

JESUS' JUDGMENTS

Matthew 26:57 - 27:31; Mark 14:43 - 15:20; Luke 22:54 - 23:25; John 18:13 - 19:16

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jesus, Peter, the priests, Pilate, and King Herod

Key-location: Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Jesus was judged by: the high priest (Mat 26:57-68; Mk 14:53-65; Lk 22:54, 63-65; Jn 18:13-24); Pilate (Mat 27:2, 11-26; Mk 15:1-15; Lk 23:13-25; Jn 18:28 - 19:16).
- Three times Peter denied he knew Jesus (Mat 26:58, 69-75; Mk 14:54, 66-72; Lk 22:55-62; Jn 18:15-18, 25-27).
- Pilate resisted condemning Jesus: he said that he found no basis for a charge against Jesus (Lk 23:4); again Pilate said that he had not found basis for charges against Jesus (Lk 23:13-17); he repeated a third time that he found Jesus not guilty (Lk 23:22); Pilate washed his hands of being responsible for Jesus' death (Mat 27:24).
- Jesus was mistreated: members of the Sanhedrin spit on Jesus, blindfolded him, and hit him; guards beat him (Mk 14:65); Pilate's soldiers made fun of him, spit on him, and beat him (Mat 27:27-30; Mk 15:16-20).

Key-attitudes

- Jesus' silent confidence.
- Priests' jealous resentment.
- Jewish leaders and Pilate's manipulative attitude.
- Peter and the other disciples' cowardliness.
- Pilate's insecurity.
- Soldiers' mockery and cruelty.

Initial-situation:

At the end of Jesus' third year of public ministry, he went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. On Sunday he made his Triumphal Entry into the city. On Tuesday evening, Judas bargained with the chief priests to betray Jesus.

On Thursday, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples and established the Lord's Supper. He foretold that one disciple would betray him, Peter would deny him, and all the disciples would abandon him.

Jesus and the disciples left the room where they celebrated the Passover meal. About midnight on Thursday, Jesus entered an olive grove and prayed.

Initial-problem:

Judas, the betrayer, led a detachment of Roman soldiers and Jewish officials to the Garden of Gethsemane. They arrested Jesus, tied him up and took him to the high priest.

Final-situation:

Pilate handed Jesus over to the Jewish people to be crucified.

BIBLE STORY**Religious Judgment; Peter's Denials**

Judas, the betrayer, led a detachment of Roman soldiers and Jewish officials to the Garden of Gethsemane. They arrested Jesus, tied him up and took him to the high priest (Jn 18:12-14).

Simon Peter and John followed Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. The girl at the gate asked Peter, "Aren't you one of that man's disciples?" Peter replied, "No, I'm not." A rooster crowed (Jn 18:15-18). Peter sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire (Mat 26:58).

Religious leaders and teachers of the Law of Moses were members of the Jewish Sanhedrin Council. The Council sought evidence against Jesus so they could sentence him to death. They found nothing. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements didn't agree (Mk 14:53-59).

Then the high priest, asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed God?"

Jesus answered, "Yes, I am."

The high priest ripped his clothes and yelled, "Why do we need any more witnesses? You've heard him blaspheme; he claimed to be God. What's your decision?"

They all condemned Jesus to death. Some spit on Jesus. They blindfolded him, hit him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy! Tell us who hit you." The guards took charge of Jesus and beat him (Mk 14:60-65).

The servant girl, who questioned Peter earlier, saw him warming himself. She said to those standing around, "This fellow was with Jesus from Nazareth!"

Peter declared with an oath, "That's not true! I don't know the man!"

Those standing nearby said to Peter, "Surely you're one of them, for you're a Galilean."

Peter called down curses on himself, and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Just then, a rooster crowed the second time. Peter remembered Jesus' words, "Before the rooster crows twice you'll deny that you know me three times." Peter broke down and cried (Mk 14:66-72).

Political Judgment

As the sun was rising, the Jewish leaders led Jesus to the Roman governor's palace. Jewish authorities didn't enter the palace because they wanted to remain ceremonially clean. So Pilate came outside and questioned Jesus (Jn 18:28-38).

