together.

TEACHING AIDS: Chalk Board, chalk, pencils and paper.

PREPARING TO TEACH

BACKGROUND STUDY

In 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 we see some things Christians should do in their daily living (Broadman Commentary, volume 10). First, everything a Christian does should be for the glory of God, even our eating. If we damage a weaker Christian by eating something he considers wrong, we have not glorified God.

Second, in every situation we need to apply Christian love. We should never be offensive to anybody. Third, we need to live lives that will be pleasing in the sight of all men. This does not mean to give up our Christian ideals, but rather to live them pleasingly. Forth, in all we do we need

have much more evidence than Mary and Joseph had. God kept his promises then, and he still keeps them today.

He promised a Messiah, and he sent his own son. He promised a Saviour and Jesus died for all people. He has promised eternal life to all who believe, and he will keep that promise too.

Do we keep God from doing his work sometimes? When God wants us to do something for him, what do we say? If we say yes, then God's work is able to go forward. If we say no, we slow down his work until he prepares someone else to do our task.

Do we believe the promises of God? Do we claim these promises? Do we live each day according to God's will for our lives? Mary did. Joseph did.

God's plan for our lives is always the best plan. This is true even when we may be ridiculed for doing his will. Suffering is better than disobeying God, so we must obey him even if we suffer for it.

You have a gift from God. It is special. It may be preaching or teaching. It may be helping others or organizing events of the church. Every Christian has a gift to use to build up the body of Christ, the church.

You are to use your gift for other Christians. We must never think one gift is greater than another person's gift. A body has many parts, but all are necessary.

What about worship? It was important that the early Christians worshipped God together. When they prayed with other believers and devoted themselves to spiritual matters, they saw great results. Would we see more people being added to the church today if we spent more time in prayer to God? If the world could see Christ in the lives of Christians today, would more people want him for themselves? Yes, they would.

We should love each other and work together joyfully. We should worship God together. As we do this, God will be glorified.

CHAPTER 4

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Matthew 1:17-2:6

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 1:17-23

MEMORY VERSE: "*Blessed be the Lord...not one word has failed of all his good promise...*" (1 Kings 8:56)

CENTRAL TRUTH: God kept his promise and sent the Messiah to save his people from their sin.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to know that God always keeps his promises.

TEACHING AIDS: Ask two students to use the verses in Matthew 1 and prepare to do a short play.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

In the last lesson Mary went to her cousin's house. She remained there for three months. Then she returned to her home village of Nazareth. Arriving in Nazareth, she may have gone directly to Joseph to tell him of her condition.

Joseph was faced with a problem. He and Mary were only betrothed at this time. For her to be pregnant would bring shame on them both. Joseph was a just man which meant two things. First, he knew the Jewish law and lived within its limits. Second, and perhaps more important, justice lived in Joseph's heart. He did not want to hurt Mary if he could prevent it. If he followed the Jewish law, Mary would be stoned. Not knowing what to do, Joseph went to bed.

During the night, God solved Joseph's problem for him by sending an angel with a message. This was the same angel

who had visited Mary. The message was the same. Mary would have a Son through the power of the holy Spirit. Only the explanation was different to fit the needs of the receiver. The angel called Joseph's attention to the Scripture from Isaiah 7:14. This reminder would comfort a just man like Joseph who knew the Scriptures.

Awaking from his sleep, Joseph did what the angel had told him to do. He took his wife and "knew" her not until the child was born. This means he had no sexual relationship with her until after Jesus was born.

Matthew 2:1-6 takes place in Bethlehem, a little town five or six miles from Jerusalem. This was where Mary and Joseph had travelled to be counted in the census. (See Luke 2.) Some time after Jesus was born, perhaps as long as two years later, some wise men came seeking him. We are not told how many wise men came. We only know they came to worship him, not as God, but as a king.

These wise men were probably from Persia where they acted as priests to the Persian people. Originally, they may have been of the Median tribe. They studied the stars constantly and were men of holiness and wisdom. They had seen a star which may have been much brighter than the others in the heavens. To them, this star meant that a king had been born. They came to reverence him.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, they went naturally to the ruling king, Herod. If a king had been born, surely he had been born in the royal household. Herod knew nothing about the birth of a king, and he became upset. He called in some of the priests and religious leaders and asked them where such a king might be born. Remembering Micah 5:2, they told Herod that the long-awaited king would be born in Bethlehem.

other. Those Christians told people about their faith; but, most important, they lived their faith. Because of this, many people became Christians.

Some of the later churches forgot to live their faith. Peter wrote to them to teach them and encourage them to live their faith daily.

BE PREPARED

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Jesus is coming again! He may come at any time. We need to be ready for this coming.

Peter wanted all Christians to be ready. He said, "Do not forget that Jesus will come back soon. I know there have been hard times. Many of you have suffered. Many have been persecuted because of your faith. Do not give up. Do not fail to pray." He said to be sensible and have self-control when we pray. Do not be afraid to ask bodily, but ask according to God's will.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

Peter did not want the Christians to forget how important love is. The early church witnessed to others by their love for each other. Others saw it and were won to Christ.

When Jesus was here on earth, many crowds gathered to see and hear him. They could tell he loved them.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Do we love one another today? People will want to come to Christ if they see real love in Christians. We need to love one another. We need to love the lost, too.

When we love another person, we see the good in him. We do not look for the bad. We do not say bad things to other people about him. This is what Peter meant when he said love covers a multitude of sins.

The church members wanted to learn from the apostles. Many were Jews from other countries who had been saved on the day of Pentecost. They had a great desire to learn all they could about Jesus. They listened eagerly to the apostles' teachings. They had fellowship together and ate together. They needed time with God, so they prayed together. They gave themselves to these activities. This means they put spiritual matters first in their lives.

They enjoyed the fellowship they had together. These were people who really loved each other. As they met together and ate together, their fellowship grew stronger. Because they loved Jesus, they loved each other.

Now look at the results! From this good fellowship, good results came. Many miracles were done. Fear (great reverence and respect for God and his power) came upon every person.

The Christians had faith God would take care of them. Each one shared what he had with other Christians. They did not worry about saving up for themselves. They knew if they had a need someone would share with them. Some were rich and could give much. Some had land which they sold. They gave the money to the apostles to share with those who needed help.

The Christians knew the importance of worshipping God. They went daily to the temple to praise God for what he was doing. They were united. They praised God together.

The people outside the church saw the unity of the Christians. They saw them eating at one another's homes. They saw their joy and their spirit of sharing. The people liked what they saw. Many of them were saved too. Day by day, more people were added to the church.

LIVING THEIR FAITH

What a beautiful picture of faith in action the Jerusalem church was! Because they loved God and each other, it showed. Other people saw their love for God and for each

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Begin the lesson by having the short play that you assigned earlier in the week. (See Teaching Aids.) After the play is finished, ask: "How would you have felt if your fiancée had become pregnant and you knew you had not been involved?" Let the class discuss this for a bit. Then ask, "After the angel came and explained what had happened to Mary, how would you have felt?" Again give the class time to discuss this.

