

=THE CONVERSION=

Lesson 5

The Thief on the Cross

Objects to have:

A pitcher
A piece of cloth
A sign reading HIDE-AND-SEEK
A hammer
Chalk and chalkboard
Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

Whenever we have come to Sunday school the last few Sundays, we have heard Bible stories about different people who lived during the years when Jesus was on earth. God did not tell us in His Word some of the names of people in the stories; one name in one of the stories is very strange. Let's see what we can remember. (Point to the different symbols representing the past weeks' stories, urging the children to tell you something about each story. Take just a few minutes for review.) In our story for today we cannot tell you the names of some of the men. All we know is what they did. Listen.

Telling the story:

(Pretend to be driving spikes with your hammer.) "Pound, pound, pound. There! That cross is finished. These two rough logs have been nailed together to form a cross. Only two more crosses to make. Pound, pound, pound. Now, these two rough logs have been nailed together. There is only one more cross to make. Pound, pound, pound. All three crosses now are finished. These crosses are to be used tomorrow. Let me see, do I have some more spikes? Yes, I do have some more spikes. These nails that are long and so big that they are called spikes will be needed tomorrow. Everything is ready now for the crucifixion which is to be held tomorrow. I'll just deliver the crosses to the right place so that they can be used when they are needed for the crucifixion." (Put down your hammer and straighten up from "constructing" the cross.) The man in his workshop had finished the job that he was supposed to do. Three crosses were made for the day of crucifixion.

Why should people be crucified? People who had been very bad criminals were punished by being fastened to a cross—crucified—until they died. Instead of shooting bad criminals or putting them into an electric chair or a gas chamber, the soldiers crucified them on crosses.

Jesus was sentenced to die. He was to die on one of those three crosses. Jesus was not a criminal; we know that! Why was Jesus sentenced to die on a cross? The judge said that Jesus should die on the cross because most of the people in Jerusalem wanted Him to be killed. Jesus had done nothing wrong; why then did most of the people want to see Him killed? Most of the people wanted to see Jesus killed because He was preaching against sin and against churches that said it was all right to commit the sins that the people were committing. The important people in the churches did not like to have Jesus preaching against them. God the Father was allowing Jesus to be killed because God had a plan. God the Father planned that Jesus would die on the cross so that Jesus could take everybody's punishment for sin.

The next day came. Jesus was brought out of the room where the soldiers were keeping him. After Jesus came outside, someone dragged one of the big heavy crosses over to Him and leaned the cross against Jesus. Jesus was being made to carry His own cross.

Jesus was led to a hill outside the city wall. The side of that hill was rock. The rocky side of that hill looked like the face of a skull. (Draw a hill.) The hill was called Calvary. As Jesus got closer to the hill, He stumbled and

fell because the cross was so heavy and because Jesus was so weak from the beating that He had gotten. A kind man then carried Jesus' cross for Him. Jesus and the big crowd of people who were walking with Him climbed the hill to the top. On top of the hill there were three big holes dug beside each other. Two other men were going to be crucified at the same time that Jesus was. Jesus was perfect; the other two men were thieves. They had not stolen just a little bit, nor had they done it only one time, but they had stolen many times. These two men were very bad men. They deserved to die on the cross. They deserved to be put to death as punishment for their wrongdoing.

Such a noisy time! It was a big crowd of shouting people who had gone up to the hill with Jesus and the two thieves. The big crowd of people wanted to see this terrible thing happen. Jesus and the two thieves were laid on the crosses (pick up your hammer and pretend to be driving the nails into the hands and feet) and their hands and their feet were nailed to the cross. The crosses then were raised up (draw three crosses on top of the hill) until they stood straight. Then the three crosses were moved until the bottoms of them could be put into the holes in the ground. With a thud the crosses were stood up in the holes in the ground on top of the hill called Calvary. As the crosses were let down, their hands and feet tore. The pain was terrible. The crowd of people who had followed to the hill stood looking and making fun of Jesus. The sun was very, very hot. Jesus' back was torn and bleeding.

The crowd kept on shouting mean things at Jesus. They were saying, "If You are the Son of God, Jesus, come down off that cross. The Son of God should be able to do anything that He wants to do. Come on off that cross and prove that You are the Son of God." The thieves also turned their heads toward Jesus, and started to talk that way to Him. They said, "If you are the Son of God, save Yourself and us." One thief, however, began to think. He thought of things that he had done. He knew that he had done wrong. He knew that he deserved the punishment that he was getting there on the cross. He knew that according to the law he deserved to die. That thief called across to the other criminal, "You should hush. Aren't you afraid of God? You have done wrong, and I have done wrong. We deserve to be punished and to die here on our crosses. After we die, however, we'll have to face God. Suddenly, I'm afraid to face God. The part of me that will live on forever has to go somewhere when my body dies. I am afraid of where I will have to go after I die."

The Bible tells us that this thief then started to talk to Jesus. He said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." See. He believed that Jesus would rise from the dead. He believed that Jesus someday would be the King of kings. He believed that after death the person who has not been saved by Jesus will be punished forever and ever for his sins. That thief believed that if he would ask Jesus to be his Saviour, Jesus would save him from that punishment. The thief, therefore, said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Let's listen to Jesus' answer to the thief. Jesus might have said, "You have been a bad man for a long time. You are too bad to be saved." Do you think that Jesus said that to the thief? Jesus said, "Today—this very day—you will be with me in Paradise." How wonderful! That thief died and the living part of him went to Heaven. The other thief died, too, but he went to hell, just because he did not ask Jesus to be his Saviour. How sad.

Jesus wants to save everybody. All that anybody has to do in order to be saved is just to ask Jesus to save him. In order to go to Heaven, everybody has to say, "I know I am a sinner. Please, Jesus, save me from punishment for my sins."

The thief said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Let's all learn those words so we can remember what the thief on the cross said. (Work on memorizing Luke 23:42.)

In order to know that he was going to Heaven, did the thief have to go to church? No. We want to go to church so that we can learn more of the Bible and be with God's people, but there was no way that the thief could get down off the cross and go to church. In order to be saved, did the thief on the cross have to be baptized? No. He died before he could be baptized. We want to be baptized after we're saved, because getting baptized shows people that we are saved. To be saved, all anybody has to do is ask Jesus to be his Saviour. Are you saved?