Pilate told the rulers and the people, "You brought me Jesus and accused him of inciting the people to rebellion. I've examined him in front of you and have found him not guilty of your charges. This man doesn't deserve a death sentence" (Lk 23:13-16).

The crowd yelled, "Crucify him! Nail him to a cross!"

Pilate saw that a riot was starting. Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, "I'm innocent of this man's blood. You are guilty of his blood!"

The people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Mat 27:15-26).

Soldiers twisted together thorn branches into a crown, and put it on Jesus' head. They clothed Jesus in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They also slapped him in the face (Jn 19:1-3).

The chief priests and their officials shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him! Nail him to a cross!"

Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. I find him not guilty of all charges!"

The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

Pilate heard this and was more terrified. Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the crowd kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you're no friend of the Emperor Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king is an enemy of Caesar."

Pilate handed Jesus over to the crowd and his soldiers to be crucified. It was the morning on the day Jews prepared the Passover Meal that would be eaten after sunset (Jn 19:4-16).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What reason did the religious leaders give for wanting to crucify Jesus?
2. What was the real reason the religious leaders wanted to crucify Jesus?
3. When Jesus was being judged, how did the disciple Peter fail him?
4. Who are some of the people who contributed to Jesus' condemnation to die on the cross?
5. Of those who contributed to Jesus' condemnation to die on the cross, who are you most like?
6. Why didn't Pilate do what he knew was right?
7. What kinds of situations require a person to make a decision between:
 - Fulfilling personal ambitions and avoiding that which they fear?
 - Doing what is right?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **It takes prayer and trust in God to commit to God's will when suffering will be the result of obeying God.** Jesus knew the sufferings that lay ahead of him when he went to Gethsemane. Jesus asked to be freed from the "cup" of the cross (Lk 22:39-46). Afterwards, he submitted to God's will and faced the cross. Jesus both confessed his dread of the coming cross and he reaffirmed his commitment to do God's will. Paul asked to be freed from a thorn in the flesh; God's answer was the "grace" to live with the thorn (2 Cor 12:7-10).
2. **People must choose for themselves whether to believe that Jesus' words are truth or lies.** The Jewish religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy – calling himself God. They refused to consider that Jesus' words could be true (Mat 26:65-66).
3. **Religious leaders who desire human security more than eternal security will commit injustice and go against the God they profess to follow.** The high priest and members of the Sanhedrin knew the Scriptures and their job was to point people to God. They were more concerned about preserving their privileged positions and holding on to their authority. So they manipulated the trial and crucifixion of Jesus (Mk 14:55-65).
4. **The road for the Christian to deny his relationship to Jesus is often made in stages of a downward spiral.** Three downward steps to Peter's denial were: (1) he denied that he was a follower of Jesus; (2) he swore an oath that he didn't know Jesus; (3) he cursed and swore, talking and acting like those who don't know Jesus (Mat 26:69-74).
5. **Everyone is guilty of condemning Jesus to die on the cross.** Jesus' disciples deserted him out of fear; Peter denied that he knew Jesus; Judas betrayed him; crowds who had followed and cheered him now stood by and did nothing or flip-flopped and shouted, "Crucify him;" religious leaders actively sought Jesus' death; Roman soldiers tortured him.
6. **Some situations require a person to make a right decision, or circumstances beyond his control will make the wrong decision for him.** Pilate knew that Jesus deserved to be released, but he gave into the pressure of the screaming crowd that demanded Jesus' death. When Pilate refused to make the decision to free Jesus, he allowed the crowds to crucify Jesus (Mat 27:24). Washing his hands didn't cancel his guilt.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Pantomime Retelling of Story:**

The storyteller tells the story one time. Then the storyteller chooses volunteer listeners who pantomime different characters while the storyteller retells the story. Have volunteers to pantomime actions for:

- Jesus.
- Servant girl who accused Peter.
- Peter.
- Pilate.
- Priest.
- Members of the crowd.

2. **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in “twitter” length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about Jesus’ judgments.
- Decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.
- How the story helps them to know God better.
- Silently confess to God how they have acted similar to Peter and denied Jesus by word or action.