Say: "It is not always easy for people to accept what God plans. It may have been difficult indeed for Joseph to accept the angel's message. Even then, Joseph knew that he and Mary must be prepared to be ridiculed and talked about. The betrothal period was to be a period of time when the man and woman had no sexual contact. To marry Mary immediately as Joseph was told to do did not solve the problem completely. After all, Mary was already three months pregnant. All the village would assume that Joseph was the father. This was hard for a just man like Joseph to accept."

Interpretation

Read Matthew 1:18-25 aloud for the students to hear. Say: "In verse 21, the angel told Joseph to name the child Jesus. In Isaiah 7:14 the child is to be called Immanuel. Can you think why there are two names here for the same baby?" Give the class an opportunity for discussion. Listen to see if they can make the connection that the two names really mean the same thing. Say: "Yes, both names mean 'God is with us.' Jesus came to the earth to show us what God is like."

Ask the students if they have questions about these verses in Matthew 1.

Read Matthew 2:1-6. Say: "These wise men who came to worship Jesus have always had some mystery about them. Legend has built up around them until it is necessary for

Christians to return to the Bible to see what the truth really was. Legend says there were three of them. The Bible does not give their number. Legend gives them names. The Bible does not. Legend says one was young, one middle-aged and one was old. The Bible does not mention age. Legend says their gifts had special significance. The Bible does not say so.

“Whoever these three wise men were, they came from the East where they had seen a star of unexpected brilliance. It told them that a king had been born. At that time there was a general feeling of expectancy over all the world. Ancient writings said a world-wide ruler would come from the Judean nation. When the star suddenly appeared, these wise men set out early to be among the first to welcome this new king and give him homage.”

Tell the class they may want to read on through Matthew 2 to find the results of the trip of the wise men.

Application To Our Lives

Say: “God always keeps his promises, even though it may take hundreds of years before they are fulfilled. Sending his only Son to the earth was one of the promises God made that took hundreds of years to accomplish.

“We can depend on God. What he promises, he fulfills. When we study the Bible and know the events God has promised, we can know for sure that those things will happen. For example, God has promised a judgment day and that day will come.

“Let us look at some other promises God has made.” Read these Scripture references and have a student read the Scripture.

CHAPTER 10

A WORSHIPPING PEOPLE

AIM: I will study this lesson to learn how to relate to other Christians.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Colossians 3:12-17; James 2:1-4; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 4:7-11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 4:7-11

MEMORY VERSE: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3:16

Do you like to be with a group of people? Few people enjoy being alone all the time.

The church at Jerusalem worked together. They prayed together. They had prayed together for power. God gave power abundantly. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had come upon them. Peter had preached and 3000 people believed. Three thousand people were added to the church that day. Did that stop their witnessing? Our lesson will show us what God led them to do next.

FAITH IN ACTION

Read Acts 2:42-47. Faith in action is a good description of this early church. The apostles had been with Jesus for about three years. They had learnt much from Jesus. They remembered he had said, “...make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:19-20

power to the righteous. If we have unforgiven sin in our lives, God will not give us power. Tell them that God uses clean vessels for his work.

Have the students bow their heads and close their eyes. Ask them if they would like to have power in their spiritual lives. Tell them they must confess their sins and ask God to forgive them. Remain quiet for a few minutes to allow them to do this. Then tell them God will answer their prayers now, especially if they ask for power to do his work. Say a short prayer thanking God for your students and asking him to give them knowledge, wisdom and power.

Discuss each one as to whether God fulfills his promises.

1. John 15:7
2. Matthew 20:23
3. Mark 16:16
4. Matthew 21:22
5. John 3:16
6. Proverbs 8:17
7. 2 Corinthians 1:5
8. Matthew 10:32
9. Micah 5:2
10. Proverbs 3:6

Use as many of these Scriptures as you have time for. Reading them and discussing them should convince everyone in your class that God does keep his promises.

Say: *"If you have not trusted in God, reading his promises will help you do so."*

CHAPTER 5

THE MAN OF COMPASSION

AIM: This lesson will help me realize how much Jesus knows about me and how much he really cares.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Luke 4:14-21; 5:17-26; 13:10-17

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 4:17-20; 5:18-25

MEMORY VERSE: "...the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted." Isaiah 49:13

The old woman sat alone in front of her house. She held a stick in her hand to help support herself. Her eyes watched the people as they passed back and forth in front of her. No one stopped to talk to her, although a few called a greeting to her as they hurried on their way. If you asked this old woman, "What would you like to have more than anything else?" She would reply, "A friend who cares!"

Everyone needs someone who cares about them. It is wonderful to know that we all have someone who cares about us. That person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Man of compassion. He loves us, and he cares about us. Our Scriptures tell us about one of the times Jesus showed compassion.

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Read Luke 4:17-20. Jesus announced something important before all men. He read a Scripture from Isaiah about the coming of the Messiah. He said the Scriptures that he had read were coming true that very day.

What did these verses say? What kind of Messiah was Jesus going to be? First he was one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. This meant that everything he

Ask one student to read Acts 2:2-4. Say: "This was Pentecost, the time the Holy Spirit arrived to empower all Christians. Until this time, the Holy Spirit had helped prophets, judges and kings. Now he would be available to every Christian. On the day of Pentecost, Peter used this new power to preach a sermon and 3000 people were saved."

Have the students turn to Ephesians 1:16. Have one read through Ephesians 2:2.

Say: "These verses tell us that Paul prayed for the Christians. What did he ask God to give them?" From their books and Bibles the students should be able to discuss these verses. Add material from your own Background Study if you wish.

Say: "God has made great power available to us."

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

Ask the students if they have felt this power we have studied today. Let them discuss this spiritual power for a time. Probably, very few of your students have felt this power very often.

Say: "We have this great source of power to use, but so many of us fail to use it. We try to do everything in our own power is to be used to bring men to God. We cannot ask God to give us power to jump from the ground up into a tall tree. That is foolishness, and God would not do it. But if we want to witness to our friend, God will give us the boldness and the words to say to him. If God want us to write a great book to glorify as, and we ask for power to do it, He will give it to us. If we are to teach a lesson about God or preach a sermon, God will give us the power to do it."

Ask: "How do we get this power?" Let the students say we ask God for it.

Ask: "Will God always give this power?" Give time to discuss this. If they fail to say yes, you say that God gives

with himself. There is nothing man can do to bring this harmony. We as Christians are his workmanship.

Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:18-20 is Christ's commission to us. He promised power, but only so we can tell the world about him.

TEACHING THE LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Before class time, assign each of the four stories from the pupils Introduction to students. Ask them to read these in their Bibles and be ready to tell these heroic stories in class. (Daniel, Samson, Gideon and Elijah)

Begin your lesson by asking each of the students to tell the story you have assigned him.

When the last student has completed telling his story, ask: "Where did each of these people get the power they needed to perform these deeds?" Agree with the students that the power came from God.

Say: "We, too, have power to do God's will. It is available to us at any time."

INTERPRETATION

Say: "Today, we are going to use our Bibles to study God's power. We have heard how God gave power in the Old Testament. When Jesus died and rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples on several occasions. He told them he was leaving them a big job to do, but he was going to make sure they had the power to do the job. Let us find and read Acts 1:8." Have this verse read. Then say, "Let us find and read Matthew 28:18-20." Have this verse read. Say: "Notice that Jesus claimed all the power in heaven and in earth. That some power was to be made available to his disciples. Jesus went back to heaven, and his followers met and prayed and waited for the power."

did would be what God the Father wanted his Son to do.

Second, he was selected in a special way to do a special work. The Bible says he was "anointed." This meant he was specially chosen by God the Father for this work.

What was the work to be? One part was to speak, preach proclaim, teach the poor, the captives and the sick. Jesus could have chosen to preach only to the people in the government. He could have preached only to the rich and important people. But God sent Jesus to those with the least hope. He sent him especially to those who needed help the most.

GOOD NEWS

What would Jesus preach and teach? Good news! Freedom! Being able to see! Being healed! That time of salvation had arrived! This was the approved time of God for Jesus to come and live on earth.

Preaching and teaching alone were not enough. Jesus proclaimed the good news. Then he went about doing the very things he said he would do. Jesus did more good than anyone else has ever done or will ever do.

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Read Luke 5:18-25. We can read in James 1:22, "...be doers of the word, and not hearers only..." Jesus was a doer, not just a speaker. In these verses we see one example of what Jesus did and taught. We can see the compassion of Jesus in this act.

One day Jesus was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God. Many people had come to listen. They had come because they realized it was very good news. They had come to hear Jesus preach and teach. Most of these people were poor and needy. But some of them were important religious leaders.

FRIENDS WHO CARED

The crowd of people was so great that the door to the house where Jesus was had been blocked by people. Some friends heard that Jesus was in town, and they hurried to bring a sick friend of theirs to Jesus to be healed.

Seeing the great crowd, they said, "What can we do?" Finally, one said, "We can go up on the roof, make an opening there and let him down with ropes to where Jesus is sitting."

That is just what they did. They had compassion because their friend was sick. Jesus was glad to see their faith.

Jesus had compassion also, and he said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." Some of the scribes and Pharisees began to question this. They were shocked and said, "No one but God can forgive sins. Jesus is claiming to be equal with God."

Jesus answered them by asking a question. "*Which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say 'Rise and walk?'*" (verse 23). Jesus knew that someone could say the words that sins were forgiven, and no one could prove whether it was really true or not. But when someone is healed, it is seen clearly. Talk is easy. Action is hard.

And so Jesus said to the man, "Rise, take up your bed and go home." The man stood up immediately, took up his bed and gave glory to God. Surely no one could question what they had seen now.

Jesus healed many people while he was here on earth. He did this because he loved them. He cared about their souls too, and so he forgave their sins. He healed their spiritual blindness. He freed them from the captivity of sin. He gave them freedom. By doing this, he made the Scriptures that he had read that day in the synagogue come true. He showed he was indeed the Messiah. He had power from

his Lord. He wanted his listeners to be convinced, not by the wise sayings of men, but by the power of God.

Ephesians 1:1-2:10 is a very difficult passage of Scripture. Paul, the writer, called himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. Though not one of the twelve, Paul was commissioned alone after the death and resurrection of Jesus. He greeted his readers by calling a blessing from God. Then he began to give God's plan of redemption. God always intended that men should live in harmony with him. In the Garden of Eden, God had the companionship of Adam and Eve until sin destroyed the relationship. In Old Testament times men maintained their relationship with God by a system of sacrifices and offerings. They were looking forward to the cross. In the New Testament, we can see God's plan to bring men in harmony with himself all through the Gospels.

First, Paul said God had foreknowledge as to who would be his sons through Jesus. The Blood of Jesus brings us redemption and forgiveness through his grace. He went on to say that the believers have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our future inheritance (life with God forever).

Paul, assured the believer that he prayed for them continually. He thanked God for them, he asked God to give them wisdom, revelation and knowledge. He asked God to give them enough light to see God clearly and understand him fully.

Then Paul looked at Christ, recognizing his mighty power, the very power of resurrection. He is above every ruler, authority and power. He reminded people that Christ is the head of the church which is his body.

Paul then turned his attention to the believers. He told them they were once dead, but now they are alive with Christ. They are able to sit with him in heavenly places and share in the great riches of his grace (his love which we do not deserve). No man can please God by his works without faith. It is God who has brought the believers into harmony

filled each of them and enabled them to speak in foreign tongues which were understood by people from other lands.

We need to make certain that we understand that this is not the first appearance of the Holy Spirit. To the contrary, the Holy Spirit had been active throughout all time, **even** moving upon the face of the waters during creation. (See Genesis 1:2) He had always been the enabler, the source of divine power. In Old Testament times, however, the Holy Spirit came to the aid of various kings, prophets, judges, rather than to all believers. At Pentecost he showed himself to be available to supply power to every Christian.

Peter's sermon was mostly taken from Joel and Psalms 16 and 110. He told the Jews they had killed the Messiah. They and the Romans were guilty. Peter spoke with such power that 3000 people believed him and accepted Jesus that day.

Romans 1:14-17 Paul says that he wanted to go to Rome to preach the gospel there. Paul said that the gospel is the power God uses to bring men to salvation. For Paul, life and salvation were the same thing. This salvation, Paul said, would be given to those with faith. It does not matter whether the man is of one nation or another. In verse 17, Paul said God's righteousness is revealed to those who are faithful, who are themselves righteous. In other words, Christians become righteous by exercising faith.

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul recalled the first time he came to the Corinthian church. He said he came with very great simplicity. He had just come from Athens where he had tried to deal with the philosophers and had failed. He had learnt that there is power in simplicity. All he wanted to preach was Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the Cross. He recalled, too, that he had come in a trembling manner the first time he came. This meant he was very excited about sharing the good news. His fear was not of the people. He had fear of wanting to say just the right words to honour

God to heal and to forgive sins. By doing this he showed his great love and compassion.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Read Psalms 139. It is wonderful to know that God knew us before we were born. He knows when we rise in the morning and when we lie down at night. He knows our thoughts. He knows our bodies inside and out. We have no secrets from God. Yet he loves us. When some part of our body or our mind is functioning improperly, God knows exactly what the problem is. We can trust him because he knows us and loves us so much that he sent his only Son to die for us.

CHAPTER 9

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Acts 2:22-41; Romans 1:14-17; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Ephesians 1:1-2:10; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:2-4

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Ephesians 1:16-2:2, 4-6; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:2-4

MEMORY VERSE: *"May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy"* (Colossians 1:11)

CENTRAL TRUTH: The power of the Holy Spirit is available to all Christians.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to begin to use the power God makes available to Christians

TEACHING AIDS: Early in the week, assign four students the Scriptures named in the pupil's Introduction so they can tell these stories.

PREPARING TO TEACH

BACKGROUND STUDY

Acts 2:2-4 tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:22-41 is a portion of the sermon Peter preached that day.

Luke, the author of Acts, does not tell where the believers were on the day of Pentecost. He only tells that they were together. They may have been meeting for prayer and worship, or they may have gathered in the court of the temple. As they were continuing together, a sound like a mighty rushing wind came to them. Then an appearance like tongues of fire rested on each of them. The fire seemed to come from one central force. The Holy Spirit

CHAPTER 5

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 4:14-21; 5:17-26; 13:10-17

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 4:17-20; 5:18-25

MEMORY VERSE *"...the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted."* Isaiah 49:13

CENTRAL TRUTH: Jesus knows everything about me, and he still loves me.

TEACHING AIM: I will use this lesson to teach my students that God cares for them as no one else can.

TEACHING AIDS: Chalkboard and chalk.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background

If we read all of Luke 4, it seems that the first public act of Jesus after his temptation was his return to read in the synagogue of his home town, Nazareth. The other Gospels put the events in a different order, having Jesus come to Nazareth after several other appearances and some miracles. Luke may have put the event here to show that Jesus would be rejected by his own people, but accepted by the Gentiles. Whatever the case, we should keep in mind that Jesus had been away from Nazareth for a period of time and had become known in other places.

It is well to remember that Jesus grew up in Nazareth and lived there during his young adulthood. He was a carpenter in the town and was well-acquainted with his fellow citizens. During those thirty years, Jesus must have lived an extraordinary life since he was without sin. The people may have been **amazed** at Jesus' conduct, but they

your work and your free time to bring honour to his name?
In what ways are you able to do this?

Paul loved his Christian friends and prayed for them often.
Do you pray often for your brothers and sisters in Christ?
Do you pray for those who are not Christians yet?

Many times we are defeated as Christians because we lack knowledge. We don't know how to do God's work in the best way. We don't know how to have victory in our Christian lives. But we have access to the power that will help us do all these things. If we will ask for the power and knowledge to do God's work, he will give it to us. He wants to give it to us. He is our strength, and he has promised never to leave us. Matthew 28:20 concludes with, "*...lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*"

Power is ours from God if we ask for it. Have you asked for power lately?

finally had grown used to it. Now the "perfect man" had returned to his home town, and the people were eager to hear what he had to say.

It was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue. When he got there, he sat down with the other people. First, the Law was read, then a portion from the Prophets was read. If a competent teacher was present, he was asked to bring a lesson following the reading from the Prophets. Jesus was handed one of the Isaiah scrolls, and he read from it, standing up. Then he sat down to deliver the lesson or sermon, as the custom was in the synagogue.

Jesus had read the Scripture portion which was from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. Then he told his listeners that the Scripture was fulfilled in himself. The anger the people showed a little later was because Jesus had said he was the Messiah. He also told them he had come not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well. To a Jew this was heresy. They did not think the Gentiles were worthy to be saved.

The second Scripture is Luke 5:18-25. Jesus was in a house teaching. The crowd was thick around the house, and no one could enter through the door. Some friends brought a sick man to Jesus for healing, but they could not enter the house because of all the people.

Palestinian houses were built with an outside staircase which led up to the roof of the house. The roof was flat and built of beams which had been laid from wall to wall. In between the beams were twigs compacted with mortar. It was an easy task to remove some of this matting between the beams and to let the man down with ropes to the feet of Jesus.

Seeing their faith, Jesus forgave the man's sins. Immediately the religious leaders there questioned his authority to forgive sins. Jesus asked them which was easier, to forgive sins or heal sick people. Then he healed the man, and he and his friends went away rejoicing.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "What is compassion?" Discuss this word until the group has decided that it means to care enough to do something about it. (Among many cultures, compassion is masked behind an attempt to hide tender feelings. If this is true in your culture, spend some time taking about being gentle, tender-hearted and sympathetic. Tell your students that to weep is not a sign of weakness, but it is often a sign of great strength. Even Jesus wept.)

Say: "Let us think of some situations in our own lives when we have seen people who were compassionate." (Again, this may be hard for your people. Help them to think of crippled children or people with diseased hearts. What does the nation do to help? If your church has given something like crutches or wheelchairs to people who needed them, remind the class of the event.)

Say: "*Jesus was a man of compassion. He came to the earth on a mission of compassion.*"

Interpretation

Ask the students to turn to Luke 4:17-20. Read this to the class. Then, ask: "Can someone explain what was happening in these verses? Where was Jesus? Why was he there? What did he say about himself?" Let one student explain these verses. Allow others to add their thoughts. Add your own from the Background Study. Make sure the students understand that Jesus was telling the world why he had come to earth. He was to heal the sick, make the blind see, raise the dead, and preach good news to mankind.

Tell the students to turn to Luke 5:18-25. Read this or have it read aloud. Say: "This story shows the compassion of Jesus. He saw the man, recognized his need and forgave his sins. Later he healed his body. Can you think of other times when Jesus showed compassion? Use your Bible,

Knowledge is power! Have you ever wanted to do something, but you did not know how to do it? You needed knowledge.

Paul wanted his Christian brothers and sisters to have knowledge. More than that he wanted them to have wisdom. Wisdom is using knowledge in the right way. Paul wanted the Christians to have knowledge and wisdom about God.

Look at verses 18-19 again. Paul wanted the Christians to know about the wonderful life ahead in heaven. He wanted them to know about the wonderful Christian life we can have on earth. He wanted them to know all about the wonderful promises God has made. He wanted them to know the power that made all these things possible. Paul prayed for many things for his friends.

Knowledge alone is not enough. They needed power too. How great is the power of God? Read Ephesians 1:20-23 again. There is not any power as great as God's power.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Paul was very thankful for these Christians. They belonged to God. They were showing God's love to others. Christians like this make God very happy. Paul wanted them to do even more. He prayed for them that they would learn more about God and his promises. He especially wanted them to remember one thing. Jesus is the head of the church. We are to follow him and his will always.

Christ is our leader because he is the one who has given us life. We are dead in our sins. We deserved to be punished for our sins. We were unable to save ourselves. Jesus loved us and died for us. He has given us eternal life if we have believed in him. One day we will be with him in heaven.

Do you have spiritual power in your life? Is God working in your life? Are you allowing God to use you, your life,

Jesus gave his disciples the answer in Acts 1:8. He knew they did not have power to do God's work. God had to give them the power. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for this power. Then he left.

The disciples prayed together and worshipped together. They wondered how this power would come. Then it happened! The Holy Spirit came just as Jesus promised. Read this story in Acts 2:2-4.

Suddenly they had the power they needed. They could preach and witness boldly. They were not afraid of anyone, not even the ones who killed Jesus. The day they received the power, Peter preached a powerful sermon. About 3000 people believed in Jesus. That is power!

A MAN OF LOVE AND PRAYER

Paul received this power too. He became an apostle of the Lord Jesus. This meant he was sent out to tell many people about Jesus. He travelled to many cities and countries. He started many churches.

Paul was stoned, shipwrecked, beaten and cursed because he preached about Christ. How could he keep on preaching? He used God's power!

Paul wrote many letters to the churches he started. He wrote to other churches as well. He always told them about God's power. Today we will read what he told the church of Ephesus.

Paul was a man who loved people. Read Ephesians 1:16-2:6. Paul went many places preaching about Jesus because he loved people. He especially loved those who accepted Jesus. Because he loved them, he prayed for them often.

THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

Paul told the people at Ephesus that he prayed for them. He told them he was asking God to give them knowledge.

and we will write each on the board." Use plenty of time doing this activity. Your reason for doing it is to show the students how many times Jesus showed mercy and compassion to those about him.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "Jesus was a man of compassion when he lived on the earth. He is still a man of compassion. He cares for us today just as he cared for those who lived when he was on the earth. Since God and Jesus are one, the same characteristics exist in each other." Read Psalm 139. Say: "This psalm tells us exactly how well God knows us. No one else is able to know us like God does. How wonderful to know that he knows us so well and he cares for us so much. The Bible tells us that he knows how many hairs we have on our heads!"

"Jesus was our example of compassion. It is true that we cannot do the miracles Jesus did, but we can feel compassion as he felt it. Perhaps our own responses to our compassion will not be very spectacular, but God will be pleased."

Ask one of the students to read the Introduction of their lesson, the story of the old woman. Say: "There are lonely people around us. We see them every day. How can we show them our compassion."

Ask: "Can you think of other ways we can show compassion? There may be acts we can do as individuals, or we may need to join with others to respond to a situation." Let the class name as many situations as they can where they can show compassion.

Say: "We must remember that we may feel sympathy for someone, but unless we take action to help we have not shown compassion."

Close in prayer asking God to show the class ways to be compassionate this week.

THE MASTER TEACHER

AIM: I will learn to trust God's Word as the only standard of truth.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:17-28; 7:24-28; 10:24-25; 13:33-52

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 5:17-20; 7:24-26, 28-29; 13:34-35

MEMORY VERSE: "Make me to know thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths." Psalm 25:4

The confused young Christian listened to her friend telling her she was not a Christian because she could not speak in "tongues." When she had become a Christian, she had understood that all she had to do was to repent, turn from her sins and accept Jesus as her Saviour. Now her friend was confusing her by saying she had to speak in tongues.

A police officer who had accepted Jesus as his Saviour three months before was attending a class at his church about how to pray. He was glad to learn how to pray because the only way he had been able to communicate with God and to get forgiveness for his sins in the past was through a priest. He was amazed to learn that he could go directly to God in prayer.

Talking with her neighbour, a woman heard that it was necessary to observe the Lord's Supper each Sunday. Her neighbour told the woman that she would lose her salvation if she failed in this observance.

Who or what do we believe? Do our neighbours and friends always tell us the truth? Can we trust a person from another denomination to speak truthfully?

AN EMPOWERED PEOPLE

AIM: I will learn that as a Christian, I have limitless power.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:22-41; Romans 1:14-17; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Ephesians 1:1-2; 10; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:2-4

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Ephesians 1:16-22, 4-6; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:2-4

MEMORY VERSE: "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy." Colossians 1:11

Could you spend the night alone in a cave full of fierce, hungry lions? Daniel did. Read Daniel 6:6-24. Could you fight 1000 men by yourself? Samson did. Read Judges 15:14-16. Could you lead an army of 300 men against an army of uncountable soldiers? Gideon did. Read Judges 7:9-22. Could you bring back to life a boy who had died? Elijah did. Read 1 Kings 17:17-24.

Most people would say any of those acts are impossible. They are impossible in our own strength. All these men, however, used God's power to do these things. Matthew 19:26 says that "...with God all things are possible."

Today we will study the power of God which every Christian can have.

POWER FOR A BIG TASK

Jesus had died on the cross. He had come alive again and appeared to his disciples. He was leaving them to return to heaven. Before he left he gave them a big job to do. They were to tell the whole world about him. How could they do such a big task?

is a great comfort when we face the death of a loved one. We will meet him again at the day of resurrection when Jesus will demonstrate his power over death again."

Ask questions. Answer them or promise to get answers by the next class meeting.

Close the meeting with prayer for those in need around you.

To know the truth, it is necessary to search the Bible. The young Christian girl will learn that she is a Christian although she does not speak in tongues. The young police officer will learn more and more about the true way to pray as he studies his Bible. The woman will find out that Jesus told his followers to observe the Lord's Supper as a remembrance. It is not necessary to have it at any certain interval of time, and she certainly will not lose her salvation if she fails to observe it every week.

Just as we are confused by the teaching of churches and religious leaders today, the people of Jesus' day were also confused. Our lesson tells us how Jesus handled the problem of man-made laws being added to God's laws.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS

Read Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus loved the Law of Moses, which are the books from Genesis through Deuteronomy. Jesus loved all the Old Testament. As a boy, he had gone to synagogue school where he learnt much of the Old Testament by memory. Because he was the Son of God, Jesus knew and understood the Scripture better than anyone else.

Jesus knew that God had given the people good laws. These laws were to guide the people. They were to help keep the people following the way of righteousness, faith and love.

A BIG PROBLEM

The scribes and Pharisees were religious leaders in Israel. Over the years they had added many man-made rules to God's Law. These rules made the people forget the real meaning of God's Law. They forgot about love and faith and real righteousness. They were afraid they would break one of these man-made rules.

When Jesus came, he did not try to keep all the man-made laws. He knew they were not from God. This made the

JESUS' ANSWER

Jesus said God's Law will last. None of it will be lost, not the smallest letter in the Greek language (the iota) nor the smallest marking in the Hebrew (the dot). Read Matthew 5:18. These were the two languages the Bible was first written in. In fact, Jesus said he came to fulfil the Law. This meant he would teach the true meaning of the Law which the Pharisees had forgotten.

Read Matthew 7:24-26, 28-29. In these verses we see one of the reasons people liked Jesus' teachings. He used many illustrations while he taught. This helped the people to understand his teaching.

Jesus said that real wisdom is hearing and obeying his words. Then he told them what wisdom was. He used an illustration of building a house to teach this message.

Would a man want to build a house on sand? No, a man would not build on sand if he knew about building. He would build his house on solid ground with a firm foundation, like a solid rock.

Jesus was saying his teaching could be trusted. They were solid and firm. Only a foolish man would build on man-made laws. A wise man would choose the solid and firm teachings of Jesus.

Jesus used parables in his teaching. These are stories that help people understand the meaning of the lesson more easily. Then the people would remember the lesson better. Read Matthew 13:34-35.

HIS AUTHORITY

There was another reason the people liked to listen to Jesus. He knew what he was talking about. He did not

Group 1: Read John 11:1-5. Be prepared to tell the class who Lazarus was. You will also tell the class why Jesus delayed his journey to Bethany.

Group 2: Read John 11:6-16. Report to the class the meaning of these verses.

Group 3: Read John 11:17-43. Use your own words to tell the class what happened in these verses.

Give the class ten minutes to work on their assignments. If it is a sunny day, the groups may want to go outside to work. After ten minutes, the class will come together again and each group will report to the class.

Ask: "Did any of you have trouble with your work?" Help any who did. Then listen to the reports. Congratulate each group. Add to their information if you need to, so they can understand the Bible lesson.

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

Ask: "Does Jesus raise the dead today?" Let the class discuss this.

Ask: "If raising someone today would bring glory to God, would God do so?" Give the class time to discuss this. Help them to see that God almost always allows his laws (the laws of nature) to govern life and death. If a person dies, God allows him to remain dead. If someone came back from the dead, if someone came back from the dead today, much confusion might result. Sometimes we hear that someone has been raised from the dead. Such news is always met with disbelief. God will not allow his Name to be defiled. That is why today he does not allow us as Christians to raise dead people. He allowed Jesus to do so to bring himself glory and to show that Jesus is Lord of life and death."

Say: "Though God may not allow our dead to be raised now, he will raise them and all of us on the last day. This

Martha tried to prevent this because Lazarus had begun to stink inside the grave.

Lifting his eyes, Jesus thanked God for hearing him. This must have surprised those with him, because they had heard no prayer. Then, with a loud voice, Jesus called Lazarus to come from the grave. Immediately he walked out. Seeing how restrained he was with his legs bound, Jesus told them to take the grave clothes off him. Bodies were wrapped in linen garments with the hands and feet bound tightly in bandage-like wrappings. A towel covered the head. These were the clothes Jesus demanded be taken off. Lazarus was free to live again.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Say: "When death comes to someone we love, we feel great sorrow. The sorrow is not for the one who died if he was a Christian, because he has gone to be with God. We sorrow for ourselves because we will miss being with that one we loved. We may have to adjust our lives. We will have to become used to not talking with him. The sorrow is very real. We feel great pain.

"Our lesson today is about a death, about sorrow, about comfort and restoration. As we study, let us remember that the greatest lesson we can learn today is that Jesus is Lord of life and death."

INTERPRETATION

If you have six or more students present, divide them into three small groups. If you have only six present, two people will be in each group. If you have less than six, you will need to let the whole group discuss each of the three questions. Give each group one of the following assignments. They will use their Bibles and their pupils' books to do the work. Give each group a pencil and paper, and tell them that **one member of each group** will write a short report for the **whole class**.

hesitate. He was not unsure of what he believed. He had authority as he taught. Read Matthew 7:28-29.

Jesus said, "I say to you," and "These words of mine." The teachers of the Jews always said what others said, but Jesus always spoke in his own authority.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Are you following the Laws of God or the laws of man? If someone tells you something about God's Laws, you should ask where the law is in the Bible. If it is not there, you cannot trust it.

The Bible is God's standard of truth. We need to measure the matters we hear against the words of the Bible. The Bible is God's Word. It can be trusted.

CHAPTER 6

FOR THE TEACHER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:17-28;
7:24-28; 10:24-25; 13:33-52

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 5:17-20;
7:24-26, 28-29; 13:34-35

MEMORY VERSE: "*Make me to know thy ways, O Lord;
teach me thy paths.*" Psalms 25:4

CENTRAL TRUTH: The Word of God is the standard of
measure for what is right and what is wrong.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to learn to
determine what is right and what is wrong by searching the
Bible to find the truth.

TEACHING AIDS: Before your students arrive, write the
names of all kinds of churches in your area on the board;
i.e. Baptist, Catholic, etc.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

In Matthew 5:17-28 we read Jesus' statement that he came
to fulfil the law. This seems to contradict other Scriptures
(Luke 16:16; 13:10-17; Mark 3:1-6; Romans 10:4) where
Jesus is breaking the law or is said to be the end of the law.
Paul wrote to the Galatians that he, through the law, had
died to the law that he might live to God. What, then, is
Jesus saying?

The Jews used the word "law" to indicate four different
things. First, it could mean the Pentateuch, the first five
books of the Bible. Or, it could mean the Ten
Commandments. Or, they might be referring to the

in him would be raised from the dead on the last day. Read
verses 39, 40 and 44.

In John 11:1-27, we have the wonderful story of the
restoring of life Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha.
Strangely, this story is only in the Gospel of John.
Matthew, Mark and Luke do not include it in their Gospel.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were close friends of Jesus.
When Jesus was tired, he often went to their home for rest
and refreshment. When Lazarus became ill, Mary and
Martha sent a hurried message to Jesus. They said,
"Lazarus is sick." They did not have to ask Jesus to come
to them. They knew he would come without a request from
them.

Jesus, however, decided to wait for two days before he
travelled to Bethany. He waited until he knew Lazarus was
dead, then he said, "Let us go to him" Now Bethany was
very close to Jerusalem where the religious leaders were.
It would be dangerous for Jesus to go there. Thomas told
the other disciples that they all must go, and if necessary
they would die with Jesus.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead
for four days. Decay of his body had already started.
Hearing that Jesus had come, Martha ran out to greet him.
Martha, always busy, was the first to reach Jesus; and she
said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not
have died" (Verse 21). She continued speaking and
showed great faith in Jesus.

Jesus told her that her brother would rise again.
Remembering Jesus' teaching, Martha said she knew he
would rise on the last day. But this was not what Jesus had
in mind. He said he was the Resurrection and the Life. He
had power over life, and he had power over death.

Martha hurried to call Mary. Mary came with the same
questions and statements that Martha had had. When Jesus
saw her sorrow, he wept. Then he went to the tomb and
asked that the stone covering the cave be removed.

CHAPTER 8

FOR THE TEACHER

BACK GROUND SCRIPTURE: John 6:35-51; 11:1-53

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: John 11:1-27

MEMORY VERSE: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me...."* (Galatians 2:20a)

CENTRAL TRUTH: God has all power. He controls all of life and death.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to learn that God is all powerful. He is able to help them in every situation because he is Lord of life and death.

TEACHING AIDS: Pencils and paper and small pieces of paper on which you have written the assignments mentioned in the Interpretation.

PREPARING TO TEACH

BACKGROUND STUDY

Soon after Jesus fed the 5000, he went away into the hills to be alone with God. When evening came, Jesus had not returned, so the disciples got into a boat and started across the sea to Capernaum. Suddenly, a great wind came upon the sea. When the disciples were three or four miles out to sea, they saw a figure coming toward them across the water. Jesus had decided to join them.

The next day, the crowds caught up with Jesus again, and we read in John 6:35-51 that he continued teaching them. In this lesson, he told the people that those who believed

Pentateuch and the Prophets which was all the Scripture to them. Or, they might mean the scribal law or oral law.

The scribal or oral law was that set of laws that religious leaders had made to define God's law. The basis of God's law was that men were to love and revere God, and they were to love and revere each other. The religious leaders decided that the people could not understand the law unless it was defined better. They solved the "problem" by adding man-made laws to God's laws. An example of this is God's law to keep the sabbath holy by doing no work that day. The scribes defined what work was to the point of saying that a tailor was breaking the law if his robe had a needle sticking in it. This was bearing a burden which was unnecessary.

Jesus said he came to fulfill God's law, not the scribal law. Then he went on to show that he had authority over all the law and named some instances to point out this truth. He used the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" to explain that murder is having anger in our hearts toward our fellow man.

Matthew 7:24-28 gives us a picture of two ways to build character. We can build solidly upon the stone foundation of Jesus' teaching, or we can build foolishly upon the sand of the world's teaching. Jesus was a carpenter, and he knew how to build a house. He knew where to build them as well. He ends this passage by saying that not only must we hear his words, we must act on them.

Matthew 10:24-25 tells us that the student is never better than his master. Christians are never better than Jesus. The fate Jesus suffered on the cross can be demanded of us, his followers.

In Matthew 13:33-52, we find a series of parables. Jesus, the Master Teacher, was using items common to his listeners to explain eternal matters. All of these parables tell the value of the kingdom of God. It is like yeast that spreads through the whole loaf. Indeed Christianity has spread throughout the world. It is like good seed that

brings forth a bountiful harvest. It is a pearl of great price. It is a treasure hidden in a field. It is a net thrown into the sea to draw men.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Ask: "Why are there so many different kinds of churches? They all claim to be Christian churches, yet there are differences. Why?" Give the students plenty of time to discuss this question. Lead them to the conclusion that men interpret what the Bible says in different ways. Say: "Yes, we have all these churches. (Point to the chalkboard.) They all have different beliefs, but often the beliefs are different because of what men add or take away from the Scripture. Our lesson today is about how Jesus felt about man-made laws that had been added to God's laws."

Interpretation

Ask a student to read Matthew 5:17-20. Say: "The Law and the Prophets that Jesus is talking about is the Old Testament. These were the laws that were read in the synagogue each sabbath. They were God's laws that if followed would allow man to live in peace with God and with his fellow men. Jesus said he came to fulfil this law, which was simply to love God and man."

"In verse 20 Jesus states that the Christian's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. These were the religious leaders. The scribes were those who taught the law, and the Pharisees were those who followed the law completely. However, the law that the scribes and Pharisees were so cautious about was the large number of man-made laws that had been added to God's laws. Why do you think men had made extra laws?" Allow the students to discuss this thoroughly, helping them to see that they wanted to make the laws completely clear to all the Jews.

Remember that Jesus is Lord over life and death. The Lord of life and death has the power to help us in whatever difficulty we find ourselves.

Jesus did not say he knew about the resurrection. He did not say he might be the resurrection. He said, "I am the resurrection." Because of this we do not have to fear death. Jesus, our Lord, is the resurrection and the life. If we believe this, we will live forever with him. Read John 11:26 again.

Have you believed in the Lord of life? Jesus gives each believer eternal life. He also gives a life that satisfies while we live on this earth. Are you satisfied with your life? Have you tried Jesus' way? Why not try it today?

who were mourning. Because of this great compassion, Jesus wept also.

Then they went to the cave where Lazarus was buried. After praying aloud, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out of the grave. And he did!

UNLIMITED POWER

Jesus has power over even death! The dead man had come alive. Jesus told the people to take off the grave clothes in which Lazarus was bound. They did this, rejoicing at what Jesus had done. Many people believed in Jesus because of this miracle.

Jesus' disciples and other friends learnt that he is Lord of life. In a short time, he would die himself. But he would rise again, never to die again. This experience with Lazarus would strengthen the disciples for his own death.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Jesus knows us, and he cares about us. When we are sad, he knows it and is concerned. When we are sick, his Holy Spirit hovers near our bed. When we feel defeated, he comforts us.

Jesus had told us to have faith in him. Read Romans 8:28. However, sometimes we forget that God is in control of every situation. Do we even scold God sometimes? Do we sometimes think, "Lord, why didn't you give me this thing which I need so much?" Or, "God, why did you let that happen to me?"

We should let God use the difficult times in our lives to strengthen our faith. Many people lose faith when the hardships of life come to them. This is not what God wants for us. He wants to comfort us and strengthen us.

If you have a problem, give it to God. He will carry your burdens. As you trust him more and more, he will enable you to face greater things in your life.

Say: "In trying to make God's laws clear, the scribes had managed to make them so burdensome that men could follow them only if they forgot everything else in life except the law. This was never God's intention. He meant for us to love one another. But if we have to follow thirty laws to show that love, we forget to love and only follow the law. Jesus rebelled against this body of man-made laws and found himself in constant disagreement with the religious leaders of the day because of it."

Application To Our Lives

"Even today men try to impose their own thoughts and ideas into God's laws. If a church has a rule or law, there must be a scriptural basis for it. In our church we have laws or rules. We must be careful that all our rules and beliefs are directly from the Bible. For instance, we believe that each person must be saved. We cannot be saved because our parents are Christians. Our basis for this belief is John 3:18." Have someone read that verse.

"Another belief we have is that we are saved by grace, not by doing any good thing." Have someone read Ephesians 2:8.

"Still another belief we have is that we must be regenerated. We find this in John 3:3." Have this read. "Let us also read Matthew 18:3 where we find the same command.

"We believe that if we are saved, we will have eternal life. This is found in John 3:36 and John 5:24." Have these read. "We believe that Christians must be baptized by being totally immersed in water. Let us read Matthew 3:5-6, 16 and Mark 1:5.

"We believe in missions. That means we believe every person has the right to hear the gospel and accept Jesus. We find that in Matthew 28:18-20." Have this read.

Say: "We believe many things, but we need to be certain that our beliefs are based in Scripture. When someone

comes to us with an idea that we have not heard before, we need to ask him where the belief is stated in the Bible. If our own church leaders teach us something new, we need to make sure it is in God's Word before we accept it. We can learn to use our Bibles to search for truth. We do not have to believe the things the world would like us to believe. We have the truth in the Bible."

He told his disciples he had waited so their faith might be made stronger.

At last Jesus arrived in Bethany. Martha was probably thinking that it was too late to help Lazarus. Jesus had come to join Mary and Martha in their mourning.

Martha was feeling very sad. Many friends had come to mourn with her and Mary. Probably many had said that Jesus should have come earlier. So Martha's first words to Jesus sounded like words of reproach. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Then she remembered to whom she was talking and added, "I know that even now you have the power to do anything you desire."

JESUS CARES

Jesus was very sorry for Martha. He knew how much she loved her brother. He knew the sorrow she was feeling. It had been four days since Lazarus had died. Decay of the body had begun. No one would believe that Lazarus could live again. But Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Martha knew that at the last day, every true believer would rise again, so she agreed with Jesus.

Then Jesus made one of the greatest statements in the Bible. "I am the resurrection and the life," he said. This meant he was Lord of life and death. He could give life again where it had gone away. He was the Conqueror over death.

A GREAT CONFESSION

Martha said, "Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God." Martha recognized who Jesus was. She realized that he had power and authority and victory over all things, even death.

A little later Jesus met Mary running out to see him. She said the same words that Martha had said. She fell at his feet and wept. Jesus had love and compassion for these

CHAPTER 8

THE LORD OF LIFE

AIM: I will study to reassure myself that Jesus is Lord of death.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 6:35-51; 11:1-53

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: John 11:1-27

MEMORY VERSE: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."* Galatians 2:20a

We pray to God and ask him for many things. We may ask for healing. We may ask for help with a special problem. We may ask for a job. God always answers our prayers. Sometimes he does not give us what we want. His answer is no. Does this mean he does not love us? Not at all!

God knows what is best for us. We may ask for something that would not be good for us. As parents we often refuse to give our children what they want because we know far more than our child does. So it is with God.

Sometimes we ask for something at the wrong time. If it is something good for us, God will give it to us at the right time.

There are other times when God waits so that he can get special glory out of answering our prayers. That was just what happened when Jesus heard that his friend, Lazarus, was sick.

LAZARUS DEAD

Read John 11:1-27. Jesus probably received the message from Mary and Martha on the day that Lazarus died. He was only a day's journey from Bethany where they lived, but he did not go. He waited two more days before going.

CHAPTER 7

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

AIM: I will learn that Jesus suffered for me, and that I must be willing to suffer for him.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:27-38; 10:32-34; 15:21-39

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Mark 8:27-38

MEMORY VERSE: *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."* Isaiah 53:5

Daniel was visiting in a nearby town. Suddenly he heard someone greet him. Turning around, he saw a man coming toward him. The man was smiling. He said, "It has been a long time since I have seen you. How are you?"

"I am fine," Daniel replied, as he tried to remember who the man was. The man's smile faded as he realized Daniel did not remember him.

"Do you remember me?" he asked.

"I saved you from drowning when you were a young man."

Daniel was very embarrassed. How could he have forgotten such an important person?

Have you ever failed to recognize someone you should have known? Many people failed to recognize who Jesus really was. He began to wonder if his disciples really recognized him, really knew who he was. So he asked them an important question.

MANY OPINIONS

Read Mark 8:27-38. There were many different thoughts about who Jesus was. Some of the people thought he was John the Baptist. Others said, "No, he is Elijah, the prophet, who has come back to life again." Still others thought he was one of the other prophets from Old Testament times.

Jesus, however, wanted to know what his disciples thought. So he asked them, "But as for you, who do you say that I am?"

THE ANSWER

Peter was usually the first of the disciples to speak. Without hesitating he said, "You are the Christ."

Jesus was very glad to hear this. "Christ" was the same word in Greek as the word "Messiah" was in the Jewish language. It meant "the anointed one." It meant one whom God had especially chosen. Peter recognized that Jesus was the special chosen one of God.

A WARNING

Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone else. Many Jews were looking for a King-Messiah. They wanted someone who would free them from the Romans. They wanted a king in Jerusalem again like King David had been. Since Jesus was able to do many miracles, they thought he would make a great king. Jesus, however, would not be an earthly king. He was to be a spiritual king.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know the truth, he wanted them to know the kind of Messiah he would be. He told them that he would be treated badly. The religious leaders would refuse to accept him. He would suffer. He would be killed, but he would rise again after three days.

10. Is it possible that telling others about Jesus will cause us to suffer?

Tell the students that those who speak up for Jesus may often suffer for him.

Application Tcardinals only, were the body of the church.

2. Peter, the apostle, was ordered to be crucified by Nero. Jerome, a historian, says that Peter was crucified upside down because he felt he was unworthy to be crucified as Jesus was.

3. Paul suffered death under Nero as well. He was beheaded.

4. James was thrown from the battlements of the temple, then stoned and finally was killed by a blow on the head.

5. Thomas died in India, slain by a dart.

Tell the stories you have collected. There are many stories of suffering in Africa today because of the religious persecution which has happened in many countries.

Say: "There may come a time when you will be called upon to suffer, and even to die. The way to which Christ has called us is not an easy way. But we can say with Paul, *'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.'*" (Romans 8:18)

Close the meeting with prayer.

a friend turn against you or use you badly. These were painful times for you.

“Perhaps there is someone here who has been hurt by a child of yours. You did the best you could for the child, then he or she rejected you. He may have made fun of you, calling you names. These, also, are times of suffering.

“Our question today is not about the suffering we do in living our normal lives, but about suffering for Christ. Has anyone here really suffered for Christ?” Give the students plenty of time to discuss this question. You may learn that you have people who have really suffered for Christ’s sake. Or, you may find that no one in the class has actually suffered on his behalf.

Say: “Our lesson today is about our suffering Saviour, who not only suffered for our sakes, but has the right to call upon us to suffer for his sake.”

Interpretation

Say: “One day Jesus and his disciples were walking in an area that many people considered a holy place because other gods were worshipped there. As he walked, Jesus began to wonder if his disciples really knew him. Let us discuss our Scripture for today, Mark 8:27-38.” Ask these questions to guide your students in a discussion of the lesson. Use your Background Study to add information to the discussion.

1. What question did Jesus ask?
2. What answer did the disciples give?
3. What was Jesus’ second question?
4. Did the disciples answer correctly?
5. Why did Jesus tell them to tell no one who he was?
6. What did Peter do that caused Jesus to call him Satan?
7. There are three things Jesus says the disciples must do. What are they? What does each mean?
8. Are you ashamed of Jesus? What does that mean?
9. If we are not ashamed of Jesus, we will tell others about him, will we not?

Peter was horrified. Surely this could not happen to their beloved Master. Peter began to tell Jesus that he must surely be mistaken.

Jesus realized that Peter was tempting him to avoid the suffering ahead. Such a temptation had to come from only one source - Satan! Jesus spoke to Peter as though he were Satan. He said, “Stop tempting me. God’s way is always best.”

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

Jesus continued teaching the people. He told them plainly what he would expect of them. If they were to follow him, they must be willing to suffer. They must forget their own desires. They must take up their cross.

What does this mean? A cross was to die on. Jesus meant that they must “die” to their own plans. They must be willing to forget and leave the things they wanted most. They must follow the will of God for their lives. The one who wants to live in his own way will lose his life and spend eternity in hell. The one who gives up his life for Jesus will have eternal life. This person says to Jesus, “Here is my life for you to use. I will do what you want me to do. I will go where you want me to go.” Then Jesus will say, “I will bless you on earth. And when you die, come and live with me forever.”

Would you like to be rich and important? Many people would. But Jesus said this is foolish. Is it good or wise to have money or power in this life but spend eternity in hell? In hell, such a person would give anything to come alive again and have a chance to choose Jesus’ way. But it would be too late. We must choose while we are still living this life here on earth.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Have you decided to follow Jesus? You must be willing to give up your own desires and plans. You must be willing to follow God’s will and to stand up for Jesus. Many times

this will be hard. Mark 8:38 says some people will be afraid to stand up for him.

We need to be strong and stand up for Jesus. There may be times when this will cause us to suffer. Our suffering, however, is nothing compared to the suffering Jesus had to bear on the cross. And he bore that suffering for us. No one will ask us to die on a cross. But we must be ready and willing to suffer on his behalf as we tell a lost world about his saving grace.

Some people are ashamed to tell evil men and women about their faith in Jesus. They know the evil ones may laugh at them. They may say words that hurt the Christian. It could mean that the Christian has to stand alone to tell about the love of Jesus. Jesus said that he would be ashamed of those who are ashamed of him.

There are many wicked people in the world. Many of them are looking for someone to help them. God is looking for strong Christians to help these people. Will you be strong for Jesus? Will you take up your cross and follow him?

CHAPTER 7

FOR THE TEACHER

CENTRAL TRUTH: Jesus suffered terribly for our salvation, and so we must expect to suffer too.

TEACHING AIM: I want my students to begin to understand the realities of what their decision to follow Christ might be.

TEACHING AIDS: Collect stories of Christians who have suffered for Jesus. These may be from personal interviews, from books or from your own life. Write on the chalkboard or a paper this question: "Have you suffered for Christ?"

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background

Jesus had reached a point of crisis in his life. Ahead of him, the cross waited; but he was afraid that he was the only one who could see it. Had he come, taught, healed, raised the dead without revealing himself to his disciples? Did they really know who he was? Mark 8:27-39 contains the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" The answer was very important.

The place where Jesus and his disciples were walking that day was an area known those times. For a while the memories are too painful, then we gradually begin to forget how miserable we were. We blot the experience from our minds. We suffer in other ways too. Some of us may remember times when we lost our jobs. We suffered then when we could not buy the things we and our families needed.

"Sometimes a friend can make us suffer. You may have trusted someone and told them something you would tell no other. Then that person was not worthy of your trust and told someone else your secret. Or, you may